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Spengler's Philosophy and Its Implication that Europe has “Lost Its Way”

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During the First World War, a German historian produced a book that caused quite a stir among intellectuals around the world. By collating events in different (usually non-contemporary) cultures and civilizations, Spengler maintained that it should be possible to fill in gaps in history, and indeed to set out possibilities for the future, although admittedly only in terms of very broad generalizations.

It was an extremely ambitious undertaking, but after the Second World War, his ideas became unfashionable (mainly for political reasons). Nevertheless, Spengler's book is a work of monumental scholarship, discussing in depth such diverse topics as mathematics, music, architecture, painting, theology and money, with brief but still erudite excursions into other subjects including law, chemistry, linguistics, space-time relativity, and literature, integrating them all into a single coherent philosophy.

Eight or more “Higher Organisms”

Most people find it extremely difficult to accept Spengler's basic thesis, namely that cultures and civilizations are living organisms in their own right, as are plants, animals, and humans, although of a much higher rank. Each culture has its own distinctive soul, which expresses itself in artistic, scientific, political, economic and religious forms, he says.

Spengler identifies eight higher organisms. Three of them, Babylonian, Ancient Egyptian, and Classical (Graeco-Roman), perished long ago, with their landscapes subsequently being overlain by later cultures. (If he were writing today, he might well include in his list the recently-discovered pre-Hindu Indus Valley Civilization). Three others, the Indian, Chinese and Arab-Persian, attained “old age” many centuries ago.

We could also describe these as “petrified” although in a few respects, they have never been wholly extinguished. A seventh culture matured in Mexico and Guatemala, only to suffer a sudden and violent death at the hands of Spanish invaders (although it could be said that a few glowing embers still remain). Peru might also qualify for inclusion in Spengler’s list.

Our Western Civilization has not yet completed its life-cycle, although it has already reached late adulthood (hence the title of the book - The Decline of the West). Spengler suggests that another High Culture has started to manifest itself in Russia. However, because it was born comparatively recently, this culture is handicapped through trying to
absorb alien ideas from the much older Western organism; Spengler calls this phenomenon a *pseudomorphosis*.

Another example of a pseudomorphosis was his Magian Culture, which grew up in the shadow of various older civilizations (in particular the Classical), causing it to become distorted and fragmented into Arabian, Zoroastrian, Byzantine, Hebrew, Coptic, Armenian and other components. Only with the rise of Islam did this culture manage to break free from the pseudomorphosis and discover its true soul.

One phenomenon that might be easier to explain in terms of a higher organic entity is an increase in male birth-rate to replenish losses incurred in a major war. Admittedly, those instances could simply be accidents of statistics, but this example does at least help to illustrate the concept and role of a higher organism with its own will and consciousness.

Like individual people, cultural organisms differ in character, ability, and aptitude. Thus, calculus and the theory of mathematical functions, soaring Gothic cathedrals and a music based on fugal composition all express characteristically Western passions, which include a love for vast wide-open spaces as well as an intense interest in the distant past and concern for the far future.

In a contrasting manner, geometry, statistics and sculpture were all creative expressions of a mind obsessed with the corporeal and with *here-now* – that which produced the Ancient Greek Culture. Similarly, algebra, alchemy and arabesque were all manifestations of another unique culture-personality, as also were acupuncture, Taoism and Chinese art. And in the Hindu world, yoga and dance-forms attained levels of sophistication never equaled elsewhere.

**Phases of development**

Just as a human being reaches puberty during the second decade, and full adulthood in the third decade of life, a culture also passes through phases of predetermined sequence whose durations do not vary greatly from one higher organism to another. Its “springtime” is characterized by strong religious faith, which slowly gives way to increasing intellectuality and materialism.

A culture's “summer” is an era of great creativity: in Europe, this witnessed the crystallization of a totally new concept in mathematics (calculus) simultaneously in the minds of two people working quite independently – Newton and Leibniz. The same centuries saw the birth of oil painting and the flowering of a style of music completely unknown before the advent of Western Culture.
During “autumn,” life becomes dominated by materialism and by purely rational thought; Spengler uses the term "Civilization" to denote this particular phase. Warfare between the culture’s constituent nations increases in intensity, with tensions between various strata of society also reaching a breaking point. Eventually, one state becomes vigorous enough to conquer and absorb all others, imposing an authoritarian Imperium.

In the Classical world, this was achieved by the Romans, and in Peru by the Incas. In Central America, the Aztecs were consolidating their gains when Spanish Westerners intervened. In eastern Asia, it was the state of Qin (Ch’in) which ultimately incorporated the rest, giving the name China to the integrated empire.

