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Arnold Toynbee’s Industrial Revolution¹

I

When Arnold Toynbee chose to make ‘Industrial Revolution’ the main theme of the book he intended to write on the basis of lectures he gave in Oxford in the early 1880s, he was promoting a figure of speech that had been in occasional use since the beginning of the century. Promotion took the form of adding capital letters and a judicious mixture of moral appraisal and historical explanation to what had largely been descriptive accounts of the pace at which machine and factory production had progressed in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Toynbee’s case, however, the moral and historical components differed from those associated with the more thorough-going catastrophist interpretations of the Industrial Revolution in circulation before and after his lectures were published.

The idea that the modern system of industry which had increased national wealth in England had been achieved at the expense of the material and moral well-being of many was accepted by Toynbee as an accurate account of what had happened during the early decades of the nineteenth century. This was ‘a period as disastrous and as terrible as any through which a nation ever passed’, a period in which there had been an increase in pauperism and when free competition had ‘led to a rapid alienation of classes and the degradation of a large body of producers’ (IR, 64).

This diagnosis already had several foreign exponents, two of whom are mentioned by Toynbee – Simonde de Sismondi and Ferdinand Lassalle (IR, 33) – to which the names of other foreign observers who regarded England as a society rapidly approaching ruin as

¹ This article is based on a reading of the two posthumous texts on which Toynbee’s reputation as an author rests: The Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England; Popular Addresses, Notes, and Other Fragments by the late Arnold Toynbee, together with a reminiscence by Lord Milner, (London: Longmans Green, [1st edn., 1884], 7th impression, 1923); and Progress and Poverty; A Criticism of Mr Henry George being Two Lectures delivered in St Andrew’s Hall, Newman Street, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co, 1883). References to these works in the text will be given as IR and PP respectively, followed by page numbers.
a result of political and economic instability could be added. But linkage of the rise of manufacturing with moral decay and social disruption also had domestic exponents who can be traced back to Robert Malthus and his critics at the turn of the century. In his first Essay on Population, published in 1798, Malthus had posed the possibility of what would in later Marxian parlance be called ‘immiseration’ – the progressive erosion of living standards – as part of a critique of what he regarded as Adam Smith’s over-sanguine views on capital accumulation and economic growth. As a political economist who combined this with being an Anglican clergyman, he also voiced serious doubts about the effect on morals and happiness of the increasing proportion of the working population that was becoming dependent on urban manufacturing employments under the hot-house conditions of war and economic blockade.³

During and after the Napoleonic wars Malthus’s Tory and romantic opponents, led by Robert Southey, expanded on some of these arguments by adding a ‘feudal’ or golden age contrast to their hostile evaluation of England’s burgeoning ‘manufacturing system’.⁴ In the 1830s and 40s Thomas Carlyle further embellished the romantic position in his attack on the ‘machine age’ and in his scornful dismissal of a society based on the ‘cash nexus’ in Past and Present. Together with his earlier pamphlet on Chartism, this impressed Friedrich Engels when writing from his Manchester base The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 – a work that was to become the best-known foreign exposition of the catastrophe thesis. Engels’s account of the Industrial Revolution, according to which the steam engine and machinery used in cotton manufacture had endowed England with an industrial proletariat

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destined to play a role of world-historical significance, was to become an integral part of the argument for a revolutionary version of state socialism.

While Engels’s work seems not to have featured in Toynbee’s reading, its place was amply filled by the writings of Marx and Lassalle, probably because these were translated into French earlier than Engels’s work. Indeed, Toynbee regarded the Industrial Revolution as the origin of every kind of socialism from the ‘Tory’ or paternalistic type he associated with Carlyle to its latest ‘German’ or revolutionary alternatives at the other end of the spectrum. The material developments which had ‘silenced the spinning-wheel and hand-loom, and dragged men and women into the great cities and huge factories’ (PP, 6) had created the problems associated with the distribution of wealth to which socialism in its various forms was the response. One of the principal goals of Toynbee’s foreshortened career could be described as that of articulating a brand of radical liberalism which could address the problem of distribution in a manner suited to the progressive continuities of English history and the emerging aspirations to democratic citizenship that came with extension of the suffrage in 1832 and 1867. In urging his student audience to take up the new sub-discipline of economic history he was urging them to tackle the most important problems facing British society in the 1880s and beyond.

