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FOREWORD

The first three volumes of *A Study of History* appeared in 1934; the last four are not yet two years old. During the interim the work of Arnold Toynbee has been widely disseminated, thanks to the abridged edition prepared by D. C. Somervell in 1946. Vigorously attacked by historians as soon as it appeared, the work continued to evoke their serious reservations. Some concentrated their efforts on pointing out multiple errors of chronology, fact, emphasis and interpretations: others, attacking the very inspiration or magnitude of the endeavor, judged it to be presumptuous and vain, foredoomed to failure, and all in all more the product of an outmoded concept of the philosophy of history than of proven methods of historical research.

Over a twenty-year period, critics of one sort or another have greatly increased in number. One must admit at the outset that almost all of them are justified. The errors of detail are, and would normally be, it is true, innumerable in a work of this kind; moreover, they are of necessity destined to become more and more numerous because the progress of research will not fail to render obsolete a multitude of data which Toynbee, like his colleagues, holds to be true today. The strength of this criticism, however, is weakened by the fact that it is relevant to *all* books on history, although to a lesser extent for the more prudent, the more erudite, the more specialized.

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In any case, everyone knows that in history truth has a short life: it is at the mercy of the discovery which a more extensive investigation, or sometimes mere chance, may suddenly bring about. Of course there exist well-established facts, and dates which are not subject to revision. Certainly the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066 and the Bastille was stormed on July 14, 1789. But facts and dates of this kind are also to be found in Toynbee. The important thing, however, is to recognize and to assess the real value of the consequences of this battle or of that outbreak or of this symbol.

On the other hand, it is quite true that Toynbee's theories are pure conjectures, that his comparisons are questionable, and that his parallels are bold. Some critics have even gone so far as to explain to him that a true scholar has no right to attempt them. As early as 1936 we could read the following words about his work, from the pen of a historian who, until that time, had considered himself the champion of the spirit of synthesis, as opposed to the monographic approach: "Is it licit, good method, and correct procedure to institute a series of valid and fruitful comparisons amongst twenty-one civilizations, extending from one end of the chain of time to the other and distributed over the entire circumference of the globe?" The answer was no.

The prejudice is curious. Because if the comparisons are "valid and fruitful," it would seem that to develop them must be "licit, good method, and correct procedure." Taken literally, the decision is almost absurd; it is in fact all the more revealing. The author, *a priori*, challenges the possibility of the parallels hazarded by Toynbee. Yet is it more adventurous to hazard this than to deny oneself the right on grounds of principle? In this instance, prudence is no less paralyzing than boldness is perilous. Let us call to mind for a moment the postulates of any ambition that aspires to represent itself as science: one must readily admit that these postulates unfailingly presuppose, in one form or another, that the same causes produce the same effects. The difference, if it exists, is the result of a discernible disturbance due to the influence of a factor that is at first unidentified. Who can fail to perceive that, in regard to this primary *licit* and *correct* research, there is more steadfastness in affirming that homologous causes result in similar effects than in rejecting, as a matter of principle, any research on constant or necessary relationships that arise from the nature of things, among data that are either alien or aberrational because of place or date, or because of their singularity? I mean, in this particular case, research on relationships that are caused by a kind of permanence of the

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human animal and by a few similarities of historical situations. It goes without saying that history cannot repeat itself as to the detail of events but it is no less unthinkable that it should not repeat itself by some approximate uniformity of problems and of solutions. If this is true it is not vain but fruitful, not presumptuous but wise, to seek clues that make it possible to transpose from one register to another sequences that are nonetheless irreducible in their natural singularity. He who most seriously violates the scientific spirit is not perhaps, in this instance, he who accuses his opponent with the greatest vehemence.

I have just implicitly cited Montesquieu. This is by no means accidental. The line of descent from the *Considérations* passes through Gibbon just as *L'Esprit des Lois* today culminates in Toynbee. In *L'Esprit des Lois* just as in *A Study of History*, the material has little certainty and is almost always second or third hand; the theories scarcely stand up under rigorous examination. However, there were and are few works more important in their times than these. This is because, first of all, they establish relationships between events within the same domain which were not thought of until then and which open up new perspectives for historical explanation. Moreover, they contribute the clues of which I spoke and which shed a reciprocal light upon facts that are distant in time and in space but among which it is perhaps only the local color and the anecdote that enable one immediately to assess any chimerical comparison. Of course it is important to begin by specifying the differences. Moreover, this is a necessary condition if one hopes to perceive and determine a common denominator, permanent laws, the tenacious pressures which, in every case, deflect in the same direction experiments which are never interchangeable.

