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Deminutio Capitis: Theories of Western Civilization and World Order, 1919-2019

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Abstract

During the long nineteenth century 'civilization' was the highest-order concept through which European empire was imagined and justified. It divided the world into a hierarchical space of identity and difference on the basis of the idea of progress. It posited a constitutive identity among societies by assimilating them to a universal timeline of development, and a historical difference among societies by assigning them to different stages of development, and different velocities of progress, along that timeline. Modern Europe was a singular civilization at the crest of world history; other societies were shadows of its 'savage' and 'barbarian' past. Scholars have done an enormous amount to excavate this discourse, but their narratives invariably draw to a close with the fading of the naked language of civilizational superiority after the First World War. I argue that this is a mistake, confusing the transformation of the concept of civilization for its disappearance. Successive crises within Europe - fratricidal barbarism, imperial disintegration, fascism and Bolshevism - and the simultaneous rise of anti-colonial resistance and non-European powers, led during the interwar years to what Paul Valery diagnosed as Europe's 'deminutio capitis'. Europe's status as a singular civilization at the head of a linear process of asymptomatic progress was shattered, replaced with the aporetic possibility of decline, and the looming threat of global pluralisation. What followed over the subsequent century, I contend, were a long series of attempts to reinvent the concept of civilization to reimagine a post-European world order in the shadow of this 'deminutio capitis'. I analyse this discourse on two planes. First, I examine what I call the 'problem-space' of Europe's deminutio capitis. Western theorists of world order have repeatedly confronted the problem of civilization as that of, first, interpreting the nature and trajectory of the crisis of Europe's deminutio capitis, and second, reformulating the concept of civilization to both take into account that crisis, and to restore Europe - or 'the West' - to its status as the seat of world history. I call this a problem-space because the relative diminution of Europe on the world stage is only a peculiarly theoretical problem relative to the assumptions about historical time built into the traditional concept of civilization. It is only when fixed on this terrain, the terrain of Europe's imperial modernity, that Europe appears in need of rehabilitation, and that rehabilitation must take the form of a vindication of its modernity. Theorists have, I contend, been trapped within this matrix of assumptions. Second, I trace the genealogical mutations of the concept of civilization as it has been successively reappropriated to imagine and legitimate new world-ordering projects, from a German imperial mundi and a revivified British Empire (interwar), to the North Atlantic alliance and a dominative American empire (high Cold War), to the expansionist liberal interventionism that succeeded it (1990s). I chart three transformations in the concept of civilization, corresponding to each of these periods: its 'pluralisation', 'liberalisation', and 'deterritorialization'. I combine these two planes of analysis in a single narrative through a version of what David Armitage calls 'serial contextualism'. I string together synchronic portraits of theorists who have grappled with and responded to Europe's deminutio capitis, while stringing these portraits together into a diachronic picture of the genealogical metamorphoses of the concept of civilization. Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Karl Popper, James Burnham, Frances Fukuyama and John Rawls are all given starring roles in this narrative, though in each case, cast within the context of a wider ensemble.

Lay Summary

During the height of European empire in the nineteenth century the dominant framework through which Europe understood itself to the rest of the world was 'civilization'. A projection of the idea of progress onto the world, it organised societies into different stages of development, from 'savage' through to 'barbarian', and finally 'civilized'. In the wake of the First World War this framework broke down. In this thesis, I reconstruct the changing ways in which world order and Western civilization were reimagined over the subsequent century, and the ways in which Western thinkers have striven to revive Europe's status as the seat of world progress.

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Section 1: Preliminaries

Chapter 1: Sketch for a History of Western Civilization and World Order

What is Civilization?

'Civilization' was originally coined as a jurisprudential term denoting the transferring of a criminal trial into a civil proceeding as long ago as the sixteenth century[1]. We find the first *modern* uses of the term in French, which then carried into the English and German languages. Fernand Braudel claims that its earliest known use was by Turgot in 1752, who wrote of 'the process of becoming civilized'. Its first recorded use in English is found in Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* in 1767. By the end of the eighteenth century it had become an integral part of the European philosophical, historical and imperial lexicon. The root word of 'civilization' is *civil* from the Latin *civilis* and *cive*. Societies had, for millennia, sought to distinguish themselves from one another on the basis of their 'polished' or 'civilized' way of life. What then is the special significance of the formulation of its noun-form – civilization?

Authors have occasionally denied that the idea of civilization represents anything qualitatively new. Duncan Bell has previously suggested that 'the underlying idea' of civilization 'is not unique to modernity or the West', given that analogous ideas were common to China, Japan and the Islamic world[2]. Bell's claim rests on his conceiving of civilization as a 'standard of assessment' and a 'regime of difference'. It is a standard by which societies simultaneously conceive of themselves as superior and order other societies into a hierarchical matrix of inferior difference. Anthony Pagden proposes that the first *mission civilisatrice* was undertaken by the Roman Empire[3]. In ancient Greece 'barbarianism' was a pejorative for foreigners, especially Persians. But for the Romans, Pagden explains, barbarianism was not an ethnic attribute but a question of the kind of social composite in which an individual participated. It was therefore possible to extend the Roman body of citizens (*cives*) under law. As the Roman Empire drew in new territories, cities were admitted in different gradations – colonies, municipalities, tributaries, free – to the *civitas*.

