

PART III

THE GROWTHS OF CIVILIZATIONS

A civilization that has successfully come to birth has surmounted the first and highest hurdle, but will it then automatically go on from strength to strength? The evidence of some societies whose growth has been arrested after birth suggests that this does not always happen, and so I am led on to investigate the nature of growth itself. A society continues in growth, it seems, when a successful response to a challenge provokes a fresh challenge in its turn, converting a single movement into a series. I am then driven to ask whether the successive steps in this sequence of challenge-and-response lead in some direction. The notion of inevitable progress towards a predictable goal seems to me to be inappropriate in the human sphere, but I find that in a general way the growth of a society can be measured in terms of the increasing power of self-determination won by the society's leaders; and I believe that the future fate of a civilization lies in the hands of this minority of creative persons.

18 Examples of the arrest of growth

DO THE GROWTHS of civilizations present a genuine problem? Our inquiries up to this point have shown us beyond doubt that the problem of the geneses of civilizations is a real one, and we have done our best to offer some solutions to it. But do we now need to seek any further? When birth is once achieved, does not growth follow of itself? The answer to this question seems to be that birth may not automatically be followed by growth. In addition to those specimens of developed and abortive civilizations that we have already identified, we can find examples of a third type of society, or of communities within a society: namely, those which have not been abortive yet have not continued to develop either, but which have been arrested after birth.

The common feature of the arrested societies and communities is that they have all alike been immobilized as the result of having attempted, and achieved, a *tour de force*. They are responses to challenges which lie on the very borderline between the stimulating and the excessive. While the abortive civilizations have attempted a feat of birth which is overwhelmingly hard, and have been defeated, the arrested societies have won this first round, but have thereby ensured their own defeat in the next. In the imagery of our fable of the climbers' 'pitch',¹ the representatives of the arrested societies are like climbers who happen to have started to scale the precipice in places where they are soon brought up short against beetling projections of the cliff-face. Neither defeated nor daunted, as other more timid or more prudent souls might be, these over-audacious climbers accept the challenge and grapple with the jutting crag, only to find themselves, at the next moment, clinging to its projecting face in a rigid posture from which they dare not budge. All their skill and vigour and boldness is now absorbed in a supreme effort to save themselves from falling, and they have no margin of energy for climbing on until they have reached a normal surface again. They are performing an astonishing acrobatic feat, but a feat in the realm of statics and not in the realm of dynamics. Their motto – and eventual epitaph – is 'J'y suis, j'y reste.'

A society may in practice be arrested at any stage in its life after it has once come to birth, and we shall see² that the phenomenon of arrest can be observed in several societies after their breakdown, in the last phase of their lives. Equally, a single community within a civilization may become arrested while its neighbours continue to develop. This happened to the Ottoman Turks when they leaped from being a pastoral Nomadic community to becoming an imperial Power. They faced the unprecedented challenge of having to govern vast subject populations, and, trying to cope with this novel political problem, they created intractable and inflexible institutions which precluded any further social development. The Spartans brought a similar fate upon themselves when, in answer to the Hellenic Society's common problem of population pressure in the eighth century BC, they expanded their territory by conquest within Hellas, and found all their creative energies

absorbed in the effort to maintain their control over a hostile population of their own kind.

In addition to these examples, there are other societies which seem to have embarked on or performed the initial *tour de force* of birth, only to find themselves incapable of sustaining a movement of growth. Such are the Esquimaux, who have developed a highly distinctive and superbly well adapted Arctic culture, which has, however, made them the prisoners of the harsh environment that they set out to conquer, since the primary task of surviving uses up all their power. Such too are the many segmentary communities of the African World, who live in a physical and ideological environment which seems to inhibit the growth of large and flexible communities. Whenever such a community threatens to become too large to be sustained by the traditional institutions and practices of the tribe, a section breaks off from the parent community, and goes off to found a new tribal society. Thus the exigencies which led to the creation of such a rigid framework of social and practical life condemn the community to isolation and impotence.