It may be significant that the driving force for that unification usually came from the fringe-area of the original culture, rather than from its nucleus. For example, Rome was distant from Greece, Qin was the north-westernmost power in ancient China, and the Aztecs migrated to Mexico from somewhere further north. In the Islamic world, the Seljuk Turks invaded from the northeast before establishing an empire embracing most of Persia, Iraq, Syria and Anatolia. The Babylonian states were united by the Amorites, who were originally based in the far west. In South America, the center of High Culture was the Chimú state on the Peruvian coast, but they eventually succumbed to the Inca people from the high plateau. And the Indian Imperium was forged by the kingdom of Magadha – which was initially confined to the extreme east of the subcontinent (modern-day Bihar) – with its capital at Pataliputra.

The reason why the "conquerors" were all people from the edge of their particular culture might be that they were less exhausted than the older nations in the center (whose blood and resources had been devoured in earlier centuries when they were the dominant power).

During the Imperium, people realize the limitations of a purely intellectual view of the universe, so there is a return to religion – based on that of earlier centuries, but differently experienced through having emerged from a more advanced way of life.

If Spengler is right that cultures really are living, organic units, then all those changes are as inevitable as formation of blossom and then fruit on many trees, or as necessary as the emergence of a butterfly from the chrysalis of certain insects. There is only one alternative – namely sickness followed by premature death of the cultural organism.

**The real significance of the Second World War**

What stage, according to Spengler, has Western Civilization reached? His answer will horrify almost everybody – the 20th and 21st centuries were destined to be those of transition into our "Roman-style" era, but this was prevented (or maybe delayed) by
Germany's defeat in two world wars. Any organism's growth and development may be stunted or even destroyed by outside interference (Mexico being the prime example); in that context, Francis Yockey points out that without Russian involvement the Second World War would have ended quite differently. Of course, the Nazi leadership had only itself to blame. A real statesman (like Bismarck) would never have engaged all his opponents simultaneously — in addition to ignoring potential allies.

Many writers have pointed out that the Second World War could so easily have witnessed a German victory. Their German defeat can probably be attributed, at least partly, to the incompetence and idiotic decisions made by their Fuehrer.

For example, after invading Russia (against the advice of many of his generals — who preferred to conquer the Middle East first), Hitler rejected the offer of friendship and co-operation from the Ukrainians and other minorities. In addition, the German declaration of war on the USA after Pearl Harbor was impulsive and unnecessary, because most Americans did not want to have to fight on two fronts.

Also inexcusable was Hitler's insistence in 1944 that Me262 jet fighter aircraft be converted into (barely effective) bombers, rendering them incapable of protecting his industries and fuel stores.

It could almost be said that Hitler's first real job in life was Chancellor of the Third Reich. Spengler did actually meet him in 1933, and afterwards expressed strong reservations about Hitler's suitability for such a powerful role.

Despite that, Spengler managed to find common ground with the Nazis on a few issues, but gradually became disenchanted with them. In particular, he was not anti-Semitic. Soon after Hitler's accession to power, Spengler published *The Hour of Decision*, warning that the European Empire, lying well within the grasp of Prussian militarism, was in grave danger of being lost through incompetent leadership; the Nazis therefore disowned him.

**A possible alternative path after 1945**

Spengler died in 1936, but if he had been able to assess the conduct and aftermath of the Second World War, what comments would he have made? Undoubtedly, he would have drawn comparisons with earlier civilizations, examining centuries which he thought corresponded biologically to present and coming ones in the West.

For example, he might have reminded us that Caligula and Nero both degenerated into Hitlerian tyrants, but their excesses did not prevent Rome from later enjoying a golden era under Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius.

At the other end of Eurasia, Ying Zheng became First Emperor (Shi Hwang Di) of a
united China: he is remembered as a harsh and cruel dictator, despite certain positive achievements. After a nationwide insurrection, his dynasty was replaced by the much less tyrannical Han Empire which, apart from one interruption, controlled China for four centuries. The corresponding period in India was also beset by strife until the reign of King Asoka, who renounced war after being converted to Buddhism.

Spengler does not discuss later developments in those cultures, but it is obvious that without the heritage of Chinese civilization, there would have been no Tang or Song dynasties, which left us a rich legacy of highly refined art and poetry. Similarly indebted was the Gupta dynasty in India, during which the talented writer Kalidasa composed his poetry and drama. It could therefore be argued that despite various setbacks, the Chinese, Roman, Indian (and Egyptian) empires more than once recovered to regain order and prosperity.

