

historical eschatology and apocalypse; but the two intertwine: history and the end are my own history and my own end, and my own history and end affect the entire course and outcome of history. But this interdependence does not lend itself to clear-cut definition, for there is a tragic conflict between history, with its complex movements and agencies, and man, with his unique and irreducible personal destiny. I have frequently found myself resisting the pressure of historical processes because of their hostility and mercilessness towards man, because they arise and grow for the sake of inhuman and impersonal aims. History must come to an end, since it is incapable of resolving the problem of personality within its limits, and leads beyond them. This is one aspect of the historiographical theme.

The other aspect is marked by an experience of man's self-identification with history: I cannot extricate myself from the world, from humanity, from the social and cultural movements in the world, from the past, present and future. History takes place within me, for I am not an isolated entity existing by itself and for itself, but a microcosmos. My sense of history, then, involves these two experiences: the experience of history's hostile and alien character and of my implication in it. The tension inherent in this twofold experience can only be resolved in the end of history, which signifies a victory over all objectification and alienation—a victory by which man ceases to be determined from without. We are, however, in danger of objectifying the end itself, and imagine it as taking place in historical time. In point of fact, what is beyond history cannot be related to history in simply historical terms. The failure to see this proves a stumbling-block in the many attempts to interpret the Apocalypse. We may not be able to dispense altogether with time when thinking of its end, and yet this end cannot be a mere part of our broken time. It belongs to another order of existence; it must be the end of time itself if it is to be an end at all, however difficult it may be for us to think of something absolutely last. Thus the Apocalyptic angel swears that there should be time no longer. The flux of time is a symptom of the disrupted, fallen state of our world: "the new heaven and the new earth" betokens victory over this disrupting temporal flux, which splits human existence into extraneous moments and experiences, and the beginning of another time, which I have called "existential time," and which is not open to mathematical or astronomical measurements. . . .

Some people may still delude themselves with the idea that men are becoming richer and richer and are having a better and better time in virtue of that secret force called progress, but others are not so easily deceived. I too believe in progress, but a progress derived from the recognition of the possibility of true creative acts in history, not from evolutionary naturalism or determinism. But progress is, admittedly, a

misleading word. History provides the stage for a tragic struggle in which both good and evil are engaged in an ever increasing and intense contest. It is this which moves and presses history towards the end, in which historic time will pass into existential time.

Man is nailed to the cross of time with its tormenting contradictions, and he cannot bear its apparently unending, relentless course. . . .

. . . A terrible judgment hangs over history and civilization—the imminent judgment over their human, all-too-human pathways. History shows constant signs of a fatal lapse from the human or divine-human to the sub-human or demonic. Out of his idolatrous and demonolatrous instincts man conjures up real demonic powers which in turn seize control of him. "The beast rising out of the sea" is a highly suggestive apocalyptic image of the last demonic attempts of the kingdom of Caesar to dominate and to enslave man and the world. The victory of the Lamb over the Beast is the victory of freedom and love over force and hatred. The Beast will then be cast once more into the abyss of hell and shackled, not to eternity, but to time: for hell is that which remains in time; that which, obsessed by its evil nightmares, does not pass into eternity.

### W. R. INGE: *The Idea of Progress* \*

William Ralph Inge (1860–1954), the "gloomy" Dean of St. Paul's, London, is well known as the author of scholarly books in the history of religious mysticism, and works of Christian apologetics. *The Idea of Progress* was first delivered as a lecture at Oxford in 1920.

THE BELIEF in Progress, not as an ideal but as an indisputable fact, not as a task for humanity but as a law of Nature, has been the working faith of the West for about a hundred and fifty years.