II

This opening roll-call flags some of the issues that need to be addressed in any treatment of the state of the interpretative art before and after Toynbee mounted his lectures. It recalls some of the intellectual developments that form the background against which Toynbee sought to place his own work, and about which more can be said in a moment. What it does not recall are other features of his intellectual biography connected with the Oxford of Thomas Henry Green, the religious and philosophical mentor with whom, in the words of Alfred Milner, another member of the same circle centred on Balliol College, Toynbee had ‘a strong spiritual affinity’ (Milner in IR, xviii).
A distinguished literature on this subject allows me to confine myself to a few headline statements. Green’s teaching and personal example provided his pupils with a way of re-inscribing English liberalism in the language of philosophical idealism mixed with evangelical Christianity. It equipped them to play a part in making the transition to what became known as ‘New Liberalism’ in the 1880s, 90s, and early 1900s. The part they played was made interesting chiefly by virtue of the fact that Green and Toynbee, as teachers attached to Benjamin Jowett’s Balliol during the revival of Oxford as a would-be national institution of higher learning, were in the self-conscious business of preparing an élite for its future political and administrative role. Toynbee outlived his mentor by only one year, but he proved to be an outstanding practical exponent of Green’s position, supplying some economic backbone that could not be found in the original, thereby reinforcing its reformist purchase on contemporary politics. Milner summarized this as follows: ‘For the sake of religion he had become a social reformer; for the sake of social reform he became an economist’ (Milner in IR, xxi).

Hence, in addition to being a disciple of Green, Toynbee saw himself as a member of the latest generation of disinterested students of British economic life, part of the native tradition of political economy and economic history that began with Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations. The appearance of this work in 1776 provided Toynbee with the first of the four literary and chronological pegs on which he hung his account of successive phases of the Industrial Revolution. Smith represented the immediate pre-industrial phase, marked by the replacement of medieval and mercantile regulation of domestic and international commerce by competition and free trade. The twin philosophical conceptions of economic liberty and the providential or harmonious properties of the pursuit of individual self-interest had been woven into the intellectual fabric of political economy by Smith; but it was what Toynbee described as the ‘force of necessity’ embodied in the inventions of Arkwright, Watt, Cartwright, and Crompton patented a few years after the Wealth of Nations first appeared

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that completed the process of liberation ‘under conditions which Adam Smith could not imagine’ (IR, 152).

The second phase was inaugurated by Malthus’s first *Essay on Population*; it stood for the revolution in ‘full swing’, when concern had shifted towards the rising cost of supporting paupers under the English Poor Law, and hence when attention was focused more on the causes of poverty than wealth. David Ricardo’s *Principles of Political Economy* ushered in a third phase in 1817 by advancing inexorable laws to explain the distributive shares necessarily going to landowners, capitalists, and labour in the form of rent, profits, and wages. The fourth peg was John Stuart Mill’s *Principles* published in 1848, a work that heralded a more hopeful phase by showing that the laws of production and distribution could be separated, thereby offering scope for improvements in the latter.

There is no doubt about which of the four economic gospels Toynbee found most in need of being counteracted: Ricardo was the captivating villain of the piece. According to Toynbee’s schematized version of the truth, Ricardo established complete hegemony over political economy from 1817 to 1848 and had ‘revolutionized’ parliamentary opinion on economic subjects, thereby achieving an influence over legislation greater than that of Smith. Ricardo was master of the insidious art of abstract deductive thinking, a method that infers laws of behaviour and their economic outcomes from a simplified and unhistorical view of human nature based on self-interested motivation and frictionless adjustment to economic signals. More ominously, Ricardo was also responsible through his theories of labour value, wages, and rent for the ‘two great text-books of Socialism’, *Das Kapital* and Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* – the books that students of Toynbee’s generation and political outlook were now obliged to confront. Ricardo enjoyed the unique status in Toynbee’s account of things of being ‘at once the great prop of the middle classes and their most terrible menace’ (IR, 109,113), an unconscious apologist whose theories provided a ‘gloomy and depressing’ justification for the status quo, while at the same time supplying deadly ammunition for socialist critics: ‘his theory of wages has produced Lassalle, and... his theory of rent has produced Henry George’ (PP, 6). Hence Toynbee’s remarkable conclusion,
one that was taken up by Herbert Somerton Foxwell in his account of the Ricardian origins of English socialism in 1899, but was not to be matched until John Maynard Keynes repeated it in the 1930s for reasons of his own. Toynbee’s version of the story regretted that Ricardo’s limitations had not been fully recognized by his orthodox successors. If his ‘brilliant deductions’ had not carried all before them, destroying observation in their path, ‘endless misunderstanding and hatred would have been avoided, and some great problems would be much nearer their solution’ (IR, 146).