The Nazis were undoubtedly guilty of appalling, unforgivable behavior – but, assuming that there is a science of *Culture Morphology*, there are grounds for suggesting that a German victory in World War II would eventually have seen the Hitlerian terror subsiding, with proper statesmen arising to govern Europe, drawn not just from Germany, but from other countries too. A firm date cannot really be given; much would have depended on the degree of violence accompanying each successive handover of power. In earlier cultures, many emperors first achieved fame as successful military generals. Thus, it is appropriate to mention that if the German conspirators in 1944 had managed to eliminate the Hitlerian regime, then Field Marshall Rommel's name would probably have been among those put forward for Head of State; Rommel was widely respected by friend and foe alike.28

Our 20th and 21st centuries

If Spengler had lived for a few more decades, what would he have thought about the way in which the world-picture unfolded during the latter half of the 20th century? In particular, might he have conceded that the United States was capable of successfully guiding Western Civilization into and through its final (Caesaristic) phase? Judging by the commentary offered in his books, that does seem rather unlikely.29

Spengler subscribed to what he called "Ethical Socialism," which placed the interests of the State above those of the individual; it was not at all akin to Marxism – which championed the proletariat. Thus, Spengler had strong reservations about universal franchise, also citing the role played by money in influencing the outcome of elections. In addition, he believed that democracy made it easy for anonymous powers to operate without any scruples.32

Spengler maintained that money had overstepped its function, ruinously dominating government policies, not to mention the lives of individuals.33 In particular, he criticized the heavy reliance on *credit* in the world of finance, describing it as
representing only "phantom, imaginary money-values." Unfortunately, his warning (of 80 years ago!) went unheeded; instead, Western governments have simply permitted the situation to deteriorate out of control.

How would Spengler have assessed American and European foreign policy in the latter part of the 20th century? Again we can probably infer the answer from The Hour of Decision, which makes it clear that he regarded pacifism as a weakness which was not necessarily shared with all non-Westerners. Thus, we can deduce how he would have reacted to the possibility of Western states deliberately yielding vast tracts of Earth’s surface (and their resources) to “outsiders” – which was precisely what happened during the decades following World War II.

Is it likely that Spengler might have conceded that the present European Union represents a fulfillment of Western Culture’s final, single-state phase? He would probably have regarded it as significant that many west-European countries have voluntarily drawn together after centuries of warfare. But it is of course primarily an economic union, and Spengler would have cautioned that this was quite inadequate and fraught with potential problems – because he did insist that the political functions of government must take precedence over economic considerations.

Spengler’s personal outlook – and tasks for the future

Spengler emphasized that the only way forward was into what he termed "Caesarism," but at times even he sounded apprehensive about it, admitting that it would be negative and superficial in certain respects. It is interesting that when discussing the clash between old, hardened Classical Civilization and the young, still hesitant Magian Culture, his sympathies were very much with the newer one. When looking at the 20th and 21st centuries, however, his view was tempered by his German patriotism.

On a positive note, Spengler identifies important tasks which still need to be tackled in Western Civilization. A reform of our legal system is one – just as the codification of Roman law was one of the achievements of the late Classical world; Hammurabi did the same for ancient Babylon.

In addition, in our 21st century there is ample opportunity for initiative and new discoveries in engineering and technology; these disciplines usually enjoy their richest development during the ‘autumn’ of a High Culture. Furthermore, the Western mind seems to have a particular aptitude for technology.

It would be a pity to ignore Spengler's writings purely on account of their controversial political implications. The Decline of the West, particularly, contains a wealth of information and ideas capable of providing stimulation and enjoyment for a specialist in almost any field of knowledge.
Notes (See References for abbreviations)

1 DoWII pp. 36-37; DoWI pp. 3, 5 et seq., 111-112.
2 DoWI pp. 104, 106-110; Yockey pp. 3-12; DoWII pp. 35-37.
3 DoWII pp. 39 et seq.
4 DoWII pp. 192 et seq.; PS pp. 122 ("Das Doppelantlitz Russlands und die deutschen Ostprobleme"), 136-137 ("Politische Pflichten der deutschen Jugend"); SL pp. 34 (to H. Klöres, 7th Jun 1915), 44-45 (ibid., 12th Oct 1916), 316 (to W. Drascher, 3rd May 1936). Also see PS pp. 176-179 ("Neue Formen der Weltpolitik"). ... Until 1917, Russia was essentially dominated by Western thought and customs; see HoD pp. 60-61; Yockey pp. 578 et seq., 435.
8 Ibid.
9 DoWI pp. 109-110, and the Tables at the end of the volume.
10 Was it coincidence that these two exceptional people appeared simultaneously? Did one in fact steal ideas from the other? Or were they both just part of the necessary and inevitable development of the Western cultural organism? (cf. Yockey p.373). ... The controversy is mentioned under "Newton" in "Chambers's Encyclopaedia", volume IX – International Learning Systems Corporation, London, 1973; 840 pp.; see p.834.
11 Tables at the end of DoWI.
12 DoWI p.424; Yockey pp. 10, 335.
13 DoWI pp. 36-39; DoWII pp. 416 et seq., 422 et seq., 40-41; HoD p.24.
14 Cf. HoD pp. 225-227, 219. Also see note 17 below, regarding Prussia.
15 DoWI pp. 108, 427; DoWII pp. 310-311.
16 Yockey p.352.
17 HoD pp. 18, 32, ix; SL pp. 15 ("Introduction" by A. Koktanek), 31 (to H. Klöres, 18th Dec 1914), 37 (ibid., 14th Jul 1915), 43-44 (ibid., 12th Jul 1916). Also see Yockey pp. 567, 576, 610, 616-617, 483, 491, 123-124, 554. Note too that DoWII p.109 names "Germany ... as the last nation of the West"; cf. DoWII p.182. ... Prussia was of course responsible for unifying Germany - and (like the other states associated with note 14), Prussia was ‘on the edge’ of its High Culture.
18 Yockey pp. 571-573. Cf. HoD pp. 208-211, 228-229, 61. Also see Roberts p.603, who mentions that out of every five Germans killed in combat, four died on the Eastern Front – emphasizing that this is the "central statistic of the Second World War."
19 Roberts pp. 598-599; Kershaw p.483.
20 Kershaw pp. 81, 84, 86-88; Roberts pp. 149, 588.
21 Roberts p.590. Also J.F.C. Fuller: "The decisive battles of the Western world", volume 3 - Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1963; 636 pp. plus index; see pp. 434-437, 421, 415 ... .... In addition, Nazi Germany’s relationship with Japan (and maybe with Spain) could have been handled more profitably; see Roberts, pp. 140, 589.

