

Oswald Spengler. *The Decline of the West*. An abridged edition by Helmut Werner. English abridged edition prepared by Arthur Helps from the translation by Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: oxford University Press c199 [1926, 1928, 1932]. xxxx,415, xvix

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## Introduction

### THE PROBLEM OF "CIVILIZATION" [24-27]

Looked at in this way, the "Decline of the West" comprises nothing less than the problem of [\*Civilization\*](#). We have before us one of the fundamental questions of all higher history. What is civilization, understood as the organico-logical sequel, fulfilment and finale of a culture?

For every Culture has *its own* Civilization. In this work, for the first time the two words, hitherto used to express in an indefinite, more or less ethical, distinction, are used in a *periodic* sense, to express a strict and necessary *organic succession*. The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture, and in this principle we obtain the viewpoint from which the deepest and gravest problems of historical morphology become capable of solution. Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.

So, for the first time, we are enabled to understand the Romans as the *successors* of the Greeks, and light is projected into the deepest secrets of the late-Classical period. What, but this, can be the meaning of the fact--which can only be disputed by vain phrases--that the Romans were barbarians who did not *precede* but *closed* a great development? Unspiritual, unphilosophical, devoid of art, clannish to the point of brutality, aiming relentlessly at tangible successes, they stand between the Hellenic Culture and nothingness. An imagination directed purely to practical objects was something which is not found at all in Athens. In a word, Greek *soul*--Roman *intellect*; and this antithesis is the differentia between Culture and Civilization. Nor is it only to the Classical it applies. Again and again there appears this type of strong-minded, completely non-metaphysical man, and in the hands of this type lies the intellectual and material destiny of each and every "late" period. *Pure* Civilization, as a historical process, consists in a progressive exhaustion of forms that have become inorganic or dead.

The transition from Culture to Civilization was accomplished for the Classical world in the fourth, for the Western in the nineteenth century. From these periods onward the great intellectual decisions take place, no longer all over the world where not a hamlet is too small to be unimportant, but in three or four world-cities that have absorbed into themselves the whole content of History, while the old wide landscape of the Culture, become merely provincial, served only to feed the cities with what remains of its higher mankind. *World-city and province*--the two basic ideas of every civilization--bring up a wholly new form-problem of History, the very problem that we are living through today with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a *city, a point*, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful,

deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman. This is a very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end--what does it signify?

The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of "home" . . . To the world-city belongs not a folk but a mob. Its uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of the culture (nobility, church, privileges, dynasties, convention in art and limits of knowledge in science), the keen and cold intelligence that confounds the wisdom of the peasant, the new-fashioned naturalism that in relation to all matters of sex and society goes back far to quite primitive instincts and conditions, the reappearance of the *panem et circenses* in the form of wage-disputes and sports stadia--all these things betoken the definite closing down of the Culture and the opening of a quite new phase of human existence--anti-provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable.

This is what has to be *viewed*, and not with the eyes of the partisan, the ideologue, the up-to-date moralist, not from this or that "standpoint," but in a high, time-free perspective embracing whole millennia of historical world-forms, if we are really to comprehend the great crisis of the present.

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For it will become manifest that, from this moment on, all great conflicts of world-outlook, of politics, of art, of science, of feeling, will be under the influence of the same contrary factor. What is the hallmark of a politic of Civilization today, in contrast to a politic of Culture yesterday? It is, for the Classical rhetoric, and for the Western journalism, both serving that abstract which represents the power of Civilization--*money* It is the money-spirit which penetrates unremarked the historical forms of the people's existence, often without destroying or even in the least disturbing these forms.

It is possible to understand the Greeks without mentioning their economic relations; the Romans, on the other hand, can *only* be understood through these. ...