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PREVENTING THE COLLAPSE: A STUDY OF CIVILIZATIONAL DECLINE

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Introduction

The human pursuit of meaning is unmatched in its depth and intensity among all the creatures of earth. We strive for magnificent, beautiful, grand achievements. We dream of them, we tell stories which depict them, and we create art which displays them. The human aspiration to be more than a common beast is extraordinary and cause for hope. It signifies that we are not content with the mediocrity and wretchedness of the present moment. We are driven from within to reshape that which is without.

We order and sculpt the world around us through relationships with each other. We do so when we build a cohesive family unit. We do so when we bond our families with those of others, forming a local community. We do so when we unite that local community with a large, regional human society, which we might call a nation. In each of these cases, we connect ourselves with others in a common endeavor to cultivate a more perfect existence. We create bonds with others and strive as collective groups to identify spiritual, scientific, and philosophical truths about reality. Through these cooperative, informal organizations of humanity, we pursue great achievements of every sort. Without human cooperation on a massive scale, the construction of the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, and the Eiffel Tower would not have been possible. Without scientific and educational institutions, achievements like vaccines and innovative surgeries would never have been developed. Without the support of sponsors, the guidance of teachers, and the interest of the public, musical wonders like Mozart's symphonies and Michelangelo's paintings would not have been possible. Great achievements frequently require a great coalescence of human wills—history has made this evident.

But by far the most significant, creative, and consequential unit of humanity is that of the civilization. Beyond the civilization, there is no cohesive connection which draws together the

separate individuals of mankind. The civilizational unit is the end of the road, where all of our innate human aspirations find their most momentous manifestations. "Civilization" is not simply a term used to differentiate one materially distinct people from another. It is a term used to denote a fundamental difference in the metaphysical character of a society. It is a term that reflects distinct paths which have been taken by human peoples. Arnold Toynbee warns of "the misconception of 'the unity of history' — involving the assumption that there is only one river of civilization, our own, and that all others are either tributary to it or else lost in the desert sands" (Toynbee Vol.1 55). Toynbee argues that civilization is not, in fact, a single destination of which all peoples are in pursuit. There are numerous civilizations, each with its own unique character, distinct from the rest, and consequential in its own right.

If we are to understand civilizations as the climax of the organized human pursuit of greatness, then we ought to be concerned when they decline and collapse. The wonderful, awe-inspiring legacy of the Ancient Egyptians still evokes amazement today—but the spirit which produced that legacy has been lost to time. If we consider the artistic, scientific, and architectural achievements of the Ancient Egyptians to have been great accomplishments which brought humanity to new heights, then should we not consider the collapse of Egyptian civilization a tragedy? When civilizations like those of the Ancient Egyptians fade away, humanity loses a vessel through which it may aspire to new heights. To see this, one needs only look at the relative lack of creativity in peoples following the collapse of their civilizations. The collapse of Roman civilization saw a great regression in the areas where Rome had achieved wonders (architecture, science, political organization, art). The collapse of Ancient Egyptian civilization similarly brought an end to the creation of great achievements by the Egyptian people.

The tragedy of civilizational collapse, therefore, raises two questions. Firstly, how are we to tell when a civilization is declining? Over time, many things about a human society changes—from fashion to literature to language—so we must differentiate superficial changes from those that signify true decline. The second question we must ask is whether there is any way to reverse civilizational decline? If the collapse of civilizations is a tragedy, then we ought to consider how we might go about preventing that collapse.

Before either of these questions may be addressed, a more thorough understanding of the term "civilization" is necessary. To explore the meaning of the term "civilization," the significance and nature of civilizational decline, and the possible means of reversing such declines, it is worthwhile to consult some of the most exhaustive and renowned works on the subject—namely, Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* and Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. It will also be useful to consider other works by Samuel Huntington, Adda Bozeman, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Jefferson, and Şükrü Yazğan. Each thinker's examination of the term "civilization," the topic of civilizational decline, and the question of recovery varies, but the overlap and disagreement between them provides great insight into each of these matters.

What is a Civilization? - Materiality and the Soul

The first distinction which Arnold Toynbee makes regarding civilizations is that they are not defined by the character of their material world. He notes that "civilizations are not, in spite of the perverted notions of modern materialism, built of such bricks as these; they are not built of sewing machines and tobacco and rifles, nor even of alphabets and numerals. It is the easiest thing in the world for commerce to export a new Western technique. It is infinitely harder for a Western poet or saint to kindle in a non-Western soul the spiritual flame that is alight in his own"

(Toynbee Vol.1 59). This distinction is critical, because it allows us to avoid the trap of viewing civilizations—the pinnacle of the organized human will to project itself upon the world—as the sum of their architecture and marketplaces. Rather, the civilization is, according to Toynbee, a large, socially indirect unit of humanity which is unified by a "creative minority" in the pursuit of a goal beyond itself.

The process which Toynbee associates with this civilized order he calls "mimesis," whereby the "creative minority" enlists the rest of the population by convincing them of the meaningfulness of its aspirations. He describes this process as "a kind of social drill; and the dull ears that are deaf to the unearthly music of Orpheus' lyre are well attuned to the drill sergeant's word of command" (Toynbee Vol.1 321). While the "creative minority" are *not* deaf to the music of Orpheus' lyre (the will to elevate humanity in new, widespread ways) the vast majority is. The majority must, therefore, according to Toynbee, be led by an authority to the creative ends of the idealistic minority.

Toynbee's assessment of the civilizational unit may sound exploitative, but such an impression would be a misunderstanding. While the "creative minority" draws in the "uncreative majority," it does not do so coercively. A coercive minority is a sign of dysfunctionality in the civilization. In a healthy civilization, the minority persuades the majority that its cause is worthwhile by enchanting the majority with the minority's magnificent dreams. This is often accomplished using positions of authority in the society. Through this process of mimesis, the creative minority draws the people of a fledgling civilization toward a common goal.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the goals of the "creative minority" are not mundane matters such as building a bridge or raising an army. They are metaphysical in nature, and concern the advancement of the people in metaphysical terms through material means. The

"creative minority" aspires to achieve greatness, beauty, virtue, etc., through the worldly development of the civilization's cultural infrastructure—namely its traditions, rituals, literature, art, architecture, philosophy, politics, theology, ethics, and laws. It aspires to higher things, and convinces the "uncreative majority"—which is not naturally inclined to aspire to such great heights—to come along for the ride, or, more accurately, to hop out of the wagon and help the "creative minority" push the civilization to the peak of its development. One example of this is the role played by musical composers in 18th-19th century Europe. The average pianist is unlikely to have the creative spirit necessary to produce the great works of Mozart or Tchaikovsky. Instead, Mozart and Tchaikovsky produced works which astonished the uncreative European majority, such that virtually every pianist today knows how to play their works. By convincing the average musician of the greatness of their music, this minority successfully enlisted the majority's help in sharing their creative spirit with the world.

Oswald Spengler describes a similar phenomenon in that of the ambitious soul, though he uses different terminology to describe the unit we refer to as "civilization." For Toynbee, the unrealized, internal ambitions of the civilization's spirited people and the actualization of these ambitions are both elements of the same unit: the civilization. For Spengler, these two elements represent distinct phenomena worthy of separate terms. Spengler assigns the collective aspiration to greatness the term "culture," while he calls the worldly actualization of that aspiration "civilization." The culture is "an ideal or a style that [characterizes] a whole group of societies over a long period" (McInnes 2). But this "ideal" or "style" must be understood as a willful ambition which yearns to be actualized. Conversely, Spengler would consider the *actualization* of these ambitions to be the process of civilization. Insofar as the culture's internal will becomes a worldly reality, it becomes less of a culture and more of a civilization. However, Spengler sees

this as a zero-sum process, whereby the actualization *replaces* the spirit. The culture precedes the civilization, and the transition from culture to civilization is "the time of change in which a mankind loses its spiritual fruitfulness for ever, and building takes the place of begetting" (Spengler Vol.1 359). Spengler places enormous emphasis on this idea of "becoming" and "the become." But this is not an arbitrary distinction on his part. In his analysis, it identifies a fundamental characteristic of the civilizational/cultural unit. In one stage, it is fundamentally a body in pursuit of some metaphysical aspiration, while in the other, it is fundamentally in a state of enjoying the products of its youthful, spirited ambitions. Each of these stages lasts, according to Spengler, a few hundred years, combining for a total lifespan of about 1,000 years. This distinction in terms does not necessarily contradict Toynbee's definition of the civilization. Rather, it draws a meaningful distinction between two phases of civilizational development—one which is creative and the other which is not.

