

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 freelance 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.

* * *

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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therefore of what with the unalterable necessity of destiny and irrespective of personal ideals, hopes or desires, *will* happen. When we use the risky word "freedom" we shall mean freedom to do, not this or that, but the necessary or nothing. The feeling that this is "just as it should be" is the hall-mark of the man of fact. To lament it and blame it is not to alter it. To birth belongs death, to youth age, to life generally its form and its allotted span. The present is a civilized, emphatically not a cultured time, and *ipso facto* a great number of life-capacities fall out as impossible. This may be deplorable, and may be and will be deplored in pessimist philosophy and poetry, but it is not in our power to make otherwise. It will not be—already it is not—permissible to defy clear historical experience and to expect, merely because we hope, that this will spring or that will flourish.

It will no doubt be objected that such a world-outlook, which in giving this certainty as to the outlines and tendency of the future cuts off all far-reaching hopes, would be unhealthy for all and fatal for many, once it ceased to be a mere theory and was adopted as a practical scheme of life by the group of personalities effectively moulding the future.

Such is not my opinion. We are civilized, not Gothic or Rococo, people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a *late* life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles's Athens but in Caesar's Rome. Of great painting or great music there can no longer be, for Western people, any question. Their architectural possibilities have been exhausted these hundred years. Only *extensive* possibilities are left to them. Yet, for a sound and vigorous generation that is filled with unlimited hopes, I fail to see that it is any disadvantage to discover betimes that some of these hopes must come to nothing. And if the hopes thus doomed should be those most dear, well, a man who is worth anything will not be dismayed.

* * *

Cultures are organisms, and world-history is their collective biography. Morphologically, the immense history of the Chinese or of the Classical Culture is the exact equivalent of the petty history of the individual man, or of the animal, or the tree, or the flower. For the Faustian vision, this is not a postulate but an experience; if we want to learn to recognize inward forms that constantly and everywhere repeat themselves, the comparative morphology of plants and animals has long ago given us the methods. In the destinies of the several Cultures that follow upon one another, grow up with one another, touch, overshadow, and suppress one another, is compressed the whole content of human history. And if we set free their shapes, till now hidden all too deep under the surface of a trite "history of human progress," and let them march past us in the spirit, it cannot but be that we shall succeed in distinguishing,

amidst all that is special or unessential, the primitive culture-form, the Culture that underlies as ideal all the individual Cultures.

* * *

Each Culture, further, has *its own mode of spiritual extinction*, which is that which follows of necessity from its life as a whole. And hence Buddhism, Stoicism and Socialism are morphologically equivalent as end-phenomena.

* * *

Every soul has religion, which is only another word for its existence. All living forms in which it expresses itself—all arts, doctrines, customs, all metaphysical and mathematical form-worlds, all ornament, every column and verse and idea—are ultimately religious, and *must* be so. But from the setting-in of Civilization they *cannot* be so any longer. As the essence of every Culture is religion, so—and *consequently*—the essence of every Civilization is irreligion—the two words are synonymous. He who cannot feel this in the creativeness of Manet as against Velasquez, of Wagner as against Haydn, of Lysippus as against Phidias, of Theocritus as against Pindar, knows not what the best means in art. Even Rococo in its worldliest creations is still religious. But the buildings of Rome, even when they are temples, are irreligious; the one touch of religious architecture that there was in old Rome was the intrusive Magian-souled Pantheon, first of the mosques. The megalopolis itself, as against the old Culture-towns—Alexandria as against Athens, Paris as against Bruges, Berlin as against Nürnberg—is irreligious down to the last detail, down to the look of the streets, the dry intelligence of the faces. And, correspondingly, the ethical sentiments belonging to the form-language of the megalopolis are irreligious and soulless also. Socialism is the Faustian world-feeling become irreligious; . . .

It is this extinction of living inner religiousness, which gradually tells upon even the most insignificant element in a man's being, that becomes phenomenal in the historical world-picture at the turn from the Culture to the Civilization, the *Climacteric* of the Culture, as I have already called it, the time of change in which a mankind loses its spiritual fruitfulness for ever, and building takes the place of begetting. Unfruitfulness—understanding the word in all its direct seriousness—marks the brain-man of the megalopolis, as the sign of fulfilled destiny, and it is one of the most impressive facts of historical symbolism that the change manifests itself not only in the extinction of great art, of great courtesy, of great formal thought, of the great style in all things, but also quite carnally in the childlessness and "race-suicide" of the civilized and rootless strata, a phenomenon not peculiar to ourselves but already

observed and deplored—and of course not remedied—in Imperial Rome and Imperial China.