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1 Fernan Braudel, 1993, *A History of Civilizations*. Translated by Richard Mayne. Penguin: London, UK, pp. 3-8; Raymond Williams, 1976, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Fontana: London, UK, pp. 57-60.

2 Duncan Bell, 2013, 'Ideologies of Empire', in Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

3 Anthony Pagden, 1995, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France C. 1500-c.1800*. Yale University Press: New Haven, USA, see Chapter 1.

While these and similar claims are no doubt true on their own terms, I believe they elide the fundamental characteristic of ‘civilization’. It was a regime of global identity and difference through which Europe understood both itself as an imagined community and its relationship to other societies around the world through the idea of *progress*. Other societies were rank-ordered on a universal timeline of development relative to their fulfilment of the economic, social, legal and moral achievements of modern Europe. ‘Civilization’ was coined as a noun precisely in order that it could refer to an abstract process: uneven societal progress. This also explains the two alternating senses in which ‘civilization’ was used: it denoted an ongoing *process of self-improvement* given that all societies were thought to participate in a universal stream of progress; and at the same time it referred to an *achieved social condition* that positioned Europe as the fulcrum of progress as ‘the’ civilization.

This claim is scarcely novel. As I have already noted the concept of ‘civilization’ was first coined in French and English by Turgot and Ferguson, two of the progenitors of the four-stage theory of stadial development that laid the basis for the visions of universal progress that would dominate the long nineteenth century. In his influential *History of Civilization in Europe* (1828), Francois Guizot writes that ‘the first fact comprised in the word *civilisation*… is that of progress, of development’, and he goes on to describe civilization as the conjunctive development of the external wealth, power and sophistication of a society, and the faculties, ideas and sentiments of its individual members[4]. Jean Starobinski points out that civilization entered history ‘at the same time as the modern sense of the word *progress*’, and that the ‘two words were destined to maintain the most intimate relationship’ thereafter[5]. But I do not think the character or consequences of this fact have been analysed in any systematic fashion. For this, I believe we can do no better than turn to Reinhart Koselleck’s theory of the modern regime of historical time.

Koselleck’s theory is an outgrowth of his attempt to identify the phenomenological conditions of historical experience, so we must start here. Koselleck begins with the observation that historical events can only be communicated through linguistic activity[6]. But language captures the phenomenological experience of the individuals caught up in these events, Koselleck contends, not the mind-independent structure of the event itself. In this sense history as a plane of understanding is not an epiphenomenon of the events its represents, but always an interpretation of them, both at its genesis when it is first *recorded* and over time as knowledge of those events is repeatedly *reworked* into new phenomenologies. How might we compare the changing phenomenology of history, the different ways in which

4 Francois Guizot, 1848, *General History of Civilization in Europe*. William and Robert Chambers: Edinburgh, UK, p. 29.

5 Jean Starobinski, 1993, *Blessings in Disguise; or the Morality of Evil*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA, p. 4.

6 Reinhart Koselleck, 2004, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Columbia University Press: New York, USA, pp. 222-223.

events are ordered within experience? Koselleck believes this is possible because the experience of history has a common structure: to experience history is *always and inescapably* to organise social events into a pattern of past, present and future[7]. History is cognized through time. But this experience of history as a temporal stream is not diffuse, protean or random. Rather, Koselleck proposes, there are formal 'meta-historical' categories which underpin *all* historical experience: what he calls 'the space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'.

Experience is the present past, the way in which completed events are recorded and remembered[8]. Expectation is the present anticipation of the future, the hopes, desires, fears and dreams of events that have not yet passed into experience. Koselleck emphasises that these categories are not 'symmetrical'. Experiences are assimilated into a surveyable totality because they have been completed, while expectations are scattered across an infinite variety of individual possibilities. It is for this reason that Koselleck takes the metaphors of 'space' and 'horizon' to be apposite to each. Koselleck's ambition is to analyse the shifting ways in which the space of experience and horizon of expectation are ordered within social, political and historical concepts in order to draw out their underlying phenomenology of historical time. What fruit does this bear? Koselleck's fundamental thesis is that modernity shattered the stable sense of historical continuity of the medieval period and inaugurated a new and revolutionary mode of historical time.

In the medieval world the glacial rate of social change meant that there was a reliable expectation that the future would look much like the past[9]. Most of Europe lived as peasants following the cycle of nature in a form of life passed down by their predecessors, and passed forward to their successors. When innovations appeared they diffused slowly. Koselleck finds this same experience of historical contiguity reflected in the prevalent topos *historia magistra vitae*[10]. History was seen as life's great teacher, a fund of experiences from which lessons for how to act in the present and future could be drawn. Machiavelli, for instance, told us not only to admire the ancients but to find within them exemplars for how to navigate politics. At the same time, historical writing was *additive*[11]. New experiences were registered as qualitatively no different from past experiences, and could therefore be assimilated into the like-for-like units of chronological time. The only escape from this assumption of historical contiguity was found by turning away from the temporal realm altogether, to the

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7 Ibid.,, pp. 256-259.

8 Ibid.,, pp. 259-263.

9 Ibid.,, pp. 263-264.

10 Ibid.,, pp. 26-31.

11 Ibid.,, pp. 230.

supernatural[12]. Fantasies, nightmares and hopes were etherealised, projected onto visions of the Hereafter and perpetually deferred prophecies of the eschaton.