The underlying belief in the impact of economic theorizing now seems as remarkable as the criticism. But it should be remembered that for Toynbee what had been revolutionized by the Industrial Revolution was not merely industry and agriculture, and the relationship of employers to employed, but the ways in which the obligations of the social union were understood and acted upon by educated opinion in parliament and via the voluntary associations that were such a distinctive feature of English public life. Toynbee credited Mill with having made the effort to come to terms with the socialist challenge by distinguishing between ‘what was and was not inevitable under a system of free competition’ (IR, 65); but full deliverance from Ricardo’s legacy remained for Toynbee’s generation to accomplish. By adding an evangelical dimension to political economy – Toynbee called it a ‘gospel of life’ – he hoped to turn a science that had become a source of discord into ‘an instrument of social union’ (IR, 147).

III

Toynbee’s posthumously assembled lectures, taken in conjunction with the vivid impression left on his friends by his saint-like character and premature death, created a special place for him in the pantheon of social and economic inquiry in Britain. This makes it easy – deceptively easy, perhaps – to put together a litany of names of historians and social

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* For Foxwell’s endorsement of Toynbee’s opinions on Ricardo see his introduction to Anton Menger’s *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour* (London: Macmillan, 1899), xli-xl. Keynes’s version of Foxwell’s anti-Ricardian opinions was expressed as regret that Ricardo rather than Malthus ‘had been the parent stem from which nineteenth-century economics proceeded’; see his essay on ‘Thomas Robert Malthus’ in his *Essays in Biography. The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan for the Royal Economic Society, 1971–89), volume X, 100; and the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, ibid., volume VII, 32–4.
activists who can be cited to show his continuing influence. It begins with those friends who collected notes and manuscript material on the lectures, notably William James Ashley, Bolton King, and Alfred Milner in Oxford, with advice coming from Foxwell and Alfred Marshall who were more closely connected with Cambridge. Apart from The Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England – a surprisingly successful publication given the miscellaneous qualities of its organization and writing – the permanent monument they erected was Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel in 1884. It was there, courtesy of Canon Samuel Barnett, that Toynbee had acquired some of his own direct experience of working-class life, and where subsequent generations of Oxbridge students did the same through community work under the auspices of the settlement movement and via careers that often began with extra-mural teaching to working-class audiences.7

Beatrice Webb summed up the sentiments of many social investigators in the 1880s by speaking of a growing ‘class-consciousness of sin’ among the middle classes, citing in evidence Toynbee’s emotionally charged apology to the last working-class audience he addressed for offering charity rather than sympathy for the injustices they had suffered.8 Since the lectures were also part of the background to the work of J. L. and Barbara Hammond, and of Richard Tawney, those responsible for further articulating the native catastrophist view of the Industrial Revolution in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Toynbee’s legacy seems to extend beyond New Liberalism and Christian Socialism into the Fabian variant best represented by the partnership of Sidney and Beatrice Webb.9 While this may say much for the fecund eclecticism of social commentary during the 1880s, it is often misleading as a guide to the transitional stance that Toynbee adopted on all the key methodological, historiographic,
and political matters in this historical movement. The ambivalence on some central issues that has been seen as part of Green’s legacy can also be found in Toynbee.10

As a conscientious student of economic affairs during the period in which an Anglo-Irish version of what in Germany was known as the Methodenstreit was at its height, Toynbee naturally aligned himself with those critics of economic orthodoxy who upheld the need to supplement deductive methods with historical and inductive inquiries. The historical method lent an essential element of relativity to any discussion of economic laws and precepts (IR, 5-6); but Toynbee advised Oxford history students that deductive reasoning was a valuable antidote to immersion in facts; and that the historical method was ‘impotent of itself to give us a law of progress, because so many of the facts on which it relies are, in Economics, concealed from us’ (IR, 111). This methodological conclusion is one that Mill and later Henry Sidgwick, philosophers closer to the political economy and utilitarian mainstream, would have had no difficulty in endorsing.