The notions of "challenge," of "parry," of "mimesis," of "breakdown," of historical "no-man's-land" must obviously seem to be abstractions, but hardly more so, as Toynbee himself seems almost to say, than other concepts normally utilized in history (generations, epochs, economic conditions, general spirit, movement of ideas, etc.). One must perhaps go even further and suggest that these notions are not basically different from terms honored by the physical sciences—like "wave" or "corpuscle"—and which are considered exact, or at least expedient, to the extent that this mathematical output proves satisfactory.

The articles assembled in this current Summary are certainly critical studies. They in no way conceal the dangers and the weaknesses of Toynbee's endeavor: it has its faults, its excesses, perhaps its absurdities. How-

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ever, these essays, as if by virtue of some pre-established harmony, boldly take their place in the perspective which I have just defined. Their authors also seem to have realized that, given the nature of the work, the reservations which most often are made about it are also those which best serve its purpose. It is of no great consequence to attempt to detect how much is momentarily right or wrong in the trivial materials of such a monumental structure. It would be far better to concentrate on assessing what it contains that is stimulating or irrational. Moreover, these contributions render homage to the spirit of universality which inspired its construction. In this, as well as in the continuous attempt to analyze original cases, *A Study of History* is reminiscent of *L'Esprit des Lois*, far more, it seems to me, than Spengler's work to which at times it has been insidiously compared and which, as its title indicates, remains centered on the West. With Toynbee, history definitely ceases to be local or national. In his work every civilization seems to be the element of a totality and an autonomous element, or very nearly so. Toynbee establishes a pluralism which fortunately puts an end to what I once called the Hegelian naïveté, that is to say, the idea of a development of linear history, and consequently unavoidably voluntary. Doubtless it is possible that theories such as those of Professor Heine-Geldern will triumph and that, at the source of the diversity which Toynbee stresses, one might determine in the Neolithic age a unique center of diffusion. The established pluralism would be no less irretrievable, even though the great civilizations indicated by Toynbee might be so many distant consequences of an immemorial revolution that occurred in Mesopotamia and whose fortunate repercussions might have spread all the way to the opposite banks of the Pacific, as far as China and even Cuzco. The suggested change remains the substitution of a logic of history that is horizontal or transversal, so to speak, for the idea of a vertical, unique, regulated, necessarily impeccable unfolding of events, without freedom or gratuitousness, without error or useless repetition.

The categorical rejection of the notion of race and of its consequences, the demonstration that hostile geographical conditions often prove more favorable to success than a merciful clime, led Arnold Toynbee to discover in man's resources alone the ultimate conditions of his good fortune and of his glory. He dismisses the fatalities of biology and of climate, which after all are impotent. And again like Montesquieu he demonstrates that man's triumphs are diverse, but that they are neither arbitrary nor dissimilar. They represent hitherto unknown answers to situations, to obstacles, to dilemmas, to conjectures which themselves are always original. But

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the richness of the human heritage stems precisely from the variety of fertile and irreducible attitudes which, here and there, assured such and such a society permanent superiority over its neighbors. It is not enough to be able to enumerate these happy events nor to learn to contrast them. It is important in addition to know how to discern, to admire, to assemble what each one of them contributes that is excellent and irreplaceable, the absence of which would result in an essential impoverishment of the human adventure. The past autonomy of civilizations has borne fruit. Today a community of fate replaces it for all of us and it requires that we go beyond any local exclusiveness. The greatness of Toynbee is also to have understood and to have made others understand that the era of one's own hearth is over; that the parish, the nation, culture will be extended to become a part of the world, and that their annals will be the most glorious known.

We must not be fearful of perceiving in this new challenge the vocation of our century. There are many signs of this, beginning on the level of fiction with the success of Jules Verne's tale which seems to have assumed the task of exhausting the geography of the planet. Frazer, in his *Golden Bough*—although without sufficient regard for the contexts—attempted for ethnography what he left Toynbee the privilege of attempting for history. André Malraux conceived and composed a history of art—too far neglected by Toynbee—which, inspiring a parallel revival, gives rise to the same reservations and stimulates the same hopes. In poetry as well, a fraternal trend demonstrates its excellence: St. John Perse, in a sumptuous inventory, enumerates the opulence of the world and of history.

And this very review, *Diogenes*, the first publication of its kind to appear in six different languages, defends the concept of an ecumenical humanism and labors with fortuitous means to demonstrate by example its possibility and its importance. *Diogenes* is also aware that any cultural effort presupposes vigilance and choice, an organized chronicle of knowledge, and a hierarchy of values. *Diogenes* represents after all, in turn and in its place, only a symptom among many others of this advent of a universal culture which is still faltering and subject to opposition.

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