In what Koselleck calls the ‘saddle-period’ of modernity (1750-1850), in the midst of Europe’s dramatic techno-industrial revolution, a new regime of historical time began to establish itself[13]. What is crucial for Koselleck is that the onrush of events *accelerated*, occurring at ever-shorter intervals of time, and the character of those events was *new*, creating a vertiginous sense of hurtling into the unknown. For the first time the past was no longer a reliable guide to the future. When Chateaubriand committed to comparing old and new revolutions in 1797 he quickly came to bewail that whatever he wrote of France by day was overtaken by news of events by nightfall[14]. The unity of experience between generations fragmented, dividing families into historical waves of time. The net effect was that the horizon of expectation began to break away from the space of experience[15]. It was at this disjuncture that a new temporality of an open and accelerating future emerged. For Koselleck the concept of *Neuzeit*, modernity and *moderne* are unique as periodizing concepts[16]. They demarcate a segment of time not with reference to its determinative character, its institutions, actors or events, but its temporal structure. To be modern is simply to be new, to be pulled onwards in an accelerating vortex of perpetual self-transcendence.

Modernity created a new kind of politics[17]. As the past lost its stranglehold on the future a new surplus of utopian expectation burst forward. Dreams once relegated to the supernatural were projected onto the future as immanent possibilities of the here and now to be achieved through the remaking of human nature and society. The vocabulary of politics became temporalised. Concepts like 'revolution', 'emancipation', 'dictatorship', 'crisis', 'development' – and indeed, 'civilization' – took on new connotations as indices of historical change and movement. A new family of ideologies 'isms' emerged claiming the legitimacy of time, distinguished by their different weightings of past, present and future, and programmes for the modulation and direction of time. Politics alternated between the poles of revolution and reaction. ‘Conservatism’ is an implicit recognition of the hastening death of the old, and defines itself negatively *within* the modern regime of historical time as a politics of slowdown and recovery[18].

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12 Ibid.,, pp. 264-265.

13 Koselleck writes of the modern regime of historical time, that it was ‘certainly an effect of the technical-industrial transformation of a world that forces upon its inhabitants ever briefer intervals of time in which to gather new experiences and adapt to changes induced at an ever-increasing pace’, Ibid., p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 41.

15 Ibid., p. 267.

16 Ibid., p. 228-229.

17 Ibid., p. 248-252.

18 Ibid., p. 246-249

We might think of 'modernity' as a baseline of experience which confronted individuals across the gamut of culture and politics with a common predicament: an accelerating and open future. One of the fundamental conditions of the emergence of that experience was the idea of progress. But we can also think of progress as the dominant *response* to the experience of modernity. Koselleck occasionally frames progress in this way. He writes, for instance, 'that progress is a concept specifically calibrated to cope with modern experiences'[19]. It provides a general interpretation of the significance of modernity. I emphasise this distinction because the temporality of modernity outlasts the idea of progress: the formula of modernity without progress is a fundamental problematic of the twentieth century.

What is the idea of progress? A simplified definition of progress might be the belief that X has improved from time 1 to time 2. Yet one can, of course, find beliefs to this effect throughout history. The ancient Greeks and Romans had a fulsome vocabulary to speak of the relative progression of delimited spheres of experience: prokope, epidosis, progressus, profectus[20]. Take two examples. Within the framework of Polybius' theory of constitutional forms one can speak of the emergence of his three forms of governments as progress, but that progress is always a finite achievement that will lapse ineluctably into decay. Growth and decay are equal and opposite concepts of succession within an eternal cycle. Thucydides believed that Greeks had once lived as barbarians, but that its military, technological and legal characteristics set it apart as a singular achievement. Yet for Thucydides the basis of this progression was a backwards-looking comparison. It did not occur to him that this might be an ongoing process opening out into a greater future. On the contrary, Thucydides lamented that it had led to sickness and civil fracture among the Hellenes: the Peloponnesian war. Koselleck argues that the modern concept of 'progress' has to be distinguished sharply from these and other theories of change from the ancient and medieval worlds. He proposes that it is a creation of four linguistic transformations climaxing in the eighteenth century[21].

1. The denaturalisation of age metaphors. Representing historical time with natural metaphors presupposes a metabolic logic of growth and decay. Underneath antique theories of a fixed constitutional cycle, and Christian teachings that the degeneration of temporal affairs is proportional to the movement of the elect towards final salvation, we find a figurative language of nature. Enlightenment

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19 Reinhart Koselleck, 2002, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Translated by Todd Presner and Others. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, p. 219.

20 Ibid., pp. 221-222.

21 Ibid., pp. 225-234.

thinkers rejected the assumption that decline and progress were equal and opposite concepts, recasting the relationship as *asymmetrical*. Decline was represented as a temporary regression or partial defection within an overarching progression. ‘Growth’ became divested of its metabolic connotations.