Using Spengler's terminology, the culture is akin to a living entity while the civilization is its corpse. He states that "*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" (Spengler Vol.1 105). While his use of the term "petty" shows his intention to rank the life of the civilization/culture as greater than the individual's in terms of significance, Spengler believes that both are subject to a predetermined life-cycle—one that is defined by multiple periods which are analogous to the stages of an organic body's life. Cultures are born, grow through their youth, reach a peak of vitality, and then begin a decline toward death. The culture is the potential, while the civilization is the actualized potential. Once a potential is actualized,

Spengler argues, it is no longer possible to retain the spirited ambition which brought about its actualization.

What Spengler is getting at is that creativity is difficult if not impossible to replicate. Vincent van Gogh's paintings are highly creative, but the creative energy which he used to make any given painting arguably died with that painting. Once the abstract will had been actualized on the canvas, there was no longer a need for the will to persist—it had achieved its desire to be actualized. And if he had tried to continually recreate the same painting so as to preserve the spirit, he would be engaging in a process of *recreation*, which is inherently uncreative.

Spengler seems to apply this logic to the dramatically larger scale of the civilization. He argues that, the cultural soul's "aim once attained — the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities, fulfilled and made externally actual — the Culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes Civilization, the thing which we feel and understand in the words Egyptianism, Byzantinism, Mandarinism" (Spengler Vol.1 106). To use his own example, the Ancient Egyptians once possessed the creative will necessary for the construction of the Pyramids. But at a certain point, the creative spirit was sufficiently actualized and the spiritedness which drove their creation ceased to be. The last royal pyramid was built around 1,525 B.C., but Ancient Egypt did not slip into significant decline until approximately 400 years later (Jarvis 1; Mark 6).

What is a Civilization? - Identifying the Soul

What distinguishes one civilization from another—explicitly for Spengler and Toynbee and implicitly for many other thinkers—is the civilization's soul. This soul must be understood as independent from any one individual. Spengler places great emphasis on the influence of the

cultural soul, arguing that "the peoples under the spell of a Culture are, alike in their inward form and in their whole manifestation, its products and not its authors" (Spengler Vol.2 170). This "inward form" is equivalent to the contours of the cultural soul. The "great soul awakens out of the protospirituality (dem urseelenhaften Zustände) of ever-childish humanity," and seeks to actualize "the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences" (Spengler Vol.1 106). For Spengler, the soul is a visceral, collective sense of the universe—or perhaps more accurately, of what is valuable in the universe. For both Spengler and Toynbee, the history of human civilizations has been colored by these collective spirits.

For Toynbee, the soul is the vessel which either does or does not hold creativity. During a period of civilization, the creative minority, through mimesis, extends this creative soul to virtually the whole of the civilization. In this case, the soul is defined by its creativity and the nature of its creativity. Toynbee has already distinguished the "spiritual flame" of the non-Western man from that of the Western. Since Toynbee does not believe that there is only Western civilization, he must mean that the souls of other civilizations are fundamentally different. By arguing that "it is infinitely harder for a Western poet or saint" to alter that non-Western spirit, Toynbee is implying that poets and saints instantiate the soul of the West (Toynbee Vol.1 59). Not only does Toynbee use the example of the poet and the saint because he believes them to be good examples of the Western soul—he also uses them because of their ability to disseminate that soul throughout the society by way of their works and lived examples. They instantiate the soul of the civilization, both inwardly and outwardly for all to witness.

Spengler not only agrees that there is a difference in the souls of civilizations, but also supports the general assertion that it is made knowable through manifestations of that civilization. In Toynbee's case, perhaps it is most readily the works of the poet and the saint. In

Spengler's case, it is virtually every creation of the civilization. "This is the *idea of the Macrocosm, actuality as the sum total of all symbols in relation to one soul*. From this property of being significant nothing is exempt. All that is, symbolizes" (Spengler Vol.1 165). To Spengler, everything which is developed by a civilization bears the mark of that civilization. From their clothing, to their mathematics, to their music, everything is symbolic. According to Stijn De Cauwer and James Fielding, Robert Musil, a contemporary of Spengler's, believed him to be "representative of a certain style or way of thinking that operates through problematic and imprecise analogies" (De Cauwer and Fielding 4). Spengler's interpretation of everything as symbolic likely contributed to this perception of his work.

One may fall more on the side of Toynbee, pursuing artistic and living evidence to understand the unique disposition of a specific civilization toward the world. Or one may find Spengler's approach more useful, interpreting virtually every creation of the civilization as indicative of its peculiar soul. But in both cases, it is recognized that at the heart of great civilizations (which *do* differ immensely in their material worlds) there is a fundamentally unique approach to the understanding of nature and the purpose of human existence. Even Huntington recognizes that civilizations are always "mutually exclusive because of some fundamentally different conception of life and of society" (Olivier 1).

The most basic evidence for this claim is not only present in the varied spirit of each civilization's literature, art, architecture, myths, etc., but also the manner in which each civilization addresses problems. Toynbee observes that a creative minority is necessary in order for a civilization to overcome challenges, but the creative solutions are not identical in every case, as he implies with the warning against "the misconception of 'the unity of history'" (Toynbee Vol.1 55). Chinese civilization has addressed the problems of self-defense and limited

resources with an imperial form, in which great swathes of territory and people are governed by a central entity. Classical Greek civilization addressed these problems through an emphasis on city-state strongholds and trade. The difference in approach signifies, at least for Toynbee and Spengler, a difference in the creative souls of the two civilizations—one imperial, concentrated on limitless expansion, and the other mostly isolated, concentrated on its local region (the Eastern Mediterranean) and primarily on its own local cities.

One criticism of this approach may be that it places too much emphasis on the free-will of members of a civilization to direct its actions and not enough emphasis on historical conditions which were the true, underlying cause of civilizational differences. This is a worthwhile consideration. The fact that two peoples behave differently in *different situations* does not necessarily imply that they are different peoples. Yet, it is not clear that Toynbee, or even Spengler, is arguing that. It is unlikely either of them would say that, had the Greeks originated in China, this vast region would have been filled with Greek-style city-states and the same Greek civilization with which we are familiar. Rather, these thinkers emphasize that which is different between civilizations despite *similar* stimuli. Their unique approach to *similar* problems, like how to express value through art, how to achieve a healthy political life, and how to pursue a relationship with the divine all indicate something unique about the collective psychology of the peoples in question. China could have built statues in the same style as the Greeks, but they did not. They could have adopted Western liberalism, but they did not. They could have engaged in human sacrifice on a large scale like the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayans, but they did not (Wade 1).

One might criticize this approach by arguing that these differences only reflect a variance in the psychology of each region's political elite—that these differences reflect only temporal

differences in policy and nothing deeper. But these differences were not merely the product of an ideological elite using its political power to effect temporary changes in policy. These differences in creativity display themselves throughout hundreds of years of civilizational history, transcending hundreds of generations, and therefore imply something deep-rooted in the civilization's people. We may call it a soul, or we may seek less artful language and call it collective value-systems, motivating psychologies, or world-views.

Samuel Huntington, in his work *The Clash of Civilizations*, cites Adda Bozeman, who argues that "political systems are transient expedients on the surface of civilization, and that the destiny of each linguistically and morally unified community depends ultimately upon the survival of certain primary structuring ideas around which successive generations have coalesced and which thus symbolize the society's continuity" (Bozeman 26). This description preserves the notion of a deep-rooted continuity between generations while avoiding the highly-abstract language of "souls." Perhaps this is an oversimplification of Toynbee and Spengler's articulation of the soul, but it is nonetheless worthy of consideration. Bozeman highlights the role of "primary structuring ideas" which unify the people. If the goal is to put into words that internal quality which leads the peoples of different civilizations to manifest themselves in vastly different ways, then this idea of "primary structuring ideas" may be sufficient. It speaks to the deep-rooted, cohesive element which would be necessary for such a sustained period of unique behavior on the civilizational level. It also addresses the "why" of the behavior. Ideas inform actions, and a widespread, deep-rooted idea would logically inform actions on a grand scale in a fundamental way.

Şükrü Yazğan further simplifies the answer as to what is at the core of a civilization. He argues that civilizations are "dissipative structures which are created and sustained through

continuous re-generation of their peculiar orders reflecting their sets of social values" (Yazğan 9). These "peculiar orders" are things like value-systems, religion, and political education. The means by which these "orders" are preserved, Yazğan calls "order creating mechanisms," or "OCMs." These mechanisms include things like churches, universities, and cinema. Yazğan argues that the "magnitude of societal order" is directly related to the ability of these "order creating mechanisms" to stave off the natural disorder of the universe (Yazğan 15). Taking this approach, one must simply identify the peculiar social and institutional mechanisms which produce order on the civilizational scale in order to understand what is at the heart of any given civilization.