The outstanding example of an arrested society is, however, the Eurasian Nomadic Society. The Nomads have taken up the challenge of the steppe, an element of physical Nature which is no less demanding than the Arctic snows or the tropical jungles. Indeed, the steppe bears more resemblance to another highly uncongenial element, the ocean, than it does to any area of dry land. Steppe-surface and water-surface have this in common, that they are both accessible to Man only as a pilgrim and a sojourner. Neither offers him anywhere on its broad expanse (apart from the islands and oases) a place where he can rest and stay and settle down to a sedentary existence. Both provide strikingly greater facilities for travel and transport than those parts of the Earth's surface upon which human communities are accustomed to live in permanence; but both exact (as the penalty for trespassing upon them) the necessity of constantly 'moving on', or else 'moving off' their surface altogether and finding some standing-ground upon *terra firma* somewhere beyond the coasts which respectively surround them. Thus there is a real similarity between the Nomadic herds which range the steppe in search of pasturage, and the fishing-fleet which plies the ocean in quest of shoals; between the convoy of merchantmen which exchanges the products of the opposite shores of the sea, and the camel-caravan by which the opposite shores of the steppe are linked with one another; between the water pirate and the desert raider; and between those explosive movements of population which impelled Achaeans, Norsemen, or Crusaders to take to their ships and break like tidal waves upon the coasts of Europe and the Levant, and those other movements which impelled Arabs or Scythians or Turks or Mongols to swing out of their orbit on the steppe and to break, with equal violence and equal suddenness, upon the settled lands of Egypt or 'Iraq or Russia or India or China.

It will be seen that the Nomads' response to the challenge of Nature is a *tour de force*; but, in the absence of a satisfactory body of archaeological evidence, the historical incentive which provoked this achievement must remain a matter of conjecture. The problem is one of dating, for we have no information which would allow us to assign the historical origin of Central Asian pastoral Nomadism to any exact time in any particular place.³

In exploring Man's earliest attempts to tame and harness his physical environment, it is possible to apply a model of development according to which the modes of economic production are assumed to have become progressively more sophisticated, succeeding each other in stages from hunting and gathering through the domestication of plants and animals to a settled form of mixed agricultural and pastoral farming; and, on this pattern, Nomadism might be supposed to be an alternative system that diverged from the standard development at the stage of animal domestication, for Nomadism is essentially a highly specialized form of stockbreeding. Attempts have been made, for example, to link the stages in this process to climatic change, the inference being that, as the degree of desiccation increased, so, first, the herds of wild animals hunted by Man disappeared, obliging communities which had formerly lived entirely by hunting to eke out their livelihoods under less favourable conditions by taking to a rudimentary form of agriculture and by domesticating wild animals by providing them with the food that they could no longer find for themselves. Later, as the process of desiccation intensified, so, in turn, these sedentary farmers and pastoralists were evicted, according to this theory, from the shrinking areas of cultivable land and were forced to adopt a more mobile form of pastoral production on the surrounding steppe, moving with their herds seasonally from place to place in quest of patches of temporary pastureland.⁴ More recently the hypothesis of demographic pressure has been advanced to explain the successive changes in production, on the supposition that, in response to the growth of population and in default of any ability to improve existing production techniques, early Man was forced to diversify his means of support, by learning, for example, the art of domesticating plants and animals.⁵ Either of these two theories might account satisfactorily for the institution of pastoral Nomadism, but they can be no more than unverified conjectures where no supporting archaeological evidence exists; and we are not entitled to assume that the limited evidence supplied by the excavation of any one site may be applied by analogy to the vast areas that have been utilized for pastoral Nomadism at one time or another.

In the first place, then, we cannot date even approximately the supposed successive changes in the modes of agricultural production; and if this process is shrouded in mystery, then the mystery is at its most impenetrable in the case of the origins of pastoral Nomadism, for, by definition, mobile human clans and their herds are the least likely of any prehistoric communities to have left sufficiently durable signs of their habitation or passage for the spades of modern archaeologists to dig up and bring to light again. Moreover, we even have no warrant for assuming that Nomadism began as an alternative response to environmental challenges, whether of climate or population or

ARRESTED GROWTH

96 Life in a Nomad camp, from a fourteenth-century Mongol drawing.



97 Ainu fishermen on a frozen river in Japan. The Ainu long remained a static, sub-Arctic hunting and fishing community outside the pale of the growing Japanese Civilization.



anything else – that is, as a response which diverted the peoples that adopted it from the main current of agricultural development and into what eventually proved to be a backwater. It is also conceivable that, so far from being imported on to the arid steppe by an exodus from farming communities, Nomadic stockbreeding was an original and unprecedented method devised by the ancient inhabitants of the steppe for meeting the challenges imposed by their parsimonious environment at a stage of their prehistory that may have been remote, though it must, of course, have been later than the stage at which they had acquired the domesticated animals that became their mainstay.