2. The proliferation of the concept of ‘progress’ in the late eighteenth century represents the temporalisation of human perfection. Before then it was far more common to speak of *perfectio* (perfection), a movement towards a *finite* goal. Perfection gradually came to be thought of as an iterative process (*perfectionnement*). Turgot spoke of humans marching towards perfection, *and* of a process of greater and greater perfection. Condorcet reconciled the two conflicting senses by reimagining perfection as a limitless goal: the object of human aspiration, and an endless pursuit. Progress came to take on this significance, as an *infinite* process of self-improvement.
3. Progress became what Koselleck calls a ‘collective singular’. By this Koselleck appears to mean two things. One is that it was a highly general concept that tied together disparate phenomena into a single process. In the past progression was thought of as something attaching to particular objects, institutions or domains, not to the social totality. At its culmination the range of progress was ‘humanity’ as a whole. The other, related change, is that progress came to be thought of as a historical agent in its own right. It became possible to speak of the ‘the work of progress’, to speak of progress as an abstract noun endowed with supra-historical significance.

Until the eighteenth century history was written into a uniform chronology based on a natural index: the earth’s revolution of the sun. Events were subordinated to a common and arational scale. Progress, by contrast, organises events into a rational system that breaks from the chronological scale of uniform time. Events take on a significance relative to their place within the process of development, and *not* the time of their occurrence within the astronomical calendar. This means that all theories of progress discriminate along two axes. First, they assign experiences a place between the poles of past and future in the timeline of development. Second, they ascribe to those experiences a potential and realised velocity along that timeline. Progress reaches back to organise completed experiences along these two axes. Industrialisation, Copernican science, the printing press, the French Revolution, the Reformation – and so on – were recruited into a narrative crescendo to tell the story of European modernity.

But the most dramatic effect of the repudiation of chronology was the use of progress as a standard of inter-societal identity and difference. Europe came to conceive of other societies as *chronologically* contemporaneous with themselves but *historically* non-contemporaneous[22]. Societies were ranked on a universal timeline modelled on Europe's past while explanations were offered – racial, climactic, cultural – to explain why other societies had failed to advance through history at Europe's pace. It was 'civilization' that came to denote this inter-societal standard of identity and difference, an imagined geography that organised societies as macrocosmic wholes into a universal and differential process of development. It is because it operates at the gross scale of *societies as a whole* that civilization became a unifying concept for the common denominator of progress in Europe, and that it would prove so amenable as the meta-concept of a two-tier system of international relations: European *modus vivendi* and extra-European conquest.

Take the case of Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* which, as mentioned, first introduced the modern concept of 'civilization' into the English lexicon. Ferguson employs the concept of 'civilization' to describe a stadial theory of progress which explains the observed differences between commercial and 'rude' nations. The natives of the Americas are not treated as historically coeval with Europe but as representatives of its antique past: 'It is in their present condition, that we are to behold, as in a mirror, the features of our own progenitors'[23]. He analogises from the counsels of elders of the Iroquois to the Roman senate[24], the bewitchment of tribes by religion to the 'King of Sparta inspecting the intrails of a beast'[25], and the banditry and lust for spoils of barbarians to the events of Homer's *Iliad*[26]. Underlying the idea of progress is the postulate of universal identity. All humans are thought to participate in the same process. Ferguson is insistent that all humans possess the same native capacities, and that what distinguishes them is the extent to which they have cultivated their capacities through their habituation into the lessons of experience[27]. Ferguson believes the basic index of progress on these terms is the ability of individuals to rationally plan for the future through the acquisition of property, and to maximise productive output through the ever-more elaborate division of labour[28]. What distinguishes indigenous Americans from Europeans, for Ferguson, is nothing more than their indolent neglect to plan for the future. Societies pass through a savage condition of communalistic hunting, a barbarian phase of conquest and monarchy divided between the

22 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 238.

23 Adam Ferguson, 1995, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, p. 80.

24 Ibid.,, p. 84.

25 Ibid.,, p. 89.

26 Ibid.,, p. 97.

27 Ibid.,, p. 93.

28 Ibid.,, p. 95.

nomadic husbandry in Asia and settled agriculture in Europe, before climaxing in the liberal, commercial and peaceable nations of modern Europe[29]. Yet Ferguson also grafts various other characteristics onto the idea of progress with only a slight connection to this story: notably the treatment of women and the laws of war.

As Ferguson testifies, 'civilization' is a direct product of Europe's encounter with the indigenous people of the Americas and South Seas. To Europeans the very existence of the peoples of the New World violated their basic understanding of the world: the authority of the ancients, Christian cosmology, and Europe's perception of its own history. Originally the colonial Other was understood through a Christian matrix[30]. Writers speculated as to whether the indigenous Americans descended from the stock of Adam, if their innocent simplicity and unashamed nakedness meant they belonged to the original Eden, and if their total ignorance of European antiquity meant they travelled to America after Noah's flood. At the heart of Spanish debate in the sixteenth century, however, was the question of conversion. While Islam represented a heretical threat to the East, the indigenous Americans were pagans and geopolitically impotent. Columbus wrote in 1492, 'They have no religion, nor are they idolaters… They are very ready to say the prayers we teach them'[31]. In the Papal edict of 1537, Paul III affirmed that 'the Indians' are 'true men' who are entirely 'capable of receiving Christian faith'[32]. Spanish conquistadores took to reading the *Requerimiento*, explaining to bewildered indigenous peoples their pedigree from Jesus, down through Saint Peter, to the Papacy, in a nominal attempt to justify their conquest and conversion[33].