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In France, the chief home of this heady doctrine, the psychological temperature soon began to rise under its influence, till it culminated in the delirium of the Terror. The Goddess of Reason hardly survived Robespierre and his guillotine; but the belief in progress, which might otherwise have subsided when the French resumed their traditional pursuits—'rem militarem et argute loqui'—was reinforced by the industrial revolution, which was to run a very different course from that indicated by the theatrical disturbances at Paris between 1789 and 1794, the

\* From W. R. Inge: *The Idea of Progress*, p. 3, 7–9, 13–16, 22–5. Copyright 1920 by The Clarendon Press, Oxford. Reprinted by permission of The Clarendon Press, Oxford.

importance of which has perhaps been exaggerated. In England above all, the home of the new industry, progress was regarded (in the words which Mr. Mallock puts into the mouth of a nineteenth-century scientist) as that kind of improvement which can be measured by statistics. This was quite seriously the view of the last century generally, and there has never been, nor will there ever be again, such an opportunity for gloating over this kind of improvement. . . .

But Herbert Spencer asserts the perfectibility of man with an assurance which makes us gasp. 'Progress is not an accident but a necessity. What we call evil and immorality must disappear. It is certain that man must become perfect.' 'The ultimate development of the ideal man is certain—as certain as any conclusion in which we place the most implicit faith; for instance, that all men will die.' 'Always towards perfection is the mighty movement—towards a complete development and a more un-mixed good.'

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If we turn to history for a confirmation of the Spencerian doctrine, we find, on the contrary, that civilization is a disease which is almost invariably fatal, unless its course is checked in time. The Hindus and Chinese, after advancing to a certain point, were content to mark time; and they survive. But the Greeks and Romans are gone; and aristocracies everywhere die out. Do we not see to-day the complex organization of the ecclesiastic and college don succumbing before the simple squeezing and sucking organs of the profiteer and trade-unionist? If so-called civilized nations show any protracted vitality, it is because they are only civilized at the top. Ancient civilizations were destroyed by imported barbarians; we breed our own.

It is also an unproved assumption that the domination of the planet by our own species is a desirable thing, which must give satisfaction to its Creator. We have devastated the loveliness of the world; we have exterminated several species more beautiful and less vicious than ourselves; we have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form. If it is progress to turn the fields and woods of Essex into East and West Ham, we may be thankful that progress is a sporadic and transient phenomenon in history. It is a pity that our biologists, instead of singing paeans to Progress and thereby stultifying their own speculations, have not preached us sermons on the sin of racial self-idolatry, a topic which really does arise out of their studies. '*L'anthropolarie, voilà l'ennemi*,' is the real ethical motto of biological science, and a valuable contribution to morals.

It was impossible that such shallow optimism as that of Herbert Spencer should not arouse protests from other scientific thinkers. . . .

One recent thinker, who accepts Huxley's view that the nature of things is cruel and immoral, is willing to face the probability that we cannot resist it with any prospect of victory. Mr. Bertrand Russell, in his arresting essay, 'A Free Man's Worship,' shows us Prometheus again, but Prometheus chained to the rock and still hurling defiance against God. He proclaims the moral bankruptcy of naturalism, which he yet holds to be forced upon us. 'That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the débris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.' Man belongs to 'an alien and inhuman world,' alone amid 'hostile forces.' What is man to do? The God who exists is evil; the God whom we can worship is the creation of our own conscience, and has no existence outside it. The 'free man' will worship the latter; and, like John Stuart Mill, 'to hell he will go.'

If I wished to criticize this defiant pronouncement, which is not without a touch of bravado, I should say that so complete a separation of the real from the ideal is impossible, and that the choice which the writer offers us, of worshipping a Devil who exists or a God who does not, is no real choice, since we cannot worship either. But my object in quoting from this essay is to show how completely naturalism has severed its alliance with optimism and belief in progress. Professor Huxley and Mr. Russell have sung their palinode and smashed the old gods of their creed. No more proof is needed, I think, that the alleged law of progress has no scientific basis whatever.