Precise evidence on the origins of Nomadism has not come to light so far. On the other hand, there is no uncertainty about the inherent severity of the challenge to which the Nomadic way of life was a response, and none, again, about the vigour of that response or about the tenacity with which it was sustained. The Nomad grapples with an outstandingly hostile environment in the strength of a highly developed pastoral art; but, in order to practise this art successfully under exceedingly exacting conditions, he has to develop a special skill, and, in order to exercise this skill, he has also to develop special moral and intellectual powers. Pastoral Nomadism is one of the most specialized forms of economic activity, for – lacking a settled place of residence and the opportunity for cultivation – the Nomad is almost exclusively dependent upon the single resource of his herds, from which he must obtain his food, clothing, housing, fuel, and transport, and at the same time a surplus which he can exchange with peoples on the periphery of the steppe for necessities of life like metals and cereals. The Nomads' mobility is tremendous, by contrast with the relative stationariness of agricultural peoples, but it is nevertheless limited by the immense logistical problems of organizing the movement of relatively large groups of men and animals in a barren and inhospitable environment. The Nomad must manoeuvre himself and his family and his flocks and his herds over the vast spaces of the steppe from pasture to pasture, in conformity with the climatic year-cycle which determines the capacity of successive pasture-grounds for feeding his animals; he must calculate distance and direction with fair accuracy if he is not to lose himself on the open wastes or miss those widely dispersed watering-points and pasturages without which he and his migrant flocks will perish; and the Nomad patriarch cannot wrest victory out of this perpetual economic campaign without exercising – and exacting from the human beings and animals under his authority – those virtues of forethought and self-reliance and physical and moral endurance which a military commander exercises, and exacts from his troops, when Man is at war with Man and not with physical Nature. The *tour de force* of Nomadism demands a rigorously high standard of behaviour and physique, and a highly developed instinct of loyalty and clan solidarity; without these characteristics the disciplined train that winds across the steppe will disintegrate into atomized fragments, each incapable of keeping alive in isolation. It is hardly surprising that the very achievement of such a masterly degree of discipline should have exacted from the society that has accomplished it a penalty of equivalent magnitude.

The Nomads' penalty is in essence the same as the Esquimaux's. The formidable physical environment which they have succeeded in conquering has insidiously enslaved them, in ostensibly accepting them as its masters. The Nomads, like the Esquimaux, have become the perpetual prisoners of a cycle of movement; they have to be permanently in motion as their herds exhaust one pasture after another. Thus, in acquiring the initiative on the steppe, the Nomads have forfeited the initiative in the world at large. It is true that they have not passed across the stage of the histories of civilizations without leaving their mark, and the internal articulation of their own civilization has some outstanding achievements to its credit. The vigorous artistic creations of the Scythians, one of the earliest Nomadic peoples with whom the Western World came into contact, are as impressive as any produced by their sedentary contemporaries; and, a thousand years later, the great Nomadic Empires of the Turks and the Mongols gave rise to astonishingly robust and vivid cultures, based on thriving capitals such as Ögödei Khan's Qaraqorum. Yet here surely is the clue to the frailty of the true Nomadic Civilization: except in those periods in history when it has broken out of its own domain and burst upon its sedentary neighbours and established a temporary authority over realms outside the steppe, the Nomadic Society has been condemned to languish in the wastes of its own barren environment, perpetually on the move in small clans and bands. The social instrument which has permitted a wonderfully effective economic utilization of a hostile terrain has also proved an insurmountable impediment to higher cultural development.

98 Nomad art: detail from a Scythian scabbard, showing two gods, each of whom faces a sacred tree, an image taken from Mesopotamian mythology.



19 The criterion of growth

HAVING SATISFIED OURSELVES that the growths of civilizations do present a problem, we must now try to solve this problem by inquiring what the nature of growth may be; or, in other words, we must try to identify the criterion of growth. Let us start our inquiry by invoking the aid of mythology, a power which has already helped us in an earlier chapter, and see whether the insights of Aeschylus's Promethean Trilogy can throw some light on our present subject.

The myth of the Book of Job and of Goethe's *Faust* gave us an insight into the nature of the geneses of civilizations,¹ and the Promethean myth may now offer us a clue to the nature of their growths. In the Aeschylean version, Zeus loses his battle against the challenger. Unlike the God of Job or of Faust, Zeus is here not yearning for the stimulus which will permit him to perform a fresh creative act, but rather he is anxious to stay as he is and to keep the Universe around him at a standstill; the challenge presented to Zeus by Prometheus, which calls the temper and policy of Zeus in question, moves Zeus to inflict a vindictive persecution upon his challenger; and in this act, which overthrows his cherished equilibrium, Zeus brings about his own defeat, while Prometheus, through suffering, wins his way to victory.