Toynbee had read Walter Bagehot’s defence of orthodox methods in his Economic Studies as well as the attack on them by Thomas Cliffe Leslie; and he was not prepared to go as far as the latter in rejecting theory or even in denying that at least one economic law, the law of diminishing returns, might have universal application (IR, 3, 111, 148). Toynbee’s personal compound of economic history and economic theory proved not to be a stable pedagogic one, but his attachment to it separated him from later and more partisan historical economists such as the Comtist, John Kells Ingram, and upholders of a ‘Tory’ version of economic history, Archdeacon William Cunningham, and, with less certainty, Ashley, who owed his conversion to the new sub-discipline to Toynbee’s teaching at Balliol.

Toynbee also resisted enrolment among the new generation of professional students of economic life that Alfred Marshall was hoping to rally around his revitalized version of economic science. Although Toynbee admired the elementary textbook on the Economics of Industry published by Marshall and his wife in 1879, the attempt by Marshall to reinforce the distinction between the science cultivated by academic students and its practical application

10 On Green’s ambivalences see Harris, ‘Political Thought’, 126 and Goldman, Dons and Workers, 55-6.
as a set of rules or policy recommendations was too positivistic, I conjecture, to appeal to a pupil of T. H. Green. Economists who hoped to achieve neutrality and professional distance ignored the pressures of modern existence as well as the need for a ‘gospel of life’. The enhanced notion of public duty that came with Green’s philosophy and was reinforced by Giuseppe Mazzini’s writings on the subject meant that being disinterested could never mean being disengaged. Hence Toynbee’s dismissal of John Elliot Cairnes’s claims for the neutrality of political economy: those who hold to this ideal, he said,

‘....forget that the laws of Political Economy are converted into rules by sheer force of necessity, and that the maintenance of ....neutrality is practically impossible. Some answer must be given to the pressing questions of the day, and if Political Economy did not lay down rules and become a practical science, journalism would. And, as a matter of fact, while affecting the reserved and serious air of students, political economists have all the time been found brawling in the market-place.’ (IR, 160-61)

Marshall was aware of the differences between his point of view and that of Toynbee, whose teaching duties at Balliol he took over after Toynbee’s death: he was at pains to ensure that the account of Toynbee’s legacy conformed with his own preferences rather than with the more sentimental accounts that prevailed in Oxford. By holding that ‘the leading controlling strain of [Toynbee’s] character was emotional’, Marshall indicated to those familiar with his personal vocabulary that Toynbee did not belong to the breed of Cambridge scientists Marshall hoped to raise, those whose warm hearts were matched by cool heads.

A pardonable extrapolation of this episode would be to say that if Toynbee had survived a few more years Marshall would not have been surprised to learn that he had become a keen supporter of the Oxford Christian Union’s journal, the Economic Review, rather than the British Economic Society’s Economic Journal founded under Marshall’s auspices in the same year, 1890. Marshall did his best to accept this unfortunate coincidence, merely regretting

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that his Oxford rivals had not chosen a title such as the *Journal of Social Reform* to express the difference in priorities of the two journals and sponsoring organizations.¹²

On the political issues that more clearly came to seem in retrospect like the defining ones, Toynbee was seen by Milner and others as a pioneer in the move away from laissez-faire individualism towards a more humane or philanthropic type of interventionism involving a ‘deliberate corporate effort, inspired by moral ideals, though guided by the scientific study of economic laws’ (IR, xxv). Milner had no objection to this being labelled as socialism as long as its distance from paternalism, materialism, and a form of collectivism that did not respect private property was preserved, and a Greenian ‘spiritual ideal’, in the shape of a belief in the ‘higher life of the individual’, was observed. In more realistic terms, he thought there were similarities between Toynbee’s position and that embodied in Joseph Chamberlain’s radical ‘unauthorized programme’ first enunciated during the 1885 parliamentary election, with Toynbee also showing an early interest in state subsidization of old-age pensions, an issue that became crucial to progressive politics a couple of decades later.