As to the living representative of these new and purely intellectual creations, the men of the "New Order" upon whom every decline-time finds such hopes, we cannot be in any doubt. They are the fluid megalopolitan Populace, the rootless city-mass (*oi polloi*, as Athens called it) that has replaced the People, the Culture-folk that was sprung from the soil and peasantlike even when it lived in towns. They are the market-place loungers of Alexandria and Rome, the newspaper-readers of our own corresponding time; the "educated" man who then and now makes a cult of intellectual mediocrity and a church of advertisement; the man of the theatres and places of amusement, of sport and "best-sellers." It is this late-appearing mass and *not* "mankind" that is the object of Stoic and Socialist propaganda, and one could match it with equivalent phenomena in the Egyptian New Empire, Buddhist India and Confucian China.

Correspondingly, there is a characteristic form of public effect, the *Diatribé*. First observed as a Hellenistic phenomenon, it is an efficient form in all Civilizations. Dialectical, practical and plebian through and through, it replaces the old meaningful and far-ranging Creation the great man by the unrestrained Agitation of the small and shrewd, ideas by aims, symbols by programs. The expansion-element common to all Civilizations, the imperialistic substitution of outer space for inner spiritual space, characterizes this also. Quantity replaces quality, spreading replaces deepening. We must not confuse this hurried and shallow activity with the Faustian will-to-power. All it means is that creative inner life is at an end and intellectual existence can only be kept up materially, by outward effect in the space of the City. Diatribé belongs necessarily to the "religion of the irreligious" and is the characteristic form that the "cure of souls" takes therein. It appears as the Indian preaching, the Classical rhetoric, and the Western journalism. It appeals not to the best but to the most, and it values its means according to the number of successes obtained by them. It substitutes for the old thoughtfulness an *intellectual male-prostitution* by speech and writing, which fills and dominates the halls and the market-places of the megalopolis.

C. VIRGIL GHEORGHIU: *The Twenty-fifth Hour* *

The Twenty-fifth Hour, a novel by the Rumanian Gheorghiu (1916—), created a furor when it was first published in Paris in

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1949. It became a best-seller, and the subject of a great many newspaper articles and conferences. In the selection that follows, the hero, Traian Koruga, discusses his plans for a novel with a friend, the lawyer George Damian.

"Joking aside, George," said Traian, "I feel that something of immense import is taking shape around us. I know neither when it started nor where it first broke out, nor how long it will last, but I am conscious of its presence. We are caught up in a vortex, and it will tear away the flesh from our limbs and crush every bone in our bodies. I feel this thing coming, as rats feel it when they abandon a sinking ship. But we cannot swim ashore; for us there is no shore."

"What is this 'thing' you allude to?"

"Call it revolution, if you like," said Traian. "A revolution of inconceivable proportions, to which all human beings will fall victim." . . .

"And what is this great danger threatening us all?" asked the attorney.

"The mechanical slave," answered Traian Koruga. "You know him, too, George. The mechanical slave is the servant who waits on us daily in a thousand ways. He drives our car, switches on our light, pours water on our hands when we wash, gives us massage, tells us funny stories when we turn on the radio, lays out roads, breaks up mountains." . . .

"A society which contains million of millions of mechanical slaves and a mere two thousand million humans—even if it happens to be the humans who govern it—will reveal the characteristics of its proletarian majority." . . .

"We are learning the laws and the jargon of our slaves, so that we can give them orders. And so, gradually and imperceptibly, we are renouncing our human qualities and our own laws. We are dehumanizing ourselves by adopting the way of life of our slaves. The first symptom of this dehumanization is contempt for the human being. Modern man assesses by technical standards his own value and that of his fellow men; they are replaceable component parts. Contemporary society, which numbers one man to every two or three dozen mechanical slaves, must be organized in such a way as to function according to technological laws. Society is now created for technological, rather than for human, requirements. And that's where tragedy begins." . . .

"This slow process of dehumanization is at work under many different guises, making man renounce his emotions and reducing social relationships to something categorical, automatic, and precise, like the relationship between different parts of a machine. The rhythm and the jargon of the mechanical slaves, or robots, if you like, finds echoes in