The Aeschylean Zeus is seen for what he is in an audacious pre-classical era before people had become 'afraid of the solvent and destructive effects of free speculation [but were] still looking to the powers of the human intellect, to reason and free inquiry, as the great emancipators'.² Zeus's feat was the overthrow of his divine predecessor Cronos; and, having accomplished this *tour de force* and mounted the throne of Olympus, he has no other idea except to keep himself enthroned there, in solitary, motionless, tyrannical state with his foot on the neck of a prostrate Universe. Zeus, however, has not conquered Cronos by his own unaided powers, but with the help of Prometheus; and he has to be saved in spite of himself, as Aeschylus divined, by the challenge of his erstwhile ally. Whereas Zeus has no other wish than to preserve his position in a static eternity, Prometheus is an insatiable creator, a kindler of fire, a probing progressive mind – a mythical personification of the growth process, the Bergsonian *élan vital*. He knows that, unless Zeus keeps on the move, the new ruler of Olympus will inevitably be overthrown in his turn, like Cronos before him; and therefore he gives Zeus no peace.

When first he mounted on his father's throne
Straightway he called the gods, and gave each one
His place and honours. So he wrought his plan
Of empire. But of man, unhappy man,
He had no care: he counselled the whole race
To uproot, and plant a strange brood in its place.
And none took stand against that evil mind
Save me. I rose. I would not see mankind
By him stamped out and cast to nothingness. . . .³

Failing to convince Zeus by power of reason that his

static Universe is not a world at peace but a desert, Prometheus sets the will of Zeus at defiance, and leads Mankind onward and upward, inspiring his protégé and pupil with his own spirit.

A thing of no avail
He was, until a living mind I wrought
Within him, and new mastery of thought.⁴

For this thwarting of his will, Zeus takes his revenge upon Prometheus by turning against him the whole battery of his superhuman force.

Mercy I had for man; and therefore I
Must meet no mercy, but hang crucified
In witness of God's cruelty and pride.⁵

In this contest, Prometheus is physically at Zeus's mercy. Yet the victory is in Prometheus's hands; for no torture that Zeus can inflict is able to overcome Prometheus's will-power; and this will-power guards a secret that Zeus fain would know. The secret is that, if Zeus persists in his static and tyrannical posture, he is dooming himself to be overthrown, like his predecessor, by the brute force which he has deliberately enthroned in place of thought. This secret is the key of Zeus's own destiny, and in *Prometheus Bound* we are shown Zeus trying, and failing, to wrest Prometheus's secret from him. Although the other two plays of the trilogy are no longer extant, we have enough evidence to suggest that, in the end, Prometheus and Zeus are reconciled: Zeus learns the lesson of forgiveness, and agrees to spare his enemy and to allow the human race to develop. So Zeus had, after all, a glimmer of the 'Promethean light' within himself which he could not wholly extinguish; and his conflict with Prometheus kindled into flame a spark that was latent all the time in Zeus's soul.

On the plane of mythology Zeus and Prometheus are presented as two separate human personalities, but in a psychological analysis they can be seen as being two impulses in a single human soul which interpenetrate each other, however vehement their conflict, because it is the same soul that feels them both. We can apply this psychological interpretation to the action of human souls in social situations. For example, supposing that, in the infancy of the Hellenic Society towards the close of the second millennium B.C., the lethargy of the North-West Greek-speaking barbarian invaders, who had squatted among the débris of the derelict Aegean Civilization, had nowhere been stirred by a current of Promethean mental energy, then all Hellas would have vegetated in perpetuity like 'Dorian' Crete. But in some of these barbarian souls, as in the mythical Zeus, the dying spark of a civilizing ethos was rekindled, and through this Promethean *élan* the infant Hellenic Society was released from its static bondage to a dead social fabric and was carried forward from genesis into growth. The Promethean *élan* of the human intellect which Aeschylus portrayed in mythical imagery has been described in philosophical terms by Bergson.



99, 100 PROMETHEUS THE CREATOR In Greek mythology, Prometheus – rebel against Zeus, disturber of Olympian harmony – was also the creator of the human race; above, Prometheus forms the skeleton of Man from clay and water in the likeness of gods. Below, his own protector, the helmeted goddess Athene, completes the work by breathing life into the inanimate effigy.