Many people asked Spengler why he did not think Hitler was the right man: see SL pp. 288-289 (from G. Gründel, 16th Oct 1933), 304-305 (from Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, 15th Oct 1935), 217 (to A. Fauconnet, 15th Mar 1927), 280 (to R. Schlubach, 18th Apr 1933).

HoD page xi; SL p.290 (to J. Goebbels, 3rd Nov 1933) supporting Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations – but at the same time complaining about anti-Spengler articles in the German Press. Also see Felken pp. 194-198 and 217-223.

HoD p.219; PS pp. 202-203 incl. footnote ("Neubau des deutschen Reiches"); SL p.163 (footnote to A. Doren's letter of 11th Jun 1924). Also see DoWII p.323... Confirmed by Farrenkopf; see pp. 237-238 which refer to Politica I, 54, B3-63 and II, 131, B3-150 (from Spengler's unpublished notes, archived in the Bavaria State Library, Munich).

HoD pp. xiv et seq., xii, 7. Perhaps the most telling point, however, is the absence of any reference to Hitler in "The Hour of Decision" – despite a call for a proper Leader on p.230; cf. Farrenkopf p.236... These points are amplified in Felken pp. 194-198 and 217-223 (including the text of Goebbels's December 1933 Press announcement rejecting Spengler).

HoD pp. 67-72; DoWII p.475. Also see Yockey pp. 518-520.

HoD pp. 188-194, 141 (footnote); PS pp. 15, 24-25, 33 et seq., 39, 45 (all in "Preussentum und Sozialismus"); DoWII p.506. Also see HoD pp. 94-97; DoWI pp. 361-362.

HoD pp. 37-40, 145; DoWII pp. 415-416, 455-456, 462-464. Also see DoWII p.447; PS pp. ix-x ("Vorwort").


DoWII pp. 98, 485, 506-507; HoD pp. 165-166, 143-144, 89, 97-100, 72. Also see DoWII p.432; HoD pp. 40-45; PS p.313 ("Das heutige Verhältnis zwischen Weltwirtschaft und Weltpolitik"); Yockey pp. 345, 313-118, 426-428.

HoD pp. 227-228, 205, 208-211, 218.

HoD pp. 40-45.

SL p.43 (to H. Klöres, 12th Jul 1916); DoWII p.339.

DoWII pp. 191-192. Also see DoWI pp. 212-213; DoWII pp. 304, 87.

DoWII pp.81-83, 78-80. For discussion of problems due to our inheritance from Rome (with a look too at the Arabian Culture), read DoWII pp. 60-78...

DoWI p.41; DoWII pp. 501-505; however, Spengler should really have mentioned the enduring quality of Roman aqueducts and viaducts. Also see Spengler's "Der Mensch und die Technik" – C.H. Beck, Munich, 1971 (originally 1931); 62 pp.; read pp. 43-44, 3. (Translated as "Man and Technics" - Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1963; 104 pp.; read pp. 76-77, 6). Relevant too is PS pp. 230-231 ("Neubau des
REFERENCES

The following abbreviations are used for references to Spengler's books:

**DoWI:** "The Decline of the West", volume I. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1959; 428 pp. plus index. Originally published by Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich, 1918, as "Der Untergang des Abendlandes".


**PS:** "Politische Schriften" (seven essays; some were also published separately). C.H. Beck, Munich, 1934; xvi + 338 pp.


Additional Bibliography (referenced using the author’s surname)