Yet from the beginning Europeans also drew on their classical past to understand the New World. In the Renaissance the Greek concept of barbarianism was resuscitated. Debate raged in Spain as to whether indigenous Americans were children of Adam that could be assimilated into the universal Christian communion, or whether they were brutes whose lack of rational capacities made them the inferiors of Europeans, and rightful objects of unforgiving conquest and enslavement. The ancients were also a fecund source of comparison. Meek has shown that the four-stage theory of development – which only emerged fully-formed in Ferguson, Smith and Turgot – was born of a long series of attempts to explain the genesis of the indigenous Americans by analogy with the classical world[34]. From the sixteenth century, writers observed similarities between the Americans and a wide

29 Ibid.,, pp. 74-183.

30 Bernard McGrane, 1989, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other*. Columbia University Press: New York, USA, pp. 7-42.

31 Tzvetan Todorov, 1982, *The Conquest of America: The Quest of the Other*. Harper: New York, UK, p. 44

32 Ibid., p. 161.

33 Ibid., pp. 147-148.

34 Ronald L. Meek, 1976, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, pp. 37-67.

number of ancient peoples: Jews, Scythians, Phoenicians, Norwegians, Greeks, Egyptians, and so on. But invariantly their inference was that the Americans must resemble these antique peoples because of their *genetic descent* from them, that the indigenous peoples of the Americas really *were* Greeks, Phoenicians or Jews, perhaps after some cataclysmic degeneration. In the eighteenth century the counterclaim began to emerge that Americans and antique societies were similar because *like conditions* obtained in them both. It was this move which laid the basis for four-stage theories, the idea of disparate societies passing through identical stages corresponding to four modes of production: hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. Ultimately these two appeals to antiquity – the concept of barbarianism, and analogical explanation – merged into a theory of progress from barbarism to civilization, supplanting Christianity as a new regime of identity and difference. Ferguson stands at the culmination of this movement, and the beginning of the conceptual history of 'civilization'.

Epilogues of Empire

Scholars have done an enormous amount to excavate the role of civilization as the meta-concept of the imperial imaginary during the long nineteenth century. But their narratives invariably draw to a close with the fading of the naked language of the civilizing mission in the aftermath of the First World War. There has been almost no attempt to trace the vagaries of the concept of civilization over the last century as it has been appropriated for different political ends in a succession of changing historical contexts. What we find instead are a series of *epilogues* appended to the history of the 'traditional' concept of civilization that attempt some explanation of its demise, and its vestigial effects on the last century. Here we find two theories – distinct but overlapping – which dominate the literature.

One common story is the *transmutation thesis*. On this view the sordid legacy of imperialism led to the discrediting of the explicit language of civilization and the adoption of a series of euphemistic substitutes. In Duncan Bell's telling, although the 'usage of the term "civilization" declined precipitously through the twentieth century', its underlying ideas were rearticulated in the more palatable language of 'modernization', 'development' and 'democratization'[35]. According to John Hobson, the crude language of 'civilization versus barbarianism' had, by the end of the Second World War, become tainted by imperial guilt and the diplomatic necessities of dealing with independent post-colonial states. It 'smacked of… Western racial

35 Duncan Bell, 2013, 'Ideologies of Empire', in Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies.* Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, pp. 540-543.

and imperial supremacy'[36]. Yet the 'civilizing mission' was, Hobson attests, preserved through a variety of 'subliminal strategies'. Neorealism cloaked America's civilizing mission under the window-dressing of 'hegemony', while new distinctions – traditional and modern societies, world core and periphery – played the traditional role of 'civilization versus barbarism' in all but name.

The other pervasive framing of the afterlife of the traditional concept of civilization is the *dormancy thesis*[37]. These stories are motivated by the belief that the traditional concept of 'civilization', or some analogue to it, has re-emerged in the post-Cold War world. They exhibit a common template: a delineation of the characteristics of the concept of civilization as it operated in the imperial imaginary of the long nineteenth century and an enumeration of how some contemporary practice mirrors those characteristics. The period inbetween 1914 and 1990 is elided. Often this absence goes without comment, or a peremptory explanation is offered: in both cases the death of the concept of civilization in 1914 is largely assumed. It is notable that the most influential full-volume intellectual history of civilization fits this mould, Brett Bowden's *The Empire of Civilization*. A book of two halves, it deals with the long nineteenth century, then the post-Cold War world. Bowden's explanation of what happened in the eighty-year span inbetween is offered in passing, but we can reconstruct its logic from his wider argument. First, because Bowden considers 'civilization' to be an expression of the idea of universal progress he assumes that the fortunes of the two are inextricably linked. It follows that when the 'two World Wars and the Great Depression' broke the West's faith in progress, 'civilization' was cast into political freefall[38]. Second, the bipolar logic of the Cold War inhibited the universalising impulse of the civilizing mission, forcing the idea 'beneath the surface of international affairs'[39]. The effect of the breakdown of the Soviet Union was *both* to catapult the United States into an unprecedented position of global unipolarism, and to restore the West's self-image as the locus of universal history[40]. 'Civilization' re-emerged at the convergence of the two, as the pretext for an expansionist programme of global markets, governance and democracy.

36 John M. Hobson, 2012, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, pp. 319-322.

37 To take a sample from this prodigious literature: Jack Donnelly, 1998, Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?, *International Affairs,* 74(1), pp.1-24; David P. Fidler, 2001, The Return of the Standard of Civilization, *Chicago Journal of International Law,* 2(1), pp. 137-158; Yannis A. Stivachtis, 2008, Civilization and International Society: The Case of European Union Expansion, *Contemporary Politics*, 14(1), pp. 71-89; Christopher Hobson, 2008, Democracy as Civilisation, *Global Society*, 22(1), pp. 75-95; Barry Buzan, 2010, Culture and International Society, *International Affairs*, 86(1), pp.1-26.