Man, as he issued from the hands of Nature, was a being who was both intelligent and social, with a sociality which was calculated to reach its term in diminutive societies and with an intellect which was destined to serve both the individual life and the group life. But the intellect, dilating by its own efforts, has entered upon an unexpected development. It has liberated human beings from servitudes to which they had been condemned by the limitations of their nature. Under these conditions it has proved not impossible for certain human beings, with particularly rich [psychic] endowments, to reopen that which had been closed, and to perform, at least for themselves, that which it would have been impossible for Nature to perform for humanity at large. Their example has eventually carried away the rest of Mankind, at least in imagination.⁶

Can we translate these insights into our own language of challenge-and-response? So far, in our investigations, we have been content to note certain rather obvious truths about the nature of challenges: we have observed that neither an excessive nor a deficient challenge can evoke a creative response, and that a challenge which lies just on the border of excessiveness – which at first sight seems to be the most stimulating challenge of all – will tend to exact a fatal penalty from its respondents in the shape of an arrest in their development.⁷ And here, of course, lies the secret of growth for which we are searching; for, on the long view, the optimum challenge must be the one which not only stimulates the challenged party to achieve a single successful response, but also stimulates him to acquire a momentum that carries him on a step further: from achievement to fresh struggles, from the solution of one problem to the presentation of another, from momentary rest to reiterated movement, from Yin to Yang again. The single, finite movement from a disturbance to a restoration of equilibrium is not enough, if genesis is to be followed by growth. To convert the movement into a repetitive, recurrent rhythm, there must be an *élan* which carries the challenged party through equilibrium into an overbalance which exposes him to a fresh challenge and thereby inspires him to make a fresh response in the form of a further equilibrium ending in a further overbalance – and so on in a progression which is potentially infinite. In earthly language:

So tauml' ich von Begierde zu Genuss
Und im Genuss verschmacht' ich nach Begierde.⁸

In heavenly language:

Komm! Hebe dich zu höheren Sphären!
Wenn er dich ahnet, folgt er nach.⁹

Is there any direction or purpose in this continually repeated rhythm of growth? In encountering this question we shall be wise to remind ourselves that the idea of 'direction' can have no literal application except in the physical world, and that we must be on our guard against going astray when we apply the same idea in the psychic field.

It goes without saying that the direction [of successive steps in human progress] is the same as soon as we have agreed upon calling these movements steps in progress. Each movement will in fact then have to be defined as a step forward. But this is merely a metaphor; and if there were really a pre-existing direction along which Mankind had been content to advance,

moral revivals would be predictable: the need of a creative effort for each of them would not be there. The truth is that one can always take the latest of them, define it by a concept, and say that the others contained a greater or lesser quantity of what the concept includes, and that consequently all of them were stations on the road to this. But things take this form only in retrospect. In reality, the changes were qualitative and not quantitative, and they therefore defied prediction. There was, however, one side on which they presented in themselves, and not merely in their conceptual transcripts, a factor common to them all. They were all of them attempts to open what was closed. . . . To push our analysis further, we must add that these successive efforts were not exactly the progressive realization of an ideal, because no idea that had been forged in anticipation would be able to represent the sum of acquisitions each of which, in creating itself, would be creating a special idea of its own. Yet all the same, this diversity of efforts might well sum itself up in something unique: an *élan*.¹⁰