Spengler characterizes the civilization as having a soul filled with creative potential that is unique to itself. Toynbee speaks of a "spiritual flame" which reflects the form and character of the creativity of the civilization. Bozeman emphasizes the role of "primary structuring ideas," which unify the psychology of the civilization's population toward common, general directions. And lastly, Yazğan frames the civilizational unit as defined by its "peculiar orders" and the underlying social values. All of these assessments get at a unique character that lies beneath the surface. None of them takes the civilizational unit to be a merely material phenomenon. They recognize the civilization to be the largest cohesive unit of humanity which is capable of possessing a coherent "soul," "spiritual flame," set of "primary structuring ideas," or a fundamental set of social values.

What is a Civilization? - Size and Number

One may wonder, based on Spengler's highly abstract descriptions, what the scope of a civilization/culture is. He asserts that "the higher Cultures, which are born in great spiritual

upheavals," over the course of approximately a thousand years, "weld all aggregates of lower degree — nations, classes, towns, generations — into one unit" (Spengler Vol.2 19). Here, Spengler directly addresses the question of scope. The civilization, according to Spengler and Toynbee, is a unit which encompasses all of the lower units of social organization of which we are familiar. The nation, the class, the town, the family, the personal relationships are all encompassed within the culture/civilization.

Michael Peters notes that "[Spengler] recognises eight cultures—Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Mayan-Aztec, Classical, Arab and Western—that develop organically reaching the status of a 'civilization' only in the final stage" (Peters 1). Spengler reaches this number of eight cultures/civilizations by applying his unique analytical framework to world history. For example, in Spengler's view, Greek and Roman culture/civilization did not differ sufficiently to qualify as separate, but rather connected chapters of the same cultural/civilizational unit.

Toynbee draws greater delineations among the peoples of world history, observing twenty-one societies which may be considered civilizations (Toynbee Vol.1 53). This indicates either a difference in historical knowledge between Toynbee and Spengler, or a difference in the weight each gives to behavioral differences between historical peoples.

The precise number of historical civilizations is a highly debatable subject. It is difficult to justify such an exact numeration of such complex social units. Krishan Kumar observes that "Toynbee's overall framework can often seem Procrustean... Moreover, civilizational analysis, especially of the comparative kind, is always going to be problematic, given enduring disagreements about definitions and units of analysis. Thus Toynbee's listing of twenty-one civilizations might seem highly questionable; many of his critics have come up with very different lists, equally convincing (or not)" (Kumar 11). But the possible inaccuracy of claims

regarding the total number of historical civilizations ought not to be taken as evidence that civilizations are fictional units of history. Indeed, one encounters the same problems when distinguishing the number of cultural groups throughout the world. Do Sicilians belong to the same cultural group as Northern Italians—or even the people of Naples? These questions and their controversial nature do not imply that such distinctions are meaningless, or that different cultural groups do not exist at all. Rather, they simply reflect the complexity of the topic. As has been made clear thus far, civilizations are highly complex social units which demand equally complex analytical frameworks in order to be understood. Insofar as one's analytical framework differs, the quantification of historical civilizations will also differ.

How do Civilizations Grow?

While civilizational growth is not the focus of this paper, an understanding of what leads civilizations to grow will better contextualize the factors that lead them to decline. One major factor which contributes to civilizational growth, according to Toynbee, is the spirit of self-determination. He argues that, through civilizational self-determination, "challenges do not impinge from outside but arise from within, and victorious responses do not take the form of surmounting external obstacles or of overcoming an external adversary, but manifest themselves in an inward self-articulation or self-determination" (Toynbee Vol.1 236). This may be contrasted with a people who are entirely *un*-self-deterministic—who leave their existence as a collective body up to the whims of historical events, responding to the world rather than striving to transcend it. The self-deterministic people derives its obstacles from within itself, directing its efforts towards those things which it has deemed valuable and worthy of its aspirational energy. It is not at the mercy of the universe, but rather on the path of its own self-articulated ambition

for metaphysical excellence. It is the difference between cavemen who seldom looked beyond their own survival and Catholic martyrs who pursued a good which transcended the demands of the earth.

Spengler seemingly contradicts Toynbee's view of self-determinism, arguing that "the great Cultures are entities, primary or original, that arise out of the deepest foundations of spirituality, and that the peoples under the spell of a Culture are, alike in their inward form and in their whole manifestation, its products and not its authors" (Spengler Vol.2 170). However, while Spengler is emphasizing the strong influence of the cultural form upon its people, it would seem that, in actuality, he only believes this to be applicable to the majority in the civilization/culture, not its influential individuals. For, as he argues, "world-history is the history of the great Cultures, and peoples are but the symbolic forms and vessels in which the men of these Cultures fulfil their Destinies" (Spengler Vol.2 170). Spengler distinguishes between "peoples" and "men," apparently suggesting that only the less general group is capable of taking the agency necessary to "fulfil their Destinies." A strong case could be made that both Toynbee and Spengler see the "spell of a culture" as being cast by the minority. Because Toynbee calls the majority "uncreative," it might also be possible that Toynbee identifies the majority as naturally lacking in self-determinism like Spengler argues. An absence of creativity denotes a complete reliance on the works of others, which suggests an inability to be self-determining. For Toynbee, it is the minority who drive civilizational growth, because "in a growing civilization the creator is called upon to play the part of a conqueror who replies to a challenge with a victorious response" (Toynbee Vol.1 607). The uncreative majority has a role in actualizing the creative solutions of the minority, but they are not the creators of the solutions.

While Spengler might agree with Toynbee's assessment of the role of the creative minority in driving cultural growth, he asserts that they "arise out of the deepest foundations of spirituality" (Spengler Vol.2 170). Spengler's terminology is highly idiosyncratic. By spiritual, he does not necessarily mean religious. Rather, he is referring to the psychological relationship between man and the universe. The opposite of this, the unspiritual man, Spengler associates with emotional sterility, complete rationality, and a sense that the universe possesses no mysteries—that all is subject to his intellect. Therefore, the origins of a culture/civilization, for Spengler, is a deep sense of wonder and passion in relation to reality. From this, one may infer that continued cultural growth requires that this wonder and passion be cultivated rather than neglected or suppressed. Toynbee's focus on creativity parallels this analysis. Creativity is internal and sub-rational. It is incompatible with methodological thinking and requires wonder, passion, and often spiritual exploration.

In regards to the preservation of this creative spirit which drives civilizational growth, Toynbee argues that, in general, "the greater the difficulty, the greater the stimulus" (Toynbee Vol.1 124). Stimuli which he identifies as beneficial to growth are those of a tough environment, new ground, blows, pressure, and penalization.

In his analysis of history, Toynbee observes that difficult environments (to a point) seem to yield industrious peoples. One example he uses is the Mayan ruins in American jungles, which "speak still more eloquently of the intensity of the struggle with the physical environment which the creators of the Mayan civilization must have waged in their day" (Toynbee Vol.1 104).

The second stimulus which Toynbee assesses is that of new ground. New ground, he argues, "apart from the intrinsic nature of the terrain," has a positive effect on the development of human societies (Toynbee Vol.1 124). Historical civilizations which he examines, such as the

Mughal and Ottomans, appear to have prospered upon migration to a new environment, such that they outpaced their parent Syriac civilization. This is despite the relatively similar quality of the land to which the Mughal and Ottomans migrated. Toynbee also notes the prosperity of many Greek colonies which landed their ships on new terrain and proceeded to exhibit great industry and drive for success.

Thirdly, Toynbee assesses the role of the 'blow.' A blow to a society is a concentrated shock achieved by a particular event. Toynbee claims historical evidence shows that blows have a positive effect on the development of societies. Looking to Greece, he explains that "the classic example of the stimulating effect of a blow is the reaction of Hellas in general, and Athens in particular, to the onslaught of the Persian Empire—the Syriac universal state—in 480-479 B.C." (Toynbee Vol.1 137). The Persian invasion of Greece was a sudden and extreme blow to the Greek people. This event radically elevated the level of threat present to Hellenic civilization. Yet, this elevation in adversity, via a sudden blow, led to a substantial regeneration of Hellenic vitality.

Next, Toynbee assesses the role of pressure on civilizations. Pressure is similar to blows, but it is characterized by an extensive period of stress which a force places upon the civilization. One example Toynbee gives is the pressure that Nordic civilization placed upon western Europe in the early middle ages. Viking expeditions not only threatened the economic welfare of the people of western Europe, but some also threatened their very survival as a Western, Christian nation. The Viking siege of Paris, for instance, can be seen as a blow which was part of a much longer history of pressure against Western civilization in France.