There has to be a suspicion here that Toynbee was being recruited into the causes for which Milner felt enthusiasm when he wrote his reminiscences a decade after Toynbee’s death. Something similar occurred to Ruskin when his reputation as a socio-economic thinker passed into the hands of his admirer and editor, Edward Cook, who also held New Liberal opinions on some of the leading policy questions of early twentieth-century politics.¹³ On two earlier landmark pieces of legislation, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846, Toynbee was firmly on the individualistic side of the debate. Reform of the Poor Law had put an end to the ‘pauperising policy’ of Speenhamland and was, in Toynbee’s opinion, ‘perhaps the most beneficent Act of Parliament which has been passed since the Reform Bill’ (IR, 92). Free trade had delivered exactly what it said on


the abolitionists’ tin: cheaper and steadier prices for food and higher and more regular levels of employment (IR, 127-8).

With regard to methods of controlling population growth Toynbee was a Malthusian rather than a neo-Malthusian: he was opposed to artificial methods of birth control on the grounds that they allowed ‘the gratification of a strong instinct while the duties attaching to it are avoided’ (IR, 94). This had been the moral objection raised against James Mill’s covert advocacy of birth control in his *Elements of Political Economy* in the 1820s. Secular neo-Malthusians from Bentham, James Mill, and Francis Place in the 1820s through to John Stuart Mill and Charles Bradlaugh in the 1860s and 70s would have regarded such objections as belonging to what the elder Mill described as ‘the superstitions of the nursery’. It could be taken as a mark of the difference between the irreligious Benthamite attitude to birth control and that of Christians who were also, in Toynbee’s case, radical liberals, 1880s style.

Other equally cogent reasons could be given for rejecting neo-Malthusian methods and attitudes. The census evidence since 1861 showed that England no longer suffered from an acute version of the Malthusian problem. In any event Toynbee was clearly not impressed by John Stuart Mill’s arguments for a stationary population on ecological, feminist, or other grounds: an increasing population was, he claimed, ‘a great stimulus to progress’ and ‘in the interests of civilisation, it is not desirable that a nation with a great history and great qualities should not advance in numbers’ (IR, 95). In the work of some of Toynbee’s contemporaries remarks of this kind would suggest another sign of generational change: one could surmise that an element of social Darwinism had entered the picture. This does not work in the case of Toynbee because, like Green, he was opposed to the naturalistic ethics of Herbert Spencer and the notion that civilization depended on impersonal natural forces working themselves out through competitive struggle. A more straightforward interpretation of his commendation of population growth in the nation ‘with a great history and great qualities’ will be offered in the final section.

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14 See the criticism of Mill by T. P. Thompson: ‘There is difficulty enough in keeping the passions of mankind in a state of decent suppression, with all the existing checks on their irregular exhibition; and what is to be the case when one of the strongest checks, the fear of consequences, is removed?’; see Thompson’s *Exposition of Fallacies on Rent*, London, 1820, 63.
IV

On one major issue Toynbee remained a faithful follower of Mill, whose attack on the ‘theory of dependency’ in the celebrated chapter on the probable future of the working classes in his *Principles* left its mark. This is clear from Toynbee’s rejection of the romantic notion of a pre-industrial golden age and of Carlyle’s views on the ‘cash nexus’. It can equally be taken as a response to Ruskin’s *Unto this Last*, despite Toynbee’s participation in Ruskin’s ill-fated Hinksey Road project as an Oxford undergraduate. Carlyle might be the greatest of those who ‘assailed the new industrial world created by the *Wealth of Nations* and the steam engine’, but he was not the prophet Toynbee wanted his students to follow. Carlyle had failed to understand that ‘the old economic conditions have to be destroyed before new moral relations could come into existence’ (IR, 162):

‘The historical method, the great enemy of the old Political Economy, is here on the side of the old economists against their assailants. For it shows us how the ‘cash-nexus’ which the latter denounced so vehemently, is essential to the independence of the labourer. And that independence is a necessary condition of the new and higher form of social union, which is based on the voluntary association of free men.’ (IR, 163)

It was the Chartists rather than Carlyle who had been right in agitating for parliamentary votes, and the recent successes of trade unions, friendly societies, and cooperative institutions were a sign of the benefits likely to arise from voluntary associations organized by the working-classes themselves. It followed that: ‘The detested cash-nexus was a sign not of dissolution but of growth; not of the workman’s isolation, but of his independence’ (IR, 215). Not only does this echo Mill’s opinions on ‘probable futurity’ – themselves originally formulated in reaction against Carlyle – but it does not seem far-fetched to view it in a much longer historical perspective, to see it as a late nineteenth-century version of Adam Smith’s interpretation of the shift from a feudal to a commercial stage of society in which relations of ‘servile dependency’ were being dissolved.