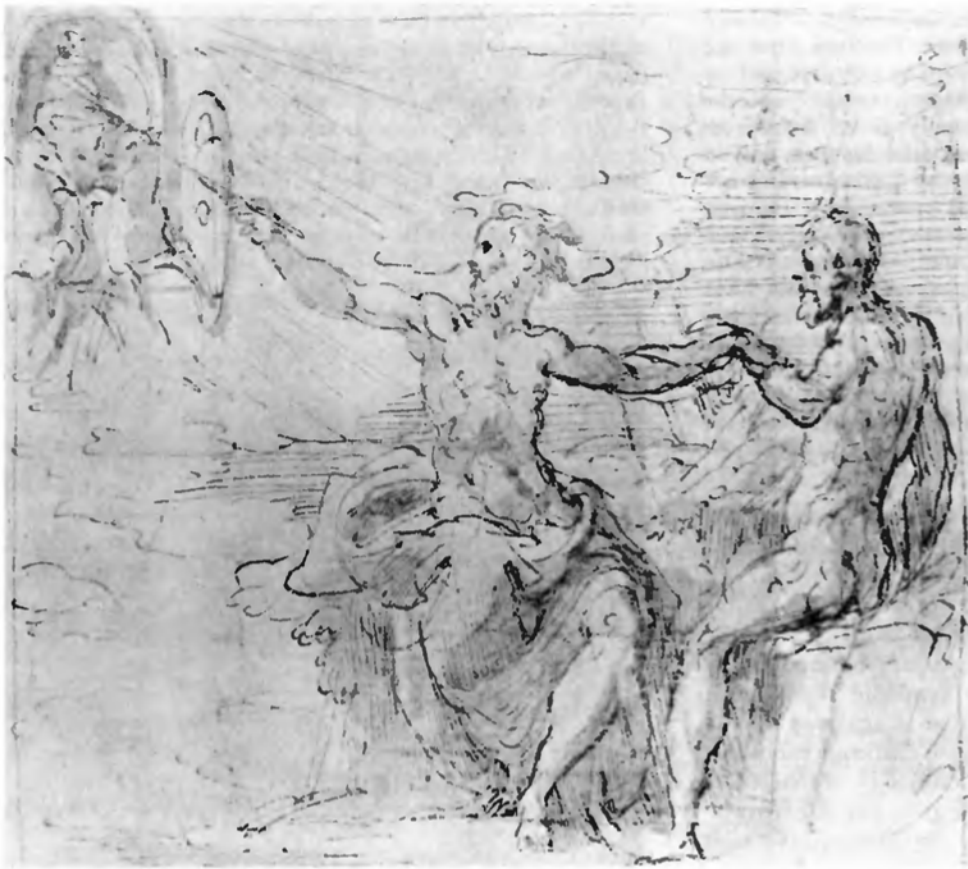
A teleological formula might be adequate to express any single term in the progression, but it would become misleading when applied to the total of the whole series. The continuity of growth is not spatial but summative. As far as direction goes, the line of movement plotted out by the succession of responses to challenges may be exceedingly erratic; but this has little or no symbolic significance, because the continuous progress that is achieved by the Promethean *élan*, as its response to one challenge exposes it to another challenge *und so weiter*, cannot be registered at all in the form of a curve. This progress has rather to be conceived of in terms of control or organization, as a progressive and cumulative increase both in outward mastery of the environment and in inward self-determination or self-articulation on the part of the individual or society that is in the process of growth.

The conquest of the external environment, be it human or physical, does not by itself constitute the criterion of growth, attractive though this simple formula may appear at first sight. We can easily find examples which contradict this view. The Sinic Civilization, for instance, was pushing out the bounds of its political dominion, and thus experiencing a period of growth in terms of geographical expansion, precisely at a time when it was undergoing a process of violent social disintegration in the period of the Contending States (771–221 B.C.). In the field of technology too there is no invariable correlation between the mastery of new techniques and the progress of civilization; we have already seen, for instance, in our survey of arrested societies, that societies may remain static even though technique improves.¹¹ Again, the sheer technical expertise which has enabled Man to conquer and control his outer environment may frequently be the seal of his doom, if he proves incapable of surmounting the challenges that impinge on his soul from within.¹² True growth consists in a progressive change of emphasis and transfer of energy and shifting of the scene of action out of the field of the macrocosm and into that of the microcosm; and in this new arena victorious responses to challenges do not take the form of overcoming an external obstacle, but manifest themselves instead in a progressive self-articulation. When we watch an individual human being or a human society making successive responses to a succession of challenges, and when we ask ourselves whether this particular series of

101, 102 PROMETHEUS THE BRINGER OF FIRE Prometheus's dual mythological roles as the creator of Man and as the defiant bringer of fire from God to Man have often been compounded into a single image, to show Prometheus animating the figure of Man by means of fire.

Below, Prometheus travels through the spheres between Heaven and Earth to bring fire to Man; illustration from a fifteenth-century Flemish manuscript. Beneath, while Jehovah gives shape to Chaos, Prometheus animates Man with his torch in paradise: a medieval Christian illustration to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* sanctifies the pagan tradition by putting the Hellenic creation myth into the iconographical language of Genesis.





103 Prometheus's revolt against Zeus has led to a new kind of creation: he raises his torch to the Sun's fire which flows through his body to give life to the figure of Man.

104 The three episodes of the Prometheus myth. In the sky, Prometheus kindles his torch at the Sun's chariot; on the left, he fires the frozen statue of Man, and, opposite, he is bound to a tree by Hermes to await his punishment.

responses to challenges is to be interpreted as a manifestation of growth, we shall arrive at the answer to our question through observing whether, as the series proceeds, the action does or does not tend to shift from the first to the second of the two fields aforesaid. The presence or absence of this movement of transference gives us our criterion for the presence or absence of growth in a series of responses to challenges. In practice, of course, the action is not confined to the one or the other of these fields exclusively, but the process of growth implies that, in each successive bout, the action on the external field is counting for less, and the action on the internal field for more, in deciding the issue between victory and defeat. In order to illuminate these rather abstract reflexions on the nature of growth, let us turn to an example drawn from history, and attach our speculations to evidence.