Again, Toynbee argues that these pressures, similar to blows, achieve a stimulating effect which elevates the civilization higher than it was before. The Norse pressure on Christendom

galvanized their identity as Christians and civilized peoples. Over the course of a few hundred years, Norse civilization was gradually influenced by the Christian Europeans they had assailed, until ultimately Scandinavia became incorporated into the Western, Christian world of Europe.

The last stimulus which Toynbee identifies is penalization. He asserts that, "in a body social, a group or class which is socially penalized—either by accident or by its own act or by the act of other members of the society in which it lives—is apt to respond to the challenge of being handicapped in, or altogether excluded from, certain fields of activity by concentrating its energies on other fields and excelling in these" (Toynbee Vol.1 153-54). This process of specialization and concentrated excellence leads a society, he argues, to advance beyond its peers. One example of this on the local level is the people of Venice, who built their city upon remarkably unfertile ground. Incapable of excelling in the realm of agriculture, livestock, or significant resource extraction such as their neighbors had, they turned to trade. Venice grew to become one of the strongest trading powers of the medieval and renaissance periods.

Each of these stimuli, according to Toynbee, promotes civilizational growth. Additionally, each fits his thesis that "the greater the difficulty, the greater the stimulus" (Toynbee Vol.1 124). Difficult problems seem to drive the people who face them to revitalize their civilization. They seem to necessitate the revival of the creativity, industry, and order which define the civilization. In this way, challenges promote civilizational growth and regeneration.

However, Toynbee warns that a difficulty which is too great can impede civilizational growth. As evidence of this, he looks to North America: "Farther north again, in Labrador, we reach conditions such as confronted the Norse settlers in Greenland—a maximum challenge which, far from being optimum, might more truly be described as 'pessimum'" (Toynbee Vol.1 178). Resources in this region are minimal, extreme cold precludes most forms of natural life,

and the land is isolated from any prosperous neighbors. In this case, the difficulty is at a maximum, but the stimulus appears to be inadequate to produce a prosperous civilization. Finding the perfect median between too much adversity and too little is, therefore, the challenge that besets those who wish to maximize their civilization's potential.

Toynbee's emphasis on the importance of challenging stimuli also sheds light onto his claims about the importance of self-determinism. A civilization which is self-deterministic can create challenges for itself which are of an ideal intensity to drive further growth. For example, the Classical Olympics was a self-determined challenge for the citizens of Ancient Greece that likely helped to preserve the virtues of athletic discipline and vigor within them. Conversely, if a civilization loses its self-determination, it leaves itself at the mercy of the natural world's stimuli, which may be too mild to promote growth.

Though Spengler does not explicitly speak to the subject of difficulty as a stimulus, his point about the importance of a "spiritual" existence rather than a hubristic, "systematized" existence suggests that he might have agreed with Toynbee's assessment. Challenging situations force people to recognize their own limitations and acknowledge the tremendous, untameable forces of the universe. Difficulty has the potential to break down rigid systems and routines. In other words, Spengler's rejection of a systematized approach to the world is consistent with Toynbee's assessment of challenges as stimulating growth.

How do Civilizations Decline?

Now that we have examined some of the most relevant literature on the subject of civilizations, their importance, and how they grow, we may move to the topic of decline. Civilizations do not persist indefinitely. Most of the great civilizations of which we are aware

have come to an end, including the Classical Greek, the Ancient Egyptian, the Ancient Chinese, and the Mesopotamian. This raises further questions about whether decline is a certainty and whether it is reversible. If civilizations provide human peoples with a greater capacity for excellence, then their decline is something to be avoided. But if it is unavoidable, then we must explore the possibility of recovery from decline. To better understand and answer these questions, we will again consult the works of Toynbee, Spengler, and various others.

Because he centers his view of the civilization around the idea of creativity, Toynbee associates decline with a decline in creativity. Civilizations, for Toynbee, are not simply vast populations of creative people. They are sustained and united by the process of mimesis, whereby the creative minority shares its creative spirit with the uncreative majority. Therefore, breakdown ensues when there is "a loss of creative power in the souls of creative individuals or minorities, a loss which divests them of their magic power to influence the souls of the uncreative masses" (Toynbee Vol.1 288). When the lifeline between the spiritedness of the minority and the majority of the population is broken, the civilization's soul becomes a niche rather than a defining characteristic.

There are two main problems created by the ending of mimesis. First, the necessary creativity is no longer present or widespread enough so as to successfully combat the challenges which threaten the civilization. Because "in a growing civilization the creator is called upon to play the part of a conqueror who replies to a challenge with a victorious response," the absence of creativity means the civilization cannot sufficiently rally to challenges like social disconnection, ideological extremism, greed, lust, selfishness, or disasters like famine and war (Toynbee Vol.1 607).

Second, the formerly creative minority is likely to attempt to preserve its power and influence by other means once it can no longer do so through its legitimate competence. Toynbee warns that "the piper who has lost his cunning can no longer conjure the feet of the multitude into a dance and if, in rage and panic, he now attempts to convert himself into a drill-sergeant or a slave driver, and to coerce by physical force a people that he can now no longer lead by his old magnetic charm, then all the more surely and swiftly he defeats his own intention; for the followers who had merely flagged and fallen out of step as the heavenly music died away will be stung by a touch of the whip into active rebellion" (Toynbee Vol.1 288). We must, then, consider what causes a once creative people to lose their creative spirit. Toynbee gives seven reasons for this event.

The first cause is what he terms "the mechanicalness of mimesis." The process of mimesis is required precisely because the uncreative majority would not be creative on their own. Therefore, it is only through the mechanical process of transferring creative ideas to the majority that the creative minority may advance the civilization. This mechanical process utilizes things like customs and traditions to convey creative ideas. However, this process of transferring creativity through faithfully accepted customs does not require the person on the receiving-end to become a creative individual. In fact, it does not even require the creative individuals to remain creative. The appearance of creativity can be preserved without any genuinely creative people, so long as the process of mimesis is mechanically sustained in the form of institutions, customs, and traditions. Interpreting Hegelian thought, Simon Lumsden states that "feelings and sensations that are habituated are under the subject's control, but they are not thereby subsumed into the rational will" (Lumsden 3). In this way, the habitual behaviors instilled through mimesis cannot

effectively produce creative people. They can only produce people who consent to partake in the creative process of the minority.

However, this may lead the creative minority to become "hypnotized" by their own mechanisms and cease to cultivate authentic creativity within themselves, instead relying on the previous generation's creativity. Toynbee warns that, "when the leaders cease to lead, their tenure of power becomes an abuse. The rank and file mutiny; the officers seek to restore order by drastic action. Orpheus, who has lost his lyre or forgotten how to play it, now lays about him with Xerxes' whip; and the result is a hideous pandemonium, in which the military formation breaks down into anarchy" (Toynbee Vol.1 324). Not only does the creativity transferred through mimesis become outdated and, by definition, uncreative, but the minority loses their right to power, undermining their authority. The people become simultaneously incapable of creatively addressing crises, and the authors of a catastrophic internal political crisis—one which leads to a completely arbitrary, tyrannical, and uncreative form of political rule.

Toynbee places great emphasis on the ability of a civilization to be self-determining. Without the ability to determine its own goals or courses of action in a unified manner, the civilization cannot embrace its "spiritual flame." It loses cohesion and any motivation or justification for cohesion. This self-determination of the civilizational body is necessary for growth, he argues. But "the secession of the led from the leaders may be regarded as a loss of harmony between the parts which make up the whole *ensemble* of the society. In any whole consisting of parts a loss of harmony between the parts is paid for by the whole in a corresponding loss of self-determination." (Toynbee Vol.1 324). Therefore, the schismatic society cannot grow in the sense of pursuing the realization of a common value-system, spiritual understanding, or other collective, meaningful existence. Without the cooperation of the

majority, the quality of the creative few is inconsequential. Without the leadership of the minority, the majority cannot find its way to the heights of the Ancient Romans and Egyptians. Without the majority, the minority cannot actualize its creative potential and is doomed to stumble through history along with the uncreative majority.

Spengler would find a population that mechanically follows its cultural traditions and institutional behaviors to be symptomatic of decline as well. At the peak of a culture/civilization, "we find every individual trait of expression deliberate, strict, measured, marvellous in its ease and self-confidence" (Spengler Vol.1 107). Mechanical obedience to tradition is inherently non-deliberate. Therefore, as intentionality leaves the leadership of the civilization, so too does the capacity for true creativity and growth.