Toynbee advised his Oxford students to have complete confidence in present-mindedness: ‘pay special attention to the history of the social problems which are agitating
the world now, for you may be sure that they are problems not of temporary but of lasting importance’ (IR, 7). At a time when the two leading theorists of social evolution, the aprioristic Spencer and the ostensibly empirical Henry Maine, were conveying the impression that ‘the conception of slow development, according to definite laws’ carried with it conservative conclusions, Toynbee leaned firmly in the opposite direction: ‘Those...who have applied the historical method to political economy and the science of society, have shown an unmistakable disposition to lay bare the injustice to which the humbler classes of the community have been exposed, and to defend methods and institutions adopted for their protection which have never received scientific defence before.’ (IR, 34-5) What had satisfied the consciences of an earlier generation no longer met the needs of a more progressive-minded one.

Toynbee’s critical modification to Maine’s theory of the natural evolution of society from relations based on status to those based on contract followed from this: ‘The real course of development has been first from status to contract, then from contract to a new kind of status determined by the law – or in other words, from unregulated to regulated contract’ (IR, 5). The Factory Acts illustrated this and were based on recognition of the need for the state to regulate contracts between unequal parties. But the social problem that was most agitating the world as Toynbee was preparing his lectures was land tenure reform in a wide variety of guises. It provided another case where Maine’s conclusion in favour of private property had to be modified, as Mill had shown, in the light of ‘the test of utility and general national well-being’ (IR, 112).

Ricardo’s theory of rent and Mill’s support for taxation of the ‘unearned increment’ in rental incomes had provided a rationale for the programme of the Land Tenure Reform Association during the 1870s. Irish agitation centring on tenants’ rights and Henry George’s campaign undertaken in the wake of his immensely successful book on Progress and Poverty published in 1879 ensured that the cause remained a prominent parliamentary concern under a number of headings: legislation to curtail landowners’ rights over footpaths and commons; protection of tenants’ rights; abolition of primogeniture and entail and other barriers to free
trade in land; creation of municipal smallholdings as a remedy for low wages and to stem the flow of rural labour into towns; with land nationalization representing the furthest end of the political spectrum.

On the far left of the spectrum were campaigns demanding land nationalization. Leadership here fell to Henry George, whose popular book entitled *Progress and Poverty* became the rallying point for a national campaign that attracted considerable lower middle-class and working-class support in the country at large. As a popular economic educator it was incumbent on Toynbee, along with other university extension lecturers such as Marshall, to take up the challenge posed by Henry George’s radical diagnosis of the land problem and popular remedies for poverty. The pair of lectures on this subject Toynbee gave in London in January 1883 was to prove fatal as well as fateful: the hostility he encountered from a working-class audience when criticizing George’s ideas placed him under considerable nervous strain and contributed to his early death, aged 30, a few weeks later in March.

A year earlier Toynbee made a special trip to Ireland to observe how Gladstone’s second Irish Land Act was working: he regarded it as legislation that marked ‘a great epoch in our history’ (PP, 33). It illustrated the movement from contract to regulated contract and represented an advance beyond the Factory Acts because, while these had protected women and children, those traditionally regarded as in need of protection, the Land Act extended this to men. It also confirmed Toynbee’s generalization that: ‘The era of free trade and free contract is gone, and the era of administration has come’ (PP, 23). Despite these sympathies with legislation that protected tenants, and his support for the idea that rent provided a special case for taxation, Toynbee was no more willing to support Henry George’s catastrophist diagnosis of the coincidence of poverty with progress than he was to approve of Marx’s revolutionary hypothesis and programme. Nor was he going to give his blessing to the policy of a single tax or land nationalization, the popular remedies to which some of his London audience gave vocal support. George had built upon the understandable yet erroneous views of Ricardo, Mill, and Cairnes, whose thinking on rent had been ‘the product of a peculiar and