In Hellenic history the earlier challenges all emanated from the external environment. After the break-up of the Aegean Civilization, the remaining inhabitants of lowland Greece were faced with the challenge of achieving some security against the aggressive brigands of the adjacent highlands. The lowlanders successfully solved their problem of self-defence by attaining a military mastery over their neighbours. Yet the very success of their response to this first challenge exposed them to a second. A victory which had ensured the peaceful pursuit of agriculture in the lowlands gave a momentum to the growth of population, until it reached a density which the

Hellenic homeland could no longer support. This problem of over-population was met by the expedient of an overseas expansion which again, in its turn, exposed the respondents to a new human challenge from the rival Phoenician and Etruscan colonists of the colonized countries. This challenge was actually presented when the expansion of the Greeks was checked for some two centuries (c. 525–325 B.C.) by the counter-pressure of their non-Greek neighbours: in the critical year of 480 B.C. Greece was compelled to fight for her existence on two fronts simultaneously – against the Carthaginians in Sicily and against Xerxes' Persians in Greece itself. Thereafter, this formidable challenge was triumphantly surmounted in the course of the four centuries beginning with Alexander's passage of the Hellespont in 334 B.C. Alexander overthrew the Achaemenian Empire, thereby opening the way for Hellenism to dominate the main body of the Syriac World, and the Egyptian and Sumero-Akkadian and Iranian and Indic Worlds into the bargain. The Romans overthrew the Carthaginians and gained the upper hand over the European barbarians, thus opening the way for a fresh expansion of Hellenism westwards. Thanks to these triumphs, the Hellenic Society now enjoyed a respite of some five or six centuries – from the latter part of the fourth century B.C. to the early decades of the third century of the Christian Era – during which no serious challenge from the external environment was presented to it. But this did not mean that the Hellenic Society was exempt from challenges altogether



during this period. On the contrary, this was a period of decline: that is to say, a period in which Hellenism was confronted with challenges to which it failed to respond with success. If we now look at these challenges, we shall observe that they were all of them new versions of old challenges which had already been met victoriously on the external field, but which had been translated, in that very act, from the environment of the Hellenic Society into that Society's own life.

For example, the Hellenic Society had resisted the external military challenge of the Persians and the Carthaginians in 480 BC with two potent weapons – the Athenian navy and the Syracusan dictatorship; but these two instruments which were so successful in performing their immediate functions also produced severe internal strains and stresses within the Hellenic body social – a competition for hegemony between Athens and Sparta, a degeneration of the Athenians' hegemony over their maritime allies into a tyranny, and a Sicilian reaction against Syracusan domination – and these in their turn presented the Hellenic Society with a challenge which it proved unable to meet and which eventually resulted in a social breakdown. Thus a challenge which in 480 BC had been presented as an impact of external political forces reappeared in 431 BC (in the great Atheno-Peloponnesian War) as an internal conflict within the society itself.

In the next chapter of Hellenic history, corresponding effects followed from the expansion of Hellenism, east and

west, in the tracks of the Macedonian and Roman armies. The military victories of Hellenic arms, which exempted Hellenism from any further external challenge for some five or six hundred years, could achieve this result only by transferring the field of challenge-and-response from outside to inside the ambit of the Hellenic World. The long military struggle against external enemies was translated into the civil wars of the rival Macedonian *diadochi* and rival Roman dictators. The economic competition between the Hellenic and the Syriac Societies for the mastery of the Mediterranean was reflected within the bosom of the Hellenic Society in the devastating domestic warfare between the Oriental plantation-slaves and their Hellenic masters. Likewise the cultural conflict between Hellenism and the Oriental civilizations reappeared, after the Hellenic culture had successfully asserted its supremacy over the others, as an internal crisis within Hellenic souls: a crisis that declared itself in the emergence of Isis-worship and astrology and the Mahayana and Mithraism and Christianity and a host of other syncretistic religions.

We can detect a similar transference of the field of action in the encounters between the Western Civilization and the Asian and African Worlds today. The reaction against an aggressive Western imperialism has resulted in the successful political emancipation of these societies from an alien dominion or domination; but the external impact of Westernism, in the shape of the imposed apparatus of political and economic colonialism, has dissolved only to

become transformed into an internal conflict within these societies between the alien civilization and the indigenous ethos. Not only are the resulting cultural stresses clearly apparent within these societies, but the Western Society – which until recently had enjoyed an extended period of exemption from external challenges – is also now exposed to the rebounding effects of these attempts on the part of its former subjects and satellites to respond to a challenge which had originally been presented by the West itself.