The second cause of lost creativity is what Toynbee refers to as "new wine in old bottles." This issue arises when the institutions become outdated and incapable of managing novel social forces. Mimesis leads to the construction of institutions which creatively address the problems of a society. For example, the institution of marriage throughout the world is an institution which promotes the stability of the family unit, benefiting emotionally, socially, and physically fragile children. However, Toynbee notes that "one source of disharmony between the institutions of which a society is composed is the introduction of new social forces—aptitudes or emotions or ideas—which the existing set of institutions was not originally designed to carry" (Toynbee Vol.1 325). To use the same example, the institution of marriage is designed to perfect monogamous relationships. However, in a society which develops a strong favorability toward sexual promiscuity, the institution of marriage would likely struggle to carry the burden of dealing with extra-marital births, emotional distress due to polygamous relationships, and uncertain paternity/maternity. If these novel factors are degenerative to the society's integrity, and the

institutions are incapable of addressing them, then the civilization necessarily suffers. A fanatic reliance on old institutions, therefore, may lead to a lack of creative solutions which makes the civilization's institutions vulnerable to novel forces.

The third cause which Toynbee articulates is that of an "idolization of the ephemeral self." The creative individual of one era may not have the tools necessary for addressing the problems of another era. By holding rigidly to the ineffective approach of a past generation, the new generation uncreatively clings to a sect of the creative minority which can no longer sufficiently address the problems of the civilization. This is not to say that a civilization must endure a revolution of ideals every couple of generations. That would undermine the continuity of the civilization and arguably, by definition, kill it. Rather, the point that Toynbee is making is that reform is necessary to combat evolving problems. Just as the institutions of a civilization cannot remain effective in perpetuity, the individual characters of a civilization must also be rotated according to the unique challenges of each era. Toynbee does not seem to argue that this changes the "spiritual flame" of the people. So, then, we must understand the transition of leadership as a change in approach, not in the fundamental spirit of the civilization. The root ideals and world-view remain constant, but the methods by which they are actualized in the world must change if the civilization is to combat new challenges. Prudential decision making does not bind different civilizations together as behaviorally the same. Some crises only allow for a small number of responses. Greek civilization was not the same as Persian civilization because both mobilized for war. Civilizations still differ immensely when the breadth of non-suicidal decisions is opened up (this is especially apparent in the areas of literature and art—where the society is not under threat of catastrophe). Rather, Toynbee's point is that a

civilization must be flexible enough to recognize when a particular approach is inconsistent with the survival of the civilization.

The fourth cause is connected to the second. Toynbee warns that an "idolization of an ephemeral institution" can lead to institutions which are incapable of preserving the integrity of the civilization. He claims that "on the new material scale of Hellenic life parochial sovereignty could be salvaged only on one condition. The sovereign city-state must make way for new states of higher calibre" (Toynbee Vol.1 368). Perhaps this example is accurate, or perhaps not, but in either case, it is clear that a civilization must perpetuate its metaphysical existence through the dissemination of ideas and performance of traditions which must be tailored to fit the unique pressures of each era. A priest does not give the same sermon during a pandemic as he does during a time of bountiful harvest and great health precisely because he wishes to address the unique threats to the spiritual integrity of the congregation. A civilization's people, too, must be flexibly cultivated through evolving institutions, while preserving the underlying spirit of those institutions. Yazgan would likely consider the idolization of an institution to be dangerous as it reduces the flexibility of the civilization's order creating mechanisms.

The fifth cause for a loss of creativity is the "idolization of an ephemeral technique." Similar to the last two causes, the idolization of a traditional technique, or traditional way of life may lead to an excessive and imprudent diversion of resources toward a course of action that is no longer efficient or effective. Toynbee gives the example of the Nomads and Eskimos, whom he believes "have fallen into arrest through an excessive concentration of all their faculties on their shepherding and hunting techniques. Their single-track lives have condemned them to a retrogression towards an animalism which is the negation of human versatility" (Toynbee Vol.1 377). Paradoxically, the creativity of the early civilization can become poisonous if it is petrified

in the form of a technique. For the Nomads and Eskimos, the development of their shepherding and hunting techniques certainly took creativity from their ancestors, but that creative spirit ceased to be once the Nomads and Eskimos became *reliant* upon these techniques. Creativity implies flexibility, not reliance. The creativity is found in the *act* of developing new things, not in the performance of those things which have already been created.

The sixth cause is the "suicidalness of militarism." Here, Toynbee warns of an over-reliance on military success. He argues that the suicidal emphasis on military solutions is derived from "the presumption that, because a faculty has proved equal to the accomplishment of a limited task within its proper field, it may therefore be counted on to produce some inordinate effect in a different set of circumstances" (Toynbee Vol.1 402). However, according to Toynbee, this "never leads to anything but certain disaster" (Toynbee Vol.1 402). One might look to the short-lived fascist states of Italy and Germany as evidence of this. While military force was a successful tool for reunification of German-speaking territories and the preservation of order on the Italian peninsula, the catastrophic downfall of each state could be attributed to this over-reliance on military force. This is an example on the level of states, not civilizations, but it is one of the clearest. Another example may be the militarism of Classical Greece which brought about the Peloponnesian War, Alexander's untenable empire, and ultimately the conquest of the weakened region by the Romans.

The seventh and final cause for a decline in creativity which Toynbee provides is that of the "intoxication of victory." Strains of this problem may be seen in all of the prior causes. Overwhelming success in a short period of time threatens to create an arrogance in a people which gives them the confidence to make poorly deliberated choices. "In the intoxication of victory Hildebrand set the institution which he himself had raised from the depths of ignominy to

the heights of grandeur on the wrong road, and none of his successors was able to recover the right one" (Toynbee Vol.1 412). Thus, the arrogance of success can instill a sense in the civilization that they are capable of overcoming challenges by virtue of their grandeur, rather than through the intentional labors of their creativity. Again, one might see an example of this on the state level with Nazi Germany's early technological and military successes driving an arrogance of racial superiority which facilitated the catastrophic invasion of the Soviet Union. One might also see the decadence of the late Roman Empire as evidence of an intoxication of victory, which led the civilization's elite to believe too strongly in the invincibility of their civilization.

The decline of a civilization may, according to Toynbee, begin with one or many of these causes. Each has the effect of reducing the creative spirit which is at the heart of the civilization. However, this is just the beginning of the decline, and it is soon followed by a schism of the soul. Toynbee argues that the "schism in the souls of members of a disintegrating society displays itself in a variety of shapes because it arises in every one of the various ways of behaviour, feeling and life which we have found to be characteristic of the action of human beings who play their part in the genesis and growths of civilizations. In the disintegration phase each of these single lines of action is apt to split into a pair of mutually antithetical and antipathetic variations or substitutes, in which the response to a challenge is polarized into two alternatives—one passive and the other active, but neither of them creative" (Toynbee Vol.1 490). Thus, decline is characterized by the breaking down of both the creative element of the civilization *and* its cohesion. Because this breakdown occurs along every line which is relevant to the civilization's growth, it directly inhibits any further civilizational growth. The forward movement of the

civilization is impeded because the mainstream choices which remain are both uncreative and highly divisive.

Toynbee argues that the soul splits on both the individual level and the social level. On the individual level, some will fall into the spiritual state of "abandon," wherein they give themselves up to base passions and instincts, disillusioned by the restraints placed on them by a failing civilized order. Others will engage in a war with nature, attempting to master their passions and instincts, thereby achieving control in a civilization which has lost its self-deterministic component.

On the social level, some members withdraw from the social formation, giving up on the structure altogether. Having lost faith in the institutions and forms of the civilization, they withdraw, hoping to save themselves from the consequences of its collapse. Others charge forth, suicidally carrying the banner of the decaying civilization. Toynbee calls these members of the society "martyrs," arguing that they "[court] death for the vindication of an ideal" (Toynbee Vol.1 491). Another example of this on the level of the state would be Nazi German soldiers who surrendered en masse during the American invasion of Europe as compared to those who fought bitterly to the end in Berlin in 1945, even launching counterattacks against the apocalyptic Soviet onslaught. However, as Toynbee states, neither of these polarized approaches are creative. Because they lack the creativity which is necessary for civilizational growth, they necessarily succumb to the challenges which threaten the existence of the civilization, essentially amounting to death throes and nothing more. Spengler might be inclined to characterize this martyrdom as an energetic (though ineffective) revolt against the supremacy of the intellect. The martyr rejects rationality in favor of a suicidal battle for an emotionally charged cause. The deserters of the civilization, on the other hand, Spengler may associate with the supremacy of the intellect itself.

These members of the civilization have searched for a reason to remain with the formation and could find none. As a consequence they abandon their comrades. However, Spengler's hypothesis about the sterility of civilized man would suggest that he would not support the assertion that this is an act to "save himself." Rather, he might argue that this desertion is a simple refusal to continue marching along with the formation because the energy required of each step cannot be justified by a soul which no longer believes in anything.