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15 Marshall undertook the same task in his extra-mural lectures in Bristol a month or so after Toynbee; see ‘Three Lectures on Progress and Poverty’, *Journal of Law and Economics*, 12, 1, 1969, 181-226.
disastrous time’ (PP, 31), a hint that historical relativity showed how policies of taxing the unearned increment advocated then were no longer justifiable. Current evidence of high rents in London for special local reasons acted likewise: it added an air of plausibility to George’s position but did not prove his thesis of inexorable decline into poverty under existing property laws (PP, 34). As noted earlier Toynbee was not prepared to accept the view that working-class standards of living had deteriorated -- since the old Poor Law had been amended and the Corn Laws had been abolished at least. Remaining grievances did not centre so much on the absolute paucity of rewards as on the disappointment of rising expectations (PP, 28-9).

At this juncture Toynbee made one of several remarks to his restive audience that sounds ill-advised: he invited them to count their blessings. They were not living through the disturbed conditions of forty years earlier, one of the ‘greatest crises in the history of the human race, when in the long struggle between fate and human will....fate was triumphant and man went to the ground’(PP, 30). The audience was also expected to listen patiently to homilies on the reciprocal nature of rights and duties. They were told that ‘a great many of them’ did not understand what ‘a subtle and delicate and complicated thing civilisation is’; that they had to appreciate it had been built up ‘by patience, by self-sacrifice, by care, by suffering’; and that they would ‘not obtain any great material change for the better unless [they were] also prepared to make an effort to advance in [their] moral ideas’ (PP, 44). The effect of Toynbee’s peroration on his audience – his apology on behalf of the sinful middle classes and his plea for forgiveness in return for pledging the rest of his life to public service – is impossible to gauge.

V

But behind the personal pathos of Toynbee’s final lecture there lay a more straightforward appeal to a patriotic Whig version of English history, an attempt to deploy conventional Burkean and Macaulayesque arguments designed to show how violent change had been avoided in the past and could be avoided in future.\textsuperscript{16} In one of the addresses he gave in

\textsuperscript{16} Macaulay’s history of England was one of Toynbee’s sources. By coupling Burke with Macaulay here I am referring to a central feature of nineteenth-century Whig historiography to which my late colleague, John Burrow, drew attention; see for example \textit{A Liberal Descent; Victorian Historians and the English Past}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
1882 entitled ‘Are Radicals Socialists?’ he asked his audience to consider whether Marx and Lassalle, the German socialists, were right in thinking that revolution was the only way in which working-class conditions could be improved; he assumed that his auditors would collude with the following answer:

‘We in England smile at [the conclusion of the German Socialist] as a mere dream, so remote does revolution seem from our slow course of even progress. But if it is remote, it is because we in England have taken steps to modify the conditions which make revolutions imminent. If we can rightly smile at such pictures it is because we have developed among artisans and labourers vast voluntary societies wielding masses of capital, and have partially realised the Socialist programme. There are two great agencies which have been at work in England to produce that result: first, those voluntary agencies, the result of the self-help in which Radicals believe; and secondly, the action of the State in which Socialists believe. (IR, 230)

Here then was the source of England’s uniqueness, her Sonderweg, when compared with less fortunate nations such as Germany and France:

‘[D]o remember of what nation you are speaking in the case of England. It is not a nation that has been ground down for ages. It has had its wrongs and has suffered, I admit: you know that as well as I do; but you know also, that the way we have dealt with those wrongs and suffering has not been by violent and spasmodic attempts at confiscation, producing a war between classes, but it has been by slow and patient endeavours to do right, by endeavouring to win one class to support another class, and to weld the nation into a compact whole.’ (PP, 40)

Borrowing from Disraeli, one could describe this as a One Nation version of New Liberalism.