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Our optimists have not made it clear to themselves or others what they mean by progress, and we may suspect that the vagueness of the idea is one of its attractions. There has been no physical progress in our species for many thousands of years. The Cro-Magnon race, which lived perhaps twenty thousand years ago, was at least equal to any modern

people in size and strength; the ancient Greeks were, I suppose handsomer and better formed than we are; and some unprogressive races, such as the Zulus, Samoans, and Tahitians, are envied by Europeans either for strength or beauty. Although it seems not to be true that the sight and hearing of civilized peoples are inferior to those of savages, we have certainly lost our natural weapons, which from one point of view is a mark of degeneracy. Mentally, we are now told that the men of the Old Stone Age, ugly as most of them must have been, had as large brains as ours; and he would be a bold man who should claim that we are intellectually equal to the Athenians or superior to the Romans. The question of moral improvement is much more difficult. Until the Great War few would have disputed that civilized man had become much more humane, much more sensitive to the sufferings of others, and so more just, more self-controlled, and less brutal in his pleasures and in his resentments. The habitual honesty of the Western European might also have been contrasted with the rascality of inferior races in the past and present. It was often forgotten that, if progress means the improvement of human nature itself, the question to be asked is whether the modern civilized man behaves better in the same circumstances than his ancestor would have done. Absence of temptation may produce an appearance of improvement; but this is hardly what we mean by progress, and there is an old saying that the Devil has a clever trick of pretending to be dead. It seems to me very doubtful whether when we are exposed to the same temptations we are more humane or more sympathetic or juster or less brutal than the ancients. Even before this war, the examples of the Congo and Putumayo, and American lynchings, proved that contact with barbarians reduces many white men to the moral condition of savages; and the outrages committed on the Chinese after the Boxer rebellion showed that even a civilized nation cannot rely on being decently treated by Europeans if its civilization is different from their own. During the Great War, even if some atrocities were magnified with the amiable object of rousing a good-natured people to violent hatred, it was the well-considered opinion of Lord Bryce's commission that no such cruelties had been committed for three hundred years as those which the Germans practised in Belgium and France. It was startling to observe how easily the blood-lust was excited in young men straight from the fields, the factory, and the counter, many of whom had never before killed anything larger than a wasp, and that in self-defence. . . .

We have, then, been driven to the conclusion that neither science nor history gives us any warrant for believing that humanity has advanced, except by accumulating knowledge and experience and the instruments of living. The value of these accumulations is not beyond dispute.

Attacks upon civilization have been frequent, from Crates, Pherecrates, Antisthenes, and Lucretius in antiquity to Rousseau, Walt Whitman, Thoreau, Ruskin, Morris, and Edward Carpenter in modern times. I cannot myself agree with these extremists. I believe that the accumulated experience of mankind, and his wonderful discoveries, are of great value. I only point out that they do not constitute real progress in human nature itself, and that in the absence of any real progress these gains are external, precarious, and liable to be turned to our own destruction, as new discoveries in chemistry may easily be.

### OSWALD SPENGLER: *The Decline of the West* \*

*The Decline of the West*, in which the German school teacher and free-lance writer Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) outlined his "Morphology of History," is not so much serious history as a reflection of the mood of the times. The book, widely discussed in the 1920's, was completed in 1914 but not published until after the First World War.

HERE, then, I lay it down that *Imperialism*, of which petrifacts such as the Egyptian empire, the Roman, the Chinese, the Indian may continue to exist for hundreds or thousands of years—dead bodies, amorphous and dispirited masses of men, scrap-material from a great history—is to be taken as the typical symbol of the passing away. Imperialism is Civilization unadulterated. In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set. The energy of culture-man is directed inwards, that of civilization-man outwards. And thus I see in Cecil Rhodes the first man of a new age. He stands for the political style of a far-ranging, Western, Teutonic and especially German future, and his phrase "expansion is everything" is the Napoleonic reassertion of the indwelling tendency of every Civilization that has fully ripened—Roman, Arab or Chinese. It is not a matter of choice—it is not the conscious will of individuals, or even that of whole classes or peoples that decides. The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage, willy-nilly, or unaware.

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Up to now everyone has been at liberty to hope what he pleased about the future. Where there are no facts, sentiment rules. But henceforward it will be every man's business to inform himself of what *can* happen and

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