Spengler confirms Toynbee's arguments about a loss of creativity when he speaks of the decline of civilizations. However, for Spengler, there is a notable difference in the cause of this loss of creativity. He argues that "there is a fundamental connexion between the become (the hard-set) and Death" (Spengler Vol.1 54). All civilizations begin as creative entities, according to all the authors we have covered. But Spengler notes that, as this creativity surges forward and strives to manifest itself in the real world, it engages in an act of suicide. The creative soul which conjures up the image of a magnificent statue in its mind, as well as a justification for the effort required to bring it into being, dies upon the creation of that statue. The soul's justification for its own existence is the pursuit of the end, and once that end is accomplished, Spengler argues, the creative soul no longer has cause to exist.

Spengler is careful not to describe the creativity of the soul in technical language. Rather, he opts for the spiritual and artful approach of a poet. This is because he considers the civilizational soul to be a deeply visceral thing which is *felt*, not *rationalized*. At the heart of this creative spirit, he argues, is a wondering awe about the world. This "world-fear," as he calls it, "is assuredly the most *creative* of all prime feelings. Man owes to it the ripest and deepest forms and images, not only of his conscious inward life, but also of the infinitely-varied external culture which reflects this life. Like a secret melody that not every ear can perceive, it runs

through the form language of every true art-work, every inward philosophy, every important deed" (Spengler Vol.1 79). Thus, it is simultaneously through the manifestation of the soul's creativity, and a hyper-intellectualism which follows, that the spirit of the decaying civilization becomes sick and uncreative. This "world-fear," or, put another way, visceral, spiritual, and humble relationship with the natural world is essential for the creative soul to prosper. Spengler asserts that "only the spiritually dead man of the autumnal cities — Hammurabi's Babylon, Ptolemaic Alexandria, Islamic Baghdad, Paris and Berlin to-day — only the pure intellectual, the sophist, the sensualist, the Darwinian, loses it or is able to evade it by setting up a secretless 'scientific world-view' between himself and the alien" (Spengler Vol.1 79).

During this period, Spengler argues that "the fire in the Soul dies down. The dwindling powers rise to one more, half-successful, effort of creation, and produce the Classicism that is common to all dying Cultures. The soul thinks once again, and in Romanticism looks back piteously to its childhood; then finally, weary, reluctant, cold, it loses its desire to be, and, as in Imperial Rome, wishes itself out of the overlong daylight and back in the darkness of protomysticism, in the womb of the mother, in the grave" (Spengler Vol.1 108). This "half-successful, effort of creation" of which Spengler speaks may be the product of the uncreative polarities which Toynbee lays out in his *Study of History*. It is certainly not the product of those who fall into "abandon" and desert the civilization, but it may be the product of the death throes of the martyrs who suicidally advance the spirit of the civilization without any true hope of preserving it.

Spengler also places tremendous emphasis on the dichotomy between rural life and that of the city. For Spengler, this is because of the city's association with the systematizing of life. "The systematic spirit, narrow and withdrawn ('abs-tract') from the sensual, is an autumnal and

passing phenomenon belonging to the ripest conditions of a Culture. Linked with the *city*, into which its life is more and more herded, it comes and goes with the city. In the Classical world, there is science only from the 6th-century Ionians to the Roman period, but there was art in the Classical world for just as long as there was existence" (Spengler Vol.1 102). If the unspiritual, rigid, "secretless" scientific worldview is associated with the decline of the internal, creative, artistic spirit, then it is associated with the decline and death of the civilization's soul. If it is associated with the city, then the city is associated with the decline and death of the civilization's soul.

Spengler further lays out this distinction and degradation of the rich, cultural soul when he states that "the world city means cosmopolitanism in place of 'home,' cold matter-of-fact in place of reverence for tradition and age, scientific irreligion as a fossil representative of the older religion of the heart, 'society' in place of the state, natural instead of hard-earned rights" (Spengler Vol.1 33). This distinction between "cosmopolitan" and "home" is interesting due to its application to major historical cities. For example, "while it was thought that Rome was mistress of the world, it was also the case that the city was in a sense felt to *be* the world" (Robertson and Inglis 5). The idea of the city possessing the cosmos is crucial to understanding the city as "secretless." There is no sense of mystery when the city believes itself to be in possession of all that is.

Spengler's citation of the 6th-century Ionians as possessing signs of this "systematic spirit" may seem surprising considering Greek civilization had not yet produced the majority of its great accomplishments. However, we must understand that Spengler does not describe the shift from a spirited culture to an actualized civilization as being sudden. This is a long process spanning hundreds of years. While he seems to be arguing that this process *began* in Greece with

the 6th-century Ionians, Spengler does not expect us to believe that Greek civilization had, by that point, exhausted its spiritedness and slumped into a steep decline.

Spengler does not go into great depth as to *why* the city produces and is representative of such symptoms of decline, but one may infer a few things from his description. Firstly, the city is a technological feat which requires cold, hard, scientific thinking over that of the spiritual or the artistic. Therefore, the physical birth and growth of the city (its buildings, infrastructure, economy, etc.) demand a conversion of the mind to a less spiritual focus. Secondly, the city is associated with productivity. The greatest buildings in the world, the strongest economies, and the largest institutions are all centered in cities. Therefore, if worldly manifestation means the death of the creative soul which conceived of the thing-manifest, then the city facilitates the death of the creative soul more rapidly and on a larger scale than anything else.

The power of civilizations has historically been concentrated in the cities (Athens, Rome, London, Beijing, New York), and because of this, the fate of the city becomes the fate of the civilization. If Toynbee's "creative minorities" are concentrated in the cities, managing the institutions, and preserving the order of the vessel, then the decline of the soul within the cities becomes amplified into a decline of the souls of all the members of the civilization who are collectively dependent upon the "creative minority" and its institutions, traditions, and leadership. The "cosmopolis," as Spengler calls it, "stands at the end of the life's course of every great Culture. The Culture-man whom the land has spiritually formed is seized and possessed by his own creation, the City, and is made into its creature, its executive organ, and finally its victim. This stony mass is the *absolute* city. Its image, as it appears with all its grandiose beauty in the light-world of the human eye, contains the whole noble death-symbolism of the definitive thing-become. The spirit-pervaded stone of Gothic buildings, after a millennium of

style-evolution, has become the soulless material of this daemonic stone-desert. These final cities are *wholly* intellect" (Spengler Vol.2 99).

This complete dominion of the intellect pushes out any instinctive or sensual conception of the world, according to Spengler. It drives out all wonder and mystery, and reduces the world to numbers, equations, and causal relationships. At this point, "when Being is sufficiently uprooted and Waking-Being sufficiently strained, there suddenly emerges into the bright light of history a phenomenon that has long been preparing itself underground and now steps forward to make an end of the drama — the sterility of civilized man" (Spengler Vol.2 104). Spengler uses the word "sterile" to denote both the biological character of civilized man and his unspirited character. The argument is that, as the intellect becomes more prominent, the visceral, innately human aspects of our lives become less vibrant. This undermines many motivations which we have, for most of history, taken for granted. But, according to Spengler, "the last man of the world-city no longer wants to live — he may cling to life as an individual, but as a type, as an aggregate, no, for it is a characteristic of this collective existence that it eliminates the terror of death... Children do not happen, not because children have become impossible, but principally because intelligence at the peak of intensity can no longer find any reason for their existence" (Spengler Vol.2 104).

This is an extreme position by Spengler, but it is not incompatible with the views of the other thinkers we have examined. Toynbee emphasizes the importance of the creative spirit. When that spirit is gone, the people, he argues, either become metaphysically suicidal or give in to animalistic instincts. In both cases, there is a giving up on the self. The morale of the civilization is failing, and the people cease to make genuine efforts to preserve it. Population

decline, for Spengler, is not necessarily a *cause* of civilizational decline, but certainly an indicator.

The decline in birth rates, rather, signifies a shift in the collective spirit of the people. "When the ordinary thought of a highly cultivated people begins to regard 'having children' as a question of *pro's* and *con's*, the great turning-point has come. For Nature knows nothing of *pro* and *con*. Everywhere, wherever life is actual, reigns an inward organic logic, an 'it,' a drive, that is utterly independent of waking-being, with its causal linkages, and indeed not even observed by it... When reasons have to be put forward at all in a question of life, life itself has become questionable. At that point begins prudent limitation of the number of births" (Spengler Vol.2 104). A civilization that is truly *alive*, according to Spengler, possesses a visceral drive to pursue the objects of its soul. The pursuit of glory, honor, beauty, truth, justice, magnificence, virtue, etc., are not treated as logical questions to be justified and worked out. They are treated as mandates of one's existence.

This applies to grand and mundane things equally. A spirited soul needs justification for neither child-rearing nor magnificent architecture. Both are parts of the life which the soul is driven to live. It is for this reason that Spengler warns of "the ages of much writing and much reading — that they should perpetually confuse the opposition of life and thought with the opposition between thoughts-about-life and thought-about-thought" (Spengler Vol.2 17). The civilization, for Spengler, begins to die when the thinking man, the man of "waking-being," replaces the "living" man. The soul of the civilization, which is its heart, ceases to beat when it is only spoken of and never felt.

Samuel Huntington echoes much of the same analysis as Spengler and Toynbee. He observes that "when civilizations first emerge, their people are usually vigorous, dynamic, brutal,

mobile, and expansionist. They are relatively unCivilized. As the civilization evolves it becomes more settled and develops the techniques and skills that make it more Civilized" (Huntington 320-321). The term "civilized" is used slightly differently depending on the writer. In this case, it appears that Huntington is using the term to mean less "vigorous, dynamic, brutal, mobile, and expansionist." While some of these traits can be dangerous if not properly controlled, they *are*, generally speaking, the qualities which Toynbee and Spengler consider to be the vital essence of a growing civilization. The vigor, mobility, and dynamic nature of the "uncivilized" man is precisely what allows for his creativity to realize itself in the world.

Spengler would likely argue that this vigor and uncivilized behavior is *driven* by a soul which requires such energetic action in pursuit of the realization of the soul's aims. Toynbee would likely praise a vigorous and dynamic people because these traits allow their creativity to be effectively deployed against challenges which face them. Additionally, it is difficult, as a collective people, to be vigorous, dynamic, mobile, or expansionist if there is no collective sense of self. If there is no unity, unified action is, by definition, impossible. Therefore, these swift and vigorous actions of these "uncivilized" peoples indicate a cohesion which is not reflected in declining civilizations (at least according to Spengler and Toynbee).

Yazgan also echoes many of the sentiments of Spengler and Toynbee, though with less fanciful language. Yazgan emphasizes the natural disorder of the universe. Rather than thinking of human societies as a naturally occurring default, he suggests we view them in the context of physics. "According to the second law, the entropy level of any isolated system increases in time as the amount of available energy decreases and its quality degrades" (Yazgan 13). Therefore, civilizations, which are ordered units, must stave off disorder through their "order creating

mechanisms." Civilizational decline, or, in other words, a return to the natural state of disorder, occurs when the OCMs are no longer capable of preserving the order of the civilization.

Toynbee emphasizes the necessity of a civilization to overcome challenges through creative solutions. Yazğan states that, "during an ordinary crisis, as the OCMs lose their effectiveness and efficiency, civilizations face more problems in the re-creation of their orders and ultimately dissolve by surrendering themselves to the entropic orientation of the universe" (Yazğan 19). In this regard, Yazğan is in complete unity with Toynbee.

However, Yazğan's articulation of the reasons for the decreasing effectiveness and efficiency of OCMs is a less clear matter. He argues that these changes in OCMs "can be created by conjectural problems in the energy flow, inability of the existing energy structure to provide adequate energy necessary for the survival of order at the existing level of complexity, or exhaustion in OCMs due to their structural incapacitation" (Yazğan 19). What Yazğan means by "conjectural problems in the energy flow" is, presumably, that there is a misallocation of resources to the OCMs. In less abstract terms, this may mean that a civilization devotes too little manpower to its institutions. Perhaps there are too few school teachers, not enough priests, or inadequate funds to subsidize the arts.

The second issue, regarding the "inability of the existing energy structure to provide adequate energy necessary for the survival of order at the existing level of complexity," is similar to the first, but implies a structural problem rather than a mere misallocation of resources. This may occur when a society becomes too large for the existing institutions. This relates to Toynbee's concern with the idolization of the ephemeral institution. Institutions are not perpetually capable of maintaining order in a society and resolving its problems. As times change, institutions become outdated and they must be updated, and perhaps expanded, in order

to address the new problems. Here, Yazğan is warning of the inability of an outdated set of OCMs to adequately preserve order in a civilization.

Thirdly, Yazğan raises the issue of the structural incapacitation of OCMs. This would include things like the Communist attempts to forcibly demolish religious institutions in their countries. One might also consider the effects of a war. On the level of the city-state, Athenian political institutions were uprooted by the Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian war. Each of the three explanations Yazğan provides for the diminishing effectiveness and efficiency of OCMs depict an increasingly graver picture for the society. Misallocation of resources is likely the easiest problem to resolve. Inadequacy of a social structure is harder to resolve, but not impossible. A complete incapacitation of a society's OCMs is a very dire situation, and likely consistent with Spengler's picture of the "autumnal" city. Similarly, Toynbee's description of the tyrannical, formerly creative minority could be characterized as an order creating mechanism (mimesis) which has been incapacitated.

Each of the thinkers we have examined presents the issue of civilizational decline in different terms, but there are a number of unifying threads through these arguments. Firstly is the notion of the creative soul, which is embraced by both Spengler and Toynbee. This soul is necessary because it creates institutions and traditions which help to preserve the civilization. As Yazğan notes, disorder is the natural state of all things, and preserving the order of the civilization, therefore, requires constant maintenance by and of order creating mechanisms.

The second unifying concept is the fragility of the civilization's soul and its institutions. As noted by both Yazğan and Toynbee, institutions must adapt to changing circumstances. However, as Spengler, Toynbee, and Huntington point out, decline is associated with a reduction

in the vitality of the soul of the people, resulting in less agile and effective responses to novel problems.

The third unifying concept is that of the civilization's morale. This idea is only explicitly expressed by Toynbee and Spengler, but it may be seen through inference in Huntington's description of the civilized man and his lack of intensity. The morale of the civilization is important, because, as Yazğan notes, the natural forces of the universe are opposed to the civilization's continued existence. Preserving order requires the expenditure of energy. The expenditure of energy requires the belief that the expenditure is worthwhile. As Spengler and Toynbee argue, the man of the collapsing civilization no longer truly cares about the preservation of the civilization—not in its material form, not in its metaphysical form, and not even, as Spengler argues, in its human form.

Is Recovery From Decline Possible?

Now we come to the question of recovery from decline. Up to this point, the scholarship has been relatively unified. However, here is where the divergence in thinking begins to show. Spengler is the most pessimistic of the thinkers we have examined. This may be due in part to his characterization of the civilization's people as products rather than creators. Although he may be referring to the masses, not the creative minority, his perspective on the inability of the people to control their own destiny paints a grim picture for those who would like to preserve their civilization. In fact, Spengler says that "world-history is the history of the great Cultures, and peoples are but the symbolic forms and vessels in which the men of these Cultures fulfil their Destinies" (Spengler Vol.2 170). This suggests that "peoples" are distinct from the individual men who fulfill their destinies through them. Therefore, the helplessness of the masses might not

doom the civilization if they are under the direction of a creative minority. However, even if the active decision-making of the masses is not necessary for revival, there remains the problem of finding an effective minority to lead them.

In fact, Spengler explicitly asserts that "the great statesman is the gardener of a people" (Spengler Vol.2 445). This suggests that Spengler believes individual statesmen have the power to reshape the character of the people. A gardener can alter the qualities of a plant by watering it, exposing it to sunlight, and changing the soil in which it grows. Similarly, a statesman may be capable of reinvigorating the civilizational spirit which has begun to atrophy. However, one should not necessarily hold their breath for such a statesman, because Spengler also observes that "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" (Spengler Vol.1 32). And later, he casts further doubt on the hopes for a heroic savior as he says that "it is a question of Incident whether he is one who can master [the people's 'mass souls'] or one who is swept away by them" (Spengler Vol.2 19).

Spengler's view of the chances for redemption by way of a heroic individual is grim. He believes that late-stage civilizations become subject to "Caesarism," falling under the control of powerful tyrants. But even if such a tyrant did not take charge, it is not clear to Spengler that a good-willed savior would be capable of commanding the "mass souls" of the people. For Spengler, once the process of actualization begins, the soul is already in a process of decline. With each new building, work of literature, and political institution, the vibrant soul of the fledgling civilization begins to wither away. This may be described as the supremacy of the "systematic spirit," and it can not, according to Spengler, be avoided. It is coexistent with the city, and the city is seemingly a natural phenomenon of all civilizations.