An earlier generation of philosophic radicals, those associated with Benthamism, would have had no truck with such complacency about the constitution; and they would certainly not have tolerated claims on behalf of the leading role played by the aristocracy in parliamentary
politics. Toynbee’s Whig-flavoured radicalism had room for both. England was an old and powerful nation ‘with a long history of free institutions, with men who have suffered for liberty’ (PP, 39). This included the rich and the aristocracy:

‘I do not think the rich would object to taxation very much if they thought that the money which was taken would really be of vast use to the people. The rich in the past have not shown themselves unequal to great emergencies. An aristocracy like ours cannot be wholly base, because it has ruled so long. It is a far better aristocracy, for example, than the aristocracy of France, because it has been a ruling aristocracy; and although a man may be debased by ruling a people, he may also be elevated by it; the sense of responsibility may elevate him and strengthen his character, and he may be open to appeals to his sense of justice.’ (PP, 49)

It may not be surprising that in popular lectures Toynbee fortified economic argument with political rhetoric, but the way in which he privileged the political at the expense of the economic is still worth noting. One of the pieces of economic history research he began but never finished concerned the causes of the decline of the yeomanry in favour of large landholdings in England, a less self-congratulatory feature of the English Sonderweg. He regarded it as an example of how historical research could show that economic change was less attributable to natural laws than to the results of ‘the self-seeking action of dominant classes’ (IR, 35) driven by political motives. The larger landowners who played the major role in the events that preceded the revolution of 1688 had consolidated their political power by buying up the properties of the yeomanry, leading to the conclusion that ‘[a] revolution in agricultural life was the price paid for political liberty’, with the further implication that what had been a price worth paying then had lost its rationale.

It followed that political solutions might be needed to supplement economic ones. In itself, free trade in land, a Cobdenite remedy, would probably not do much to break up the concentration of land ownership, but if accompanied

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‘...by sweeping and vital and necessary political changes – if you reform the House of Lords, which you will have to do; if you establish County Boards – that is, if you place the government of the English counties in the hands of the labourers and inhabitants of the counties; if you abolish the Game Laws; if you remove all those other privileges which at present induce men to buy land, I think it is extremely probable, though we have men of enormous wealth in England whose passion now is to buy land, that in future those men might be content as, on the whole, men are content in America, to buy just enough land for residence and not to accumulate estates in county after county for the sake of political influence.’ (PP, 46)

With the possible exception of the Game Laws, none of these things have yet come to pass. Lloyd George weakened the powers of the House of Lords in 1911, but more fundamental reforms are still pending. If landownership lost some of its political clout, it was more the result of the effect of agricultural depression on land values than political initiatives.

These kinds of conclusion are perhaps best left to a different kind of historical narrative. What can be said in conclusion about Toynbee’s place in the historiography of the Industrial Revolution? Toynbee’s faith in the reassuring continuities of English public life was incompatible with those romantic, golden age qualities to be found in Southey, Carlyle, or Ruskin. Nor can he readily be assimilated into the ranks of later generations of catastrophists, those represented initially by the Hammonds and Tawney; Toynbee left no scope for ruptured consciousnesses. Still less does he have anything in common with F. R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, and E. P. Thompson, the defenders of what the last of these called ‘classical catastrophic orthodoxy’ in the next generation. Toynbee held that industrialization might have left some ugly scars, but that its lessons had been learned and the benefits of a regulated form of industrial society were now being incorporated within a new scheme of citizen-minded education.

Compared with some significant forerunners such as Mill or Ruskin, Toynbee shows no trace of techno-pessimism or techno-phobia. Similarly with the sources of conflict within

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industrial society (a subject on which Toynbee *does* follow Mill) English trade unions were an eductive form of voluntary association capable of averting social and industrial dislocation and reducing the risk of strikes (IR, 128-9, 132-3). He was also confident in what boards of conciliation and industrial partnership schemes would soon be able to accomplish. The moral obstacles to the spread of the cooperative movement were being removed by education. What could not be achieved through voluntary association could safely be handed over to local government in the form of municipal or ‘gas and water’ socialism.

In an oft-quoted statement in the lectures, Toynbee revealed his hopes and conclusions as a peacemaker in the 1880s when he said that ‘the long and bitter controversy between economists and human beings has ended in the conversion of the economists’ (IR, 137, PP, 7). In the light of the persistence of cultural debate on the schism in English social and political life created by the Industrial Revolution well into the second half of the twentieth century, Toynbee’s conclusions were not merely optimistically tendentious, they were decidedly premature. And if you want my personal estimate of how premature I would say by a century if not more.

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