38 Brett Bowden, 2009, *Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 72.

39 Bowden, *Empire of Civilization,* p.17.

40 Bowden, *Empire of Civilization*, pp.161-188.

In order to see what is missing from this picture we need to disentangle the confusions which have clouded the historical field of view. I want to separate out four different senses of the world 'civilization'.

(1) *The Civilizing Mission*. In ordinary lexicon the civilizing mission is a convenient short-hand for the quest of any empire or power to convert another society to the standards of 'civilized' behaviour internal to their own way of life. Whatever the original role of the *mission civilisatrice* in the theory and practice of French imperialism – and it seems to be slight – when the concept is used today we are, in almost every case, dealing not with a hermeneutic concept drawn from the self-understanding of historical actors but a descriptive category imposed on historical events from without. In other words, if we claim that a state is embarking upon a 'civilizing mission', we mean that it has designs to *convert* other societies to some conception of morally right behaviour, whether that conception is couched in the language of civilization or not[41].

In the 2005 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute, the eminent German historian Jurgen Osterhammel offers a bravura survey of the various 'civilizing missions' of the long nineteenth century[42]. But the entire performance is plagued by an unresolved ambiguity[43]. Osterhammel alternates between a *scientific* definition of the civilizing mission as a capacious sociological process, in which a people conceives of itself as special by virtue of norms and institutions which it works to inculcate in other societies, and an *interpretive* analysis of the ways in which historical actors have adopted and used the concept of civilization. Yet the first definition is significantly wider than the second. It is this slippage which permits Osterhammel to mount his own version of the dormancy thesis, to claim that the 'standard of civilization' – which Osterhammel treats as an instrument of the 'civilizing mission', further complicating matters – is alive and well in contemporary free market norms, the European Union's accession process, and the 'democratic peace' thesis.

(2) *The Standard of Civilization*. In this case 'civilization' denotes the conditions which any society must satisfy to enter into the ranks of international society and become an eligible subject of international law. Historically these conditions included: respect for basic rights; a state with the powers of coordination and defence; a legal system and an ability to participate in international diplomatic protocol and the laws of war; and an ensemble of ethical and cultural criteria, including the treatment of women, slavery, polygamy, diet and

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41 One recent paper, for instance, suggests that what the 'political' question of European Union says is irrelevant to the question of whether the 'investigative' issue of whether it is undertaking a 'civilizing mission'. Jan Zielonka, 2013, Europe's New Civilizing Mission: The EU's Normative Power Discourse, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18(1), pp. 35-55. See p.37.

42 Jurgen Osterhammel, 2006, *Europe, the "West" and the Civilizing Mission*. The German Historical Institute: London, UK.

43 I discuss how a similar issue arises in Karuna Mantena's Alibis of Empire later in the introduction.

dress[44]. These standards were used to give the imprimatur of authority to a two-tier system in which European states were afforded *full* legal status, and non-European societies were either excluded from 'the law of civilized states' altogether, or given *imperfect* legal status and coerced into a series of unequal treaties, capitulations and protectorates. It is possible to trace the pre-history of the standard of civilization back to the – more or less implicit – attempts of natural law theorists to define the boundaries of European or Christian society in the early modern period[45], but it was only formalised as an explicit legal doctrine in the late nineteenth century. It is a standard of *civilization* because it was built around the schema of differential progress that had emerged a century earlier, organising societies into a legal geography of savage, barbarian, semi-civilized and civilized.

There are two main dangers with regard to the standard of civilization. One is to conflate the idea of civilization *in general* with the standard of civilization *in particular*, to assume that any theory of civilization has contained within it an implicit 'standard of civilization' that defines the boundaries of international recognition. Of course it is often possible to read such a standard into theories of civilization. But one can read a great many things into other people's words that betrays their original intent. The standard of civilization emerged a century after the genesis of 'civilization'. Any attempt to retroject a fully-formed standard into Koselleck's saddle-period – into the minds of the Enlightenment theorists who invented the concept of civilization – is almost always anachronistic.

The second is to abstract the 'standard of civilization' from the theory of universal progress from which it originally derived its force and meaning, while continuing to treat it as a standard of *civilization*. In Jack Donnelly's version of the dormancy thesis, for example, the standard of civilization is defined not by its theoretical content but its practical function: as a criterion for the inclusion and exclusion of states from international society[46]. Donnelley is not alone. Indeed, for many international relations theorists – especially the English School – the 'standard of civilization' has become a metonymic signifier for a trans-historical phenomenon: the tendency of state systems to develop norms to regulate the interaction of their members. In this sense the 'standard of civilization' belongs just as much to Qing diplomatic theory as to the Berlin Conference of 1884. The use of the word 'civilization' in this context is simply an obsolete holdover from the theoretical grounding of *a particular instance* of that standard in late nineteenth century Europe.

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44 My reconstruction here follows Gerrit W. Gong, 1984, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society.* Clarendon Press: Oxford, UK.

45 On this subject, see Jennifer Pitts, 2018, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire.* Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, USA.