Some might contest the claim that the city is necessary for civilization. Thomas Jefferson advances the position that a pervasive agrarian lifestyle is beneficial to a society. If Jefferson is right that "Agriculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness.," then one must wonder why a civilization could not prosper without major cosmopolitan centers (Jefferson 1). Jefferson's claims about agrarian life suggest that a society can combat both material problems and problems of the soul without falling into decline. For Spengler, the city seems to be necessary as it is the fullest actualization of the soul. But the role of the city and "the fact that world history is city history involves that the peasant lives outside history--he is an extra-historical being" (Kovacs 3). In this way, it seems that Jefferson and Spengler would agree that the agrarian lifestyle shields the farmer from the corrosive effects of a civilization which has become "systematized" and "sterile." However, there also seems to be disagreement on the question of whether the cosmopolitan city must be present. Spengler appears to argue that the city necessarily arises in all civilizations. This may be because the city is the logical conclusion to a culture which pursues maximum productive power so as to actualize its will in the world.

From the perspective of Spengler, a civilization's existence is contingent upon its persistent inability to fully actualize the mandates of its creative soul. Once the civilization has actualized itself and carried its ambitions to their worldly conclusions, the soul's existence ceases to have justification and dissipates. Therefore, the only way, according to Spengler's logic, to preserve a civilization would be to prevent the actualization of its ambitions. It would be the equivalent to preventing a creative, driven architect from ever completing the building to which he has directed all his creative potential. Until the building is completed, his creative energy will persist. But is there any other justification for the civilization's existence other than the

achievement of its aims? Is it not a futile existence to indefinitely deny oneself the fulfillment of one's innermost ambitions? Spengler does not comment on this question, but the natural human drive to go forth and create is undoubtedly in direct opposition to any attempt to curb that creativity.

Toynbee, despite his frequent agreement with Spengler, diverges on this issue, taking a more hopeful view of civilizational revival. He stands in direct opposition to Spengler's fatalism when he says that "humanity is not an Ixion bound for ever to his wheel nor a Sisyphus for ever rolling his stone to the summit of the same mountain and hopelessly watching it roll down again... The divine spark of creative power is still alive in us, and, if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then the stars in their courses cannot defeat our efforts to attain the goal of human endeavour" (Toynbee Vol.1 297). The subjects of this statement are "humanity," "us," "we," and "our." Therefore, Toynbee's assessment seems to be directed at the human whole. Without the majority, the direction of the minority is meaningless, because it cannot be driven to actualization. For Toynbee, both the majority and the minority are equally relevant to the rekindling of the "divine spark of creative power." Not surprisingly, Toynbee reportedly called Spengler's *Decline of the West* "undocumented determinism" (Callan 594). This criticism likely had much to do with the divergence between these two thinkers regarding the power of human free will.

However, the creative minority is the necessary second component to civilizational revival. Toynbee argues that "in a growing civilization the creator is called upon to play the part of a conqueror who replies to a challenge with a victorious response; in a disintegrating civilization he is called upon to play the part of a saviour who comes to the rescue of a society that has failed to respond because the challenge has worsted a minority that has ceased to be

creative" (Toynbee Vol.1 607). This suggests that the creative minority which is in power during the time of a decline must be replaced by an external creative minority which can more effectively address the problems of the civilization. Toynbee is not referring to a creative minority which is external to the civilization, but rather one which is external to the power-structures within the civilization. Not every member of the creative minority possesses the means to guide the civilization, and Toynbee argues that, from time to time, the leading minority must be replaced with fresh, creative individuals.

However, this is extremely difficult, both because the creative minority in power will likely be reluctant to relinquish its power, but also because "the secession of the proletariat, which is the essential feature of disintegration, has itself been achieved under the leadership of creative personalities for whose activity there is now no scope except in the organization of opposition to the incubus of the uncreative 'powers that be'" (Toynbee Vol.1 606). Toynbee argues that attempts by the creative minority which is not in power to gain power will be characterized by their facilitation of the degenerative schism between the creative minority that is in power and the uncreative masses (which Toynbee here associates with the "proletariat," or lower class). Therefore, efforts by an external creative minority to acquire the power necessary to save the civilization from itself will likely lead to further disunity before things get better. This further disunity may be irreparable.

One criticism of Toynbee's relative optimism is that "in spite of [his] effort to avoid the capriciousness of an individualistic interpretation which ascribes to great personalities what further analysis would attribute to social factors, his conception of cultural change is basically individualistic" (Merton 213). This is a worthwhile consideration, and one to which Spengler is well attuned. Spengler argues that the great leaders of a civilization can easily be swept away by

the "mass souls" of the people. The power of the individual must be realistically balanced with the power of social factors. However, it would be unreasonable to characterize the individual's role as inconsequential.

The difficulty of repairing a social body that has begun to fall apart, however, does not imply its impossibility. Niccolò Machiavelli also speaks to this issue. While he is explicitly addressing the issue of preserving nations, the logic of his arguments seem applicable to the civilizational unit. Machiavelli argues that "the mode of renewing them is, as was said, to lead them back toward their beginnings. For all the beginnings of sects, republics, and kingdoms must have some goodness in them, by means of which they may regain their first reputation and their first increase. Because in the process of time that goodness is corrupted, unless something intervenes to lead it back to the mark, it of necessity kills that body" (Machiavelli 209). Both Spengler and Toynbee would likely agree with this assessment, though Spengler would argue that, while a return to the "beginnings" is the solution to the civilization's salvation, it is impossible.

Machiavelli also emphasizes the importance of motivated men and effective institutions. He speaks of the Romans, arguing that "the orders that drew the Roman republic back toward its beginning were the tribunes of the plebs, the censors, and all the other laws that went against the ambition and the insolence of men. Such orders have need of being brought to life by the Virtue of a Citizen who rushes spiritedly to execute them against the power of those who transgress them" (Machiavelli 210). Yazğan echoes this emphasis on the importance of institutions and those who give life to them when he says that "if OCMs can be revitalized through reorganization (structural reform) or new energy sources that are adequate for satisfying the needs of the order can be discovered (enlargement or deepening of the energy base), it is possible

to rein over the process and decrease the increasing entropy again" (Yazğan 19). Toynbee and Spengler would likely agree with this assessment on its face, but the issue remains that, as civilizations begin to collapse, it becomes increasingly difficult to find "a Citizen who rushes spiritedly to execute" the orders of the civilization.

Machiavelli addresses this issue, at least partially, with his stipulation that these orders "often be renewed or indeed that through some accident outside the said order come to the said renewal" (Machiavelli 209). Perhaps if civilizations are renewed frequently enough by way of their institutions, the original spirit which created those institutions may be preserved. However, the people must be careful not to become mechanical followers of their institutions, for herein lies the death of the creative spirit. Ultimately, the preservation of this spirit requires a supremely confident and intentional will, channeled through a powerful minority, in an act of civilizational regeneration.

Conclusion

Civilizations have impressed a large footprint upon the sands of human history. Their creative spirits have yielded great scientific, artistic, architectural, musical, and literary wonders—each with the unique mark of the civilization from which it was born. The significance of historical civilizations and those which persist today is tremendous. However, as all of the thinkers we have examined note, units of human organization, including civilizations, have repeatedly succumbed to disorder. Civilizational collapse is a tragic event which extinguishes the unique character, not only of many of the worldly creations of that civilization, but also of an entire people.

The civilizational unit, as Spengler, Toynbee, Bozeman, and especially Yazğan have noted, is vulnerable to chaotic change. Specifically, we must be concerned about the vulnerability of the peculiar spirit which drives the creative greatness of each civilization. As Toynbee has pointed out, this soul is both cultivated and preserved by the creative will of the minority. This will, which is directed through a spirit of self-determination, allows a civilized people to overcome the challenges which threaten the existence of their civilization. However, through various factors, including idolization of self, institutions, and techniques, the creative minority loses its creativity.

Spengler appears to support the idea of an influential minority which drives civilizational development, but places the blame for its eventual impotence on the actualization of its creative aspirations. Once the will has been actualized, he argues, it ceases to be. Toynbee does not take such a fatalist approach, but does warn of the dangers that come with successfully manifesting the ambitions of the people, including idolization and intoxication with victory.

Yazğan and Bozeman also place emphasis on the preservation of what Spengler and Toynbee call the soul, but which they would more likely describe as the peculiar character of an ordered people. The means of preserving this peculiar character is, for Yazğan the "order creating mechanisms," and for Bozeman, the "primary structuring ideas" of the civilization. However, when these mechanisms and ideas become inflexible and incapable of preserving the order of the society they uphold, they crumble along with their civilization.

Each of the thinkers we have examined, from Spengler to Machiavelli, have a different perspective on the possibility and probability of preventing the death of a human society. The most optimistic assessments rely on the intelligence and vigor of the victims of a decline. While there is significant disagreement on the prospects for the recovery of a declining civilization

(most notably between Spengler and Toynbee), it is difficult to preclude its possibility. So long as humanity retains its free will, the creative spirit cannot be fully discounted.

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