The phenomenon of transference can be observed in the response to physical as well as human challenges; for the triumph of the Western Civilization over its material environment has been followed by a similar transmutation of external into internal challenges. The problems of mastering physical Nature on the economic plane – of transforming the raw materials provided by Nature into products useful to Man – have been triumphantly met by Western *Homo faber*; but these achievements in the technical sphere have created immense problems in the realm of human relations. Economic competition has accentuated international stresses and strains; in the domestic life of some communities the tension between capital and labour has produced cataclysmic upheavals; and these two disruptive movements have combined on a worldwide scale to create the glaring contemporary problem of the differences between the standards of living of different fractions of Mankind who have now been brought into economic relations with one another by the world-encompassing nexus of commerce and finance.

On the military plane, too, the crucial challenge is no longer technological but psychological. Our mastery of the techniques of destruction may still be capable of refinement, but can hardly be enhanced, since we already have the capacity to annihilate the physical and human world utterly; so the challenge presented to scientific minds by the material secrets of atomic physics has been transformed into a moral challenge for all Mankind.

On this showing, we may perhaps persist in the view that a given series of successful responses to successive challenges is to be interpreted as a manifestation of growth if, as the series proceeds, the action tends to shift from the external environment – whether human or physical – to the *for intérieur* of the growing personality or growing civilization. In so far as this grows and continues to grow, it has to reckon less and less with challenges delivered by alien adversaries that demand responses on an outer battlefield, and more and more with the challenges that are presented by itself to itself on an inner arena. Growth means that the growing personality or civilization tends to become its own environment and its own challenge and its own field of action. In other words, the criterion of growth is a progress towards self-determination; and progress towards self-determination is a prosaic formula for describing the miracle by which life enters into its kingdom.

If self-determination is the criterion of growth, and if self-determination means self-articulation, we can analyse the process by which civilizations actually grow if we investigate the way in which they progressively articulate

themselves. In a general way, it is evident that a society in the process of civilization articulates itself through the individual human beings who 'belong' to the society, or to whom the society 'belongs'. Society itself, as we have said in an earlier chapter,¹³ is not a collection of persons but is a network of relations; it is the field of interaction of two or more agents. It is not itself the source of social action, for a source is *ex hypothesi* other than a field. A society is the medium of communication through which human beings interact with each other, and it is human individuals and not human societies that 'make' history.

This truth is stated forcibly and insistently by Bergson in the work which we have already quoted in this chapter.

We do not believe in the 'unconscious' [factor] in history: the 'great subterranean currents of thought', of which there has been so much talk, only flow in consequence of the fact that masses of men have been carried away by one or more of their own number. . . . It is useless to maintain that [social progress] takes place by itself, bit by bit, in virtue of the spiritual condition of the society at a certain period of its history. It is really a leap forward which is only taken when the society has made up its mind to try an experiment; this means that the society must have allowed itself to be convinced, or at any rate allowed itself to be shaken; and the shake is always given by *somebody*.¹⁴

The individuals who perform this service to society, and who thereby bring about the growth of the societies in which they arise, are superhuman in a very literal sense, for they have attained a supreme self-mastery which manifests itself in a rare power of self-determination. These are the souls who, to use Bergson's language, have felt the direction of the *élan vital*; they are 'privileged human beings whose desire it is . . . to set the imprint [of the *élan*] upon the whole of Mankind and – by a contradiction of which they are aware – to convert a species, which is essentially a created thing, into creative effort; to make a movement out of something which, by definition, is a halt.'¹⁵

The creative personality feels the impulse of internal necessity to transfigure his fellow men by converting them to his own insight; and the emergence of a genius of this kind – whether a religious mystic like Christ and the Buddha, or a political leader like Lenin and Gandhi – inevitably precipitates a social conflict, as society struggles to cope with the disequilibrium produced by his creative energy. Equilibrium will be restored if the individual's vision can be translated into society's practice – if the creative mutation in the microcosm is answered by an adaptative modification of the macrocosm; and growth will be assured if this movement proceeds in a dynamic series of continual alternations, from integration through differentiation to reintegration and thence to a redifferentiation that is still not the end of the story. But what if the creative personality fails to carry society with him, or allows his spiritual leadership to degenerate into an oppressive and sterile tyranny? If we have argued that growth is a concomitant of the creative energy of self-determination, then we must see too whether we can interpret breakdown in terms of the loss of this power.