46 Donnelly, Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?

(3) *Civilization as Universal Progress*. On this view civilization is an expression of the idea of universal progress. I have already made the case that civilization should be understood in these terms at its birth and over the long nineteenth century – it is what I am referring to as the 'traditional' idea of civilization. Two mistakes should be avoided, however. The first is to read the concept of civilization *back into* the idea of universal progress. It clearly does not follow from the fact that civilization is an expression of progress (general) onto the global as a theory of differential inter-societal progress (particular), that any theory of progress is also a theory of civilization. This is a version of the fallacy of composition. Bowden occasionally errs in this direction in *The Empire of Civilization*. He treats Kant as the paradigmatic theorist of civilization because of his powerful teleological theory of universal progress. But this is a strange choice[47]. The concept of civilization plays only a peripheral role in Kant's writings, Kant inherited Rousseau's deep ambivalence towards civilization, his philosophy is inflected by the idiosyncratically pejorative meaning of *Zivilisation* in the German language (I address this topic in Chapter 1), and Kant's theory of world history and politics exercised little influence on nineteenth century opinion. Jumping forward to today's neo-Kantians, Bowden identifies civilization with cosmopolitanism in general, and the writings of Thomas Pogge in particular. Here we end up two steps removed: cosmopolitanism is a universalist ethics, not a universal theory of progress; and a universal theory of progress, is not in itself a theory of civilization. It would be difficult to credit Pogge as a theorist of civilization.

The second mistake is the *strict identification* of the concept of civilization with the idea of progress. This is the implicit assumption of the transmutation thesis, which has two elements: one, the traditional concept of civilization has died; two, new concepts of differential inter-societal progress have taken its place. I am sympathetic to the second of these claims. Modernization theory wielded enormous influence in post-war American social science as a counterpoint to Marxist theories of social development[48], and one can draw sensible comparisons between this kind of stadial theory of progress and the traditional concept of civilization. What I object to is the idea that the end of civilization as a projection of the idea of progress onto the global is equivalent to the end of the concept of civilization altogether, or at least to anything that might be said of any interest about the concept by the history of global political thought.

(4) *The Concept of Civilization*. In the epilogues that I have been discussing, the 'civilizing mission' is a useful short-hand for a sociological process and not an actor's category, the

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47 Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization,* pp. 82-97.

48 Nils Gilman, 2003, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America.* John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, USA; David C. Engerman, 2004, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development.* Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, USA.

'standard of civilization' denotes a functional standard of inclusion and exclusion in which the word 'civilization' is a mere vestige from the Victorian age, and 'civilization as universal progress' assumes that the essential contours of the concept of civilization as a world-ordering device were set in place in the nineteenth century. What is common to all three uses of the word 'civilization' is an almost complete neglect of the apparent object of discussion: the actual uses of the concept of civilization by historical actors over the last century. I do not mean to suggest that political concepts should only be used in a doggedly historical way. There is nothing inherently wrong with using civilization as a scientific or metonymic category. But the effect of this polysemic discourse has been to sow enormous confusion of what 'civilization' means, to mix the historical with the stipulative, the nineteenth century with the twentieth, and all three senses of civilization with each other. What is lost in all this is significant: any recognition of the second life of one of the architectonic concepts of European world politics.

How can we explain this lacuna? My hypothesis is this: the failure to recognise the enduring importance of the concept of civilization to debates over world order in the twentieth century is largely a result of a failure to investigate the *death* of the traditional incarnation of the concept as an expression of universal progress. There has been no attempt to investigate the cataclysmic breakdown of Europe's self-conception as the fulcrum of a universal process of civilization, the ubiquitous outpouring of despair and alarm over the possibility of the existential collapse of Western civilization and its supersession by China, India or Russia, or the strained efforts to grope towards a new conception of world order *adapting* the concept of 'civilization' to new circumstances while *rehabilitating* the status of Europe as the centre of world history. It is the death of the modern ideal of European civilization that has defined the terms of the discourse of civilization and world order over the last century. Without understanding this problematic, one cannot recognise its answers.

Europe's *Deminutio Capitis*

I want to suggest that the history of the concept of civilization over the last century is, at one and the same time, a chronicle of responses to the death of the traditional ideal of European civilization. It is an attempt to work through the 'problem-space' opened by what I will call Europe's *deminutio capitis* to find a new logic of world order, reconciled to Europe's regression into barbarism, and the steady rise of non-Western powers. In this section I want to draw out the contours of this problem-space from what is undoubtedly its most elegant statement: 'The Crisis of the Mind', an essay published in 1919 by the French poet Paul Valery. I take as my starting point a brief but suggestive comment by Koselleck. 'The

relations between political units of action in our world can hardly be understood linearly on the scale of a singular progression. The shrinkage of the formerly centralized European power base has allowed stark disproportions to emerge between civilizing progress and political potency. Here, a discrepancy emerged, diagnosed in 1919 by Paul Valery with extraordinary clarity. Formerly the model and forerunner of all progress, Europe has seen its position of leadership deteriorate'. This poses a simple question: what is Valery's diagnosis of European civilization in 1919?

