

A THEORY OF CIVILISATION

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649288441

A theory of civilisation by Sholto O. G. Douglas

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

SHOLTO O. G. DOUGLAS

**A THEORY OF
CIVILISATION**

A THEORY OF CIVILISATION

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
PART I	
CHAPTER	
I. ANCIENT GREECE	31
II. EARLY ROMAN CIVILISATION	60
III. THE AUGUSTAN AGE	80
IV. THE DECADENCE OF ROMAN CIVILISATION	93
V. THE DARK AGES	112
VI. THE CHRISTIAN CIVILISATIONS	136
<hr/>	
PART II	
I. ANCIENT EGYPT	157
II. BUDDHISM	176
III. ISLAM	192
IV. CONFUCIANISM	206
V. ANCIENT MEXICO AND PERU	217
CONCLUSION	237

A Theory of Civilisation

INTRODUCTION

WHY did the civilisation of ancient Greece and Rome decay and die? That is a question which must occur to every mind that studies the history of classical civilisation. Why did that former period of knowledge and culture, of vast intellectual and artistic achievement, fail to pass by a direct path of ascent into our modern civilisation? We know that there were intellects at work in the world then which were not separated by any real gulf of difference from the intellects that have crowned our modern civilisation. In every purely intellectual point the great men of that period were not inferior to the great men of modern times—or, at any rate, were not utterly inferior to them. In poetry—epic, lyric, dramatic—Greece and Rome have left us models which we have barely surpassed. In sculpture we have never reached

the perfection of Greece. Of classical painting we possess next to nothing, and we know so little that it would be rash to claim for the modern world an overwhelming superiority of craftsmanship. In architecture we may look proudly on Chartres or Ely ; but, with thoughts of the Parthenon and of the temples of Paestum, we dare not claim an intrinsic superiority for Christian architecture. And even in the latter days of the great epoch of Greco-Roman civilisation, Tacitus, that most perfect craftsman of prose literature, gave the world in his *Annals* a work that some of us may well think has never been equalled.

Why did this civilisation collapse utterly, as though the superstructure was too heavy for the foundation?

The advancing waves of barbarism, we are told, broke through the barriers, and spread like a rising tide of savagery over the Roman world. Yes, but why did that happen at this period? Have we any real reason—a reason, that is, that we have not reached *ex post facto*—for supposing that barbarian Power was greater in the fourth and following centuries of our era than in the hundred years that centre round the principate of Augustus? We read of the irresistible stream of immigration pour-

ing in from the east, and beating upon the barriers of the Empire. Yet the Byzantine Empire, which might seem to have been more at the mercy of the barbarians, succeeded in keeping a tottering head above the waves for yet another thousand years. Indeed, every reader knows that this is not a sufficient and convincing answer. We all know that Roman civilisation was rotten to the core; that the evil came from within, not from without; that the Roman world was weakening all the time, and could at last do nothing against barbarians whom Caesar and his legions would have swept away like chaff.

It has been the same with every civilisation that has been evolved in the countless ages of written and unwritten history. Greece and Rome only followed in the tracks of Nineveh and Babylon. Does the same fate lie before us in spite of the seeming strength and solidarity of the civilisation that to-day is encompassing all the world? No doubt, to any unimportant provincial governor of classical Rome, the idea that Roman civilisation could pass away, and melt into the barbarism which we find, say, in the seventh century would have seemed preposterous; in just the same way it would seem preposterous to a modern colonial

governor that the totality of modern civilisation could fade within a few centuries into a soulless, unproductive savagery. Yet that is what happened to Rome, and that is what analogy tells us may happen to our own culture.

Now can we form any notion—however tentative and falsified by misconception—why all the earlier civilisations have thus passed away, leaving only dead sepulchral fruits for antiquarian scholars of a later age? The answer to that question must be of interest to us, because from it we may hope to see whether the same forces of dissolution are working amongst us which dissolved those earlier civilisations.

But the question cannot be answered in a few words of conclusive demonstration. If that were so, the answer would have been found, studied, discussed long ago in all its endless ramifications by the great intellects that have preceded us. For no philosopher, no biologist, no anthropologist could have failed to take an interest in the road up which mankind is toiling.

If we look with a pervasive eye at the history of the European world during the last two thousand years, three things appear to stand

out as the central pivots round which the individual events may be grouped conveniently.

First, the spread of the Greco-Roman power and civilisation, which, after reaching a climax, fell into decrepitude and death.

Second, the birth, growth, and ultimate dissemination of the Christian faith.

Third, that renewal of civilisation whose commencement has by common consent been called the Renaissance: the term, of course, implies rightly or wrongly that our modern civilisation is essentially a re-birth of the Greco-Roman civilisation.

Let us try to see whether any causal connection can be traced between these three leading events.

It is at once obvious that the birth and growth of Christianity synchronise to a remarkable degree with the climacteric point and the beginning of the decay of the Roman empire.

We must be careful here not to let the wide range of our modern point of view mislead us. We have all heard in our childhood that Christ came into the world exactly at the moment when the events of Roman history were most singularly favourable to the dissemination of the Christian faith. That is true. But, looking at this statement with the un-