

The Evolution of Civilizations



Carroll Quigley

The Evolution of Civilizations

An Introduction to
Historical Analysis

Carroll Quigley



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To the Memory of Two
Who Still Guide My Way:
My Father, a Saint, and
My Mother, a Spartan
1880–1957

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Foreword
By Harry J. Hogan

T*he Evolution of Civilizations* expresses two dimensions of its author, Carroll Quigley, that most extraordinary historian, philosopher, and teacher. In the first place, its scope is wide-ranging, covering the whole of man's activities throughout time. Second, it is analytic, not merely descriptive. It attempts a categorization of man's activities in sequential fashion so as to provide a causal explanation of the stages of civilization.

Quigley coupled enormous capacity for work with a peculiarly "scientific" approach. He believed that it should be possible to examine the data and draw conclusions. As a boy at the Boston Latin School, his academic interests were mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Yet during his senior year he was also associate editor of the *Register*, the oldest high school paper in the country. His articles were

Dr. Hogan, now retired, has been a professor, administrator, and lawyer. He received his B.A. magna cum laude from Princeton University, his LL.B. from Columbia Law School, and his Ph.D. in American history from George Washington University. His articles have appeared in the American Bar Association Journal, the Journal of Politics, and other periodicals.

singled out for national awards by a national committee headed by George Gallup.

At Harvard, biochemistry was to be his major. But Harvard, expressing then a belief regarding a well-rounded education to which it has now returned, required a core curriculum including a course in the humanities. Quigley chose a history course, "Europe Since the Fall of Rome." Always a contrary man, he was graded at the top of his class in physics and calculus and drew a C in the history course. But the development of ideas began to assert its fascination for him, so he elected to major in history. He graduated *magna cum laude* as the top history student in his class.

Quigley was always impatient. He stood for his doctorate oral examination at the end of his second year of graduate studies. Charles Howard McIlwain, chairman of the examining board, was very impressed by Quigley's answer to his opening question; the answer included a long quotation in Latin from Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln in the thirteenth century. Professor McIlwain sent Quigley to Princeton University as a graduate student instructor.

In the spring of 1937 I was a student in my senior year at Princeton. Quigley was my preceptor in medieval history. He was Boston Irish; I was New York Irish. Both of us, Catholics adventuring in a strangely Protestant establishment world, were fascinated by the Western intellectual tradition anchored in Augustine, Abelard, and Aquinas that seemed to have so much more richness and depth than contemporary liberalism. We became very close in a treasured friendship that was terminated only by his death.

In the course of rereading *The Evolution of Civilizations* I was reminded of the intensity of our dialogue. In Quigley's

view, which I shared, our age was one of irrationality. That spring we talked about what career decisions I should make. At his urging I applied to and was admitted by the Harvard Graduate School in History. But I had reservations about an academic career in the study of the history that I loved, on the ground that on Quigley's own analysis the social decisions of importance in our lifetime would be made in ad hoc irrational fashion in the street. On that reasoning, finally I transferred to law school.

In Princeton, Carroll Quigley met and married Lillian Fox. They spent their honeymoon in Paris and Italy on a fellowship to write his doctoral dissertation, a study of the public administration of the Kingdom of Italy, 1805–14. The development of the state in western Europe over the last thousand years always fascinated Quigley. He regarded the development of public administration in the Napoleonic states as a major step in the evolution of the modern state. It always frustrated him that each nation, including our own, regards its own history as unique and the history of other nations as irrelevant to it.

In 1938–41, Quigley served a stint at Harvard, tutoring graduate students in ancient and medieval history. It offered little opportunity for the development of cosmic views and he was less than completely content there. It was, however, a happy experience for me. I had entered Harvard Law School. We began the practice of having breakfast together at Carroll and Lillian's apartment.

In 1941 Quigley accepted a teaching appointment at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. It was to engage his primary energies throughout the rest of his busy life. There he became an almost legendary teacher. He chose to teach a course, "The Development of Civilization," required

of the incoming class, and that course ultimately provided the structure and substance for *The Evolution of Civilizations*. As a course in his hands, it was a vital intellectual experience for young students, a mind-opening adventure. Foreign Service School graduates, meeting years later in careers around the world, would establish rapport with each other by describing their experience in his class. It was an intellectual initiation with remembered impact that could be shared by people who had graduated years apart.

The fortunes of life brought us together again. During World War II I served as a very junior officer on Admiral King's staff in Washington. Carroll and I saw each other frequently. Twenty years later, after practicing law in Oregon, I came into the government with President Kennedy. Our eldest daughter became a student under Carroll at Georgetown University. We bought a house close by Carroll and Lillian. I had Sunday breakfast with them for years and renewed our discussions of the affairs of a disintegrating world.

Superb teacher Quigley was, and could justify a lifetime of prodigious work on that success alone. But ultimately he was more. To me he was a figure—he would scoff at this—like Augustine, Abelard, and Aquinas, searching for the truth through examination of ultimate reality as it was revealed in history. Long ago, he left the church in the formal sense. Spiritually and intellectually he never left it. He never swerved from his search for the meaning of life. He never placed any goal in higher priority. If the God of the Western civilization that Quigley spent so many years studying does exist in the terms that he saw ascribed to him by our civilization, that God will now have welcomed Quigley as one who has pleased him.

In an age characterized by violence, extraordinary personal alienation, and the disintegration of family, church, and community, Quigley chose a life dedicated to rationality. He addressed the problem of explaining change in the world around us, first examined by Heraclitus in ancient Greece. Beneath that constant change, so apparent and itself so real, what is permanent and unchanging?

Quigley wanted an explanation that in its very categorization would give meaning to a history which was a record of constant change. Therefore the analysis had to include but not be limited to categories of subject areas of human activity—military, political, economic, social, religious, intellectual. It had to describe change in categories expressed sequentially in time—mixture, gestation, expansion, conflict, universal empire, decay, invasion. It was a most ambitious effort to make history rationally understandable. F. E. Manuel, in his review of this book for the *American Historical Review*, following its first publication in 1961, described it as on “sounder ground” than the work of Toynbee.

Quigley found the explanation of disintegration in the gradual transformation of social “instruments” into “institutions,” that is, the transformation of social arrangements functioning to meet real social needs into social institutions serving their own purposes regardless of real social needs. In an ideologically Platonistic society, social arrangements are molded to express a rigidly idealized version of reality. Such institutionalization would not have the flexibility to accommodate to the pressures of changing reality for which the ideology has no categories of thought that will allow perception, analysis, and handling. But the extraordinary distinction of Western civilization is that its ontology allows

an open-ended epistemology. It is engaged in a constant effort to understand reality which is perceived as in constant change. Therefore, our categories of knowledge are themselves always subject to change. As a consequence reform is always possible.

The question today is whether we have lost that Western view of reality which has given our 2,000 years of history its unique vitality, constantly pregnant with new versions of social structure. In *Evolution*, Quigley describes the basic ideology of Western civilization as expressed in the statement, "The truth unfolds in time through a communal process." Therefore, Quigley saw the triumph in the thirteenth century of the moderate realism of Aquinas over dualistic exaggerated realism derived from Platonism as the major epistemologic triumph that opened up Western civilization. People must constantly search for the "truth" by building upon what others have learned. But no knowledge can be assumed to be complete and final. It could be contradicted by new information received tomorrow. In epistemology, Quigley always retained his belief in the scientific method. Therefore, he saw Hegel and Marx as presumptuous, in error, and outside the Western tradition in their analysis of history as an ideologic dialectic culminating in the present or immediate future in a homeostatic condition.

Quigley comments upon the constant repetition of conflict and expansion stages in Western history. That reform process owes its possibility to the uniquely Western belief that truth is continually unfolding. Therefore Western civilization is capable of reexamining its direction and its institutions, and changing both as appears necessary. So in Western history, there was a succession of technological breakthroughs in agricultural practice and in commerce.

Outmoded institutions like feudalism and—in the commercial area—municipal mercantilism in the period 1270–1440, and state mercantilism in the period 1690–1810 were discarded. Similarly, we may also survive the economic crisis described by Quigley as monopoly capitalism in the present post-1900 period.

Yet Quigley perceives—correctly in my view—the possible termination of open-ended Western civilization. With access to an explosive technology that can tear the planet apart, coupled with the failure of Western civilization to establish any viable system of world government, local political authority will tend to become violent and absolutist. As we move into irrational activism, states will seize upon ideologies that justify absolutism. The 2,000-year separation in Western history of state and society would then end. Western people would rejoin those of the rest of the world in merging the two into a single entity, authoritarian and static. The age that we are about to enter would be an ideologic one consistent with the views of Hegel and Marx—a homeostatic condition. That triumph would end the Western experiment and return us to the experience of the rest of the world—namely, that history is a sequence of stages in the rise and fall of absolutist ideologies.

America is now in a crisis-disintegrating stage. In such a condition, absent a philosophy, people turn readily to charismatic personalities. So at the beginning of our time of troubles, in the depression of the 1930s, we turned to Franklin D. Roosevelt. He took us through the depression and World War II. We were buoyed by his optimism and reassured by the strength and confidence of his personality. Within the Western tradition he provided us with no solutions; he simply preserved options. When he died, all

America was in shock. We had lost our shield. Carroll came over to my place that night. We talked in the subdued fashion of a generation that had lost its guardian and would now have to face a hostile world on its own.

Since then we in America have been denied the easy-out of charismatic leadership. It may just be that we shall have to follow the route that Quigley has marked out for us in this book. We may have to look at our history, analyze it, establish an identity in that analysis, and make another try at understanding reality in a fashion consistent with that open-ended tradition.

If so, America, acting for Western civilization, must find within the history of that civilization the intellectual and spiritual reserves to renew itself within the tradition. Striking as was the impact of this book at the time of its first publication, in 1961, its major impact will be in support of that effort in the future. There is hope that in Western civilization the future ideology will be rational. If so, it would be consistent with an epistemology that accepts the general validity of sensory experience and the possibility of making generalizations from that experience, subject to modification as additional facts are perceived. It is that epistemology which was termed moderate realism in the thirteenth century and, in its epistemologic aspects, is now known as the scientific method. Such a rational ideology is probable only if it is developed out of the special history of the West. As appreciation of that spreads, the kind of analysis that Carroll Quigley develops in this book is the analysis that the West must use.

Such an effort would be consistent in social terms with Quigley's view of his own life. He greatly admired his mother, a housewife, and his father, a Boston firechief, and

described them as teaching him to do his best at whatever he chose to put his energies. That was their way of saying what Carroll would have described as man's responsibility to understand and relate actively to a continually unfolding reality. He dedicated his life to that purpose.

Preface to the
First Edition

This book is not a history. Rather it is an attempt to establish analytical tools that will assist the understanding of history. Most historians will regard such an effort as unnecessary or even impossible. Some answer must be made to these two objections.

Those who claim that no analytical tools are needed in order to write history are naive. To them the facts of history are relatively few and are simply arranged. The historian's task is merely to find these facts; their arrangement will be obvious. But it should require only a moment's thought to recognize that the facts of the past are infinite, and the possible arrangements of any selection from these facts are equally numerous. Since all the facts cannot be mobilized in any written history because of their great number, there must be some principle on which selection from these facts is based. Such a principle is a tool of historical analysis. Any sophisticated historian should be aware of the principles he uses and should be explicit to his readers about these. After all, any past event, even the writing of this book, is a fact of history, but most such facts, including this book, do not deserve to be mentioned in the narration of history.

If historians are not explicit, at least to themselves, about their principles of selection among the facts of the past and among the many possible arrangements of these facts, all histories will be simply accidental compilations that cannot be justified in any rational way. Historians will continue to write about some of the events of history while neglecting others equally significant or even more significant, and they will form patterns for these facts along lines determined by traditional (and basically accidental) lines or in reflection of old controversies about the patterns of these facts.

This, indeed, is pretty much what we have in history today. In American history, for example, dozens of books examine and reexamine the same old issues without, in most cases, contributing much that is new or different. The central fact of American history is the process by which a society with European cultural patterns was modified by the selective process of emigration from Europe and the opportunity to exploit the enormous, largely virgin, resources of the New World. Yet in most histories of the United States, this subject is hardly mentioned. Instead we have volume after volume of discussion on the rivalry of Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians or on the unrealistic problem whether the American Civil War was a repressible or an irrepressible conflict or on whether the American lapse into isolationism after World War I was caused more by the vindictiveness of Lodge or the inflexibility of Wilson.

To the non-American world the central fact of American history is American technology—what they used to call “Fordism,” meaning mass production. Until very recently there was no history of American technology in existence, and even today this vital subject obtains only incidental

mention, with an almost total lack of real understanding, in most histories of the United States.

As we have said, the content of most books depends upon accidental factors or, at most, on the rehash of ancient controversies. The Civil War has commanded major attention, but there is little recognition of the real significance of this war; namely, that after giving an impetus to industrialization, it left a residue of emotional patterns that alienated the farmers of the South and the farmers of the West so that the country could be dominated politically by the high finance and heavy industry of the East. This situation, which forms the essential background for such familiar phenomena as the agrarian discontent and third-party movements of the period 1873–1933, as well as the attacks on political machines and the rise of civil service, or the growth of muck-raking or progressivism, and of government regulation of business, is rarely presented in adequate fashion as the background that it is. Instead these events are mentioned as if they were merely accidental occurrences related in some obscure fashion to the idiosyncrasies of Americans. And the average college student of American history finishes his study without any idea why the Republican party became the party of big business in 1892–1932, what the Whitneys contributed to American life, or the significant contributions of Joseph Henry or Josiah Willard Gibbs (1839–1903) to the world today.

In the incredible and growing excitement over the Civil War, tradition and stale controversy continue to determine the centers of attention. The Battle of Gettysburg has been fought and refought (with four major books in the last six months), just as if the South ever really had a chance of

winning the war, in this or any other battle, while the Battle of Petersburg, which is of far greater tactical significance (since it was a direct foretaste of 1914–18), is almost totally neglected.

Matters are no better in European history. To mention only one point, in which I am personally very interested, the one dominant central fact of European history over the last thousand years has been the almost steady growth of public authority and the public services. We could never guess this from the history books. Or again, reams have been written on the French Revolution and its origins, yet some of the most vital points are hardly mentioned. We have been told repeatedly that the government of the Old Regime was “absolute” and that the Revolution began because this regime was financially “bankrupt.” Few have seen the paradox lying in a situation where an “absolute state” could not tax its subjects. A colleague on the faculty at Princeton once stated in conversation as a fact that the Revolution occurred in France because that country was the most advanced in Europe. When I replied that, in my opinion, the Revolution came in France because the French government was one of the most backward in Europe, he was astonished. I am not trying here to consider this problem; I am simply trying to point out that this is a problem that certainly should have been examined in connection with the study of the French Revolution and that just as surely would have been discussed in any historical work based on rational tools of historical analysis. Because such tools have not been used, study of the French Revolution, like the study of other matters, has concentrated its attention on those aspects of the problem that came to be discussed largely for traditional and accidental reasons. In fact, the chief force directing the