Paul Valery begins his essay with a lament of great symbolic power:

> 'We had long heard tell of whole worlds that had vanished, of empires sunk without a trace, gone down with all their men and machines into the unexplorable depths of the centuries, with their gods and their laws, their academies and their sciences pure and applied, their grammars and their dictionaries, their Classics, their Romantics, and their Symbolists, their critics and the critics of their critics… We were aware that the visible earth is made of ashes, and that ashes signify something. Through the obscure depths of history we could make out the phantoms of great ships laden with riches and intellect; we could not count them. But the disasters that had sent them down were, after all, none of our affairs.
>
> Elam, Ninevah, Babylon were beautiful vague names, and the total ruin of those worlds had as little significance for us as their very existence. But France, England, Russia… these too would be beautiful names Lusitania too, is a beautiful name. And we see now that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all. We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life'.[49]

Europe was aware that rich and sprawling civilizations had existed in the distant past, only to fall into the dust of time. Nineteenth century archaeology had brought the encrusted remains of the civilizations of the fertile crescent to wide attention in Europe, in the sweep of Oriental knowledge that followed the French and the British empires into the Near East. But these were but 'vague names' that held no *significance* for modern Europe. They stood at the dawn of historical progress, primitive in organisation, superstitious in understanding, despotic in their mode of government. It was these same qualities, it had been believed, that explained the failure to travel along the path of civilization, that led to their stuttering, arrest and death. Archaeological remains from Assyria were received in mid-nineteenth century Britain, for example, as little more than confirmation of the regressive effects of Oriental despotism, of the Biblical story of the tyranny of Nineveh and its sudden and precipitous ruin,

49 Paul Valery, 1963, *The Outlook for Intelligence.* Translated by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews. Harper: New York, USA, p. 22.

and fodder to throw at Russia in the Crimean War – depicting Tsarism as a tyranny fated for ruin[50].

Valery weaves together two metaphors. One is the image of civilization as a sinking ship, which has both temporal and epistemological connotations. Once a leak is sprung there is little saving a ship, the steady inflow of water drags it further and further down. It is a pure declension with the force of gravity, from which there can be no recovery. And this is true not only of the ship but its contents. No matter its riches, learning or accomplishments, all of them go down with the ship. Progress can be lost *entirely*, can vanish beneath the waves of history 'without a trace'. The sight of ships wrecked upon the ocean floor, rotten and barnacled, evokes the primordial, the forgotten, the spectral. It is the original graveyard of humankind, 'phantoms' rising to haunt us from the past, but that remains 'obscure' all the while. We are liable to turn away, to take no heed. After all, it is 'none of our affairs'.

Valery waits to reveal the real symbolic power of the metaphor. Ninevah and Babylon slide off Europe's consciousness as nothing more than 'beautiful names', but France, Russia and England too are beautiful names. Yet the force of this equivalence is brought home by one more name, that gives Valery's poetry its elegance: Lusitania. The sinking of the passenger ship Lusitania by German U-boats off the coast of Ireland in 1915, killing 1,198 people, was met with disbelief, outrage and horror across Europe and America, and played an important role in shaping popular opinion about the war in the United States. It came to symbolise the depravity to which Europe had sank, the apparent disregard of Germany for civilized standards of war-making, the jolting regression of the jewel of the world into bloody, wretched barbarism. In an ingenious metonym, Valery uses the drowning of the Lusitania to represent the sinking of the ideal of Europe, connecting the degradations of the First World War with the historical fates of Babylon, Ninevah and Elam.

Valery works into this imagery a family of natural metaphors[51]. The ocean is a primordial graveyard, an epic abyss that will claim all civilizations. The visible earth is nothing but ashes, a reminder of a cycle with the historical depth of geology, in which death gives rise to life, and life to death. Valery draws out the lesson: civilization has the *fragility of a life*. He steps behind the modern imaginary to draw back the age-old chain of associations between

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50 Shawn Malley, 2012, *From Archaeology to Spectacle in Victorian Britain: The Case of Assyria, 1845-1854.* Routledge: London, UK.

51 Hans Blumenberg's elegant study of the metaphor of the shipwreck is instructive on this point. Blumenberg shows how the sea has been an incredibly fecund metaphor over history, representing the limits of human activity, a location beyond the law of the polis, and a dangerous zone of movement, calamities and heroics. At the centre of these metaphorics has been the shipwreck. Blumenberg contends **that** in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the metaphor of the shipwreck was increasingly denaturalised, treated as a representation not of natural disaster, but of humanity's movements on the waves of history. In the terms of Koselleck, it became temporalised. Valery's 'The Crisis of the Mind', in this context, plays on one of the great metaphors of modernity. See Hans Blumenberg, 1997, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*. Translated by Steven Rendall. MIT Press: Massachusetts, USA.

historical time, and the metabolic cycle of nature. Growth is not infinite, unerring and resplendent, it is a temporary achievement that will relapse, giving way to disease, ruin and death. Even 'the most beautiful things and the most ancient, the most formidable and the best ordered, can perish'[52]. Progress is revealed as an illusion of historical perspective, a failure to pierce through the oceanic depths of history, to reveal to Europe the tomb that lies beneath its wayward ship. But the shock of war has brought the dawn of reality:

> 'An extraordinary shudder ran through the marrow of Europe. She felt in every nucleus of her mind that she was no longer the same, that she was no longer herself, that she was about to lose consciousness, a consciousness acquired through centuries of bearable calamities, by thousands of men of the first rank, from innumerable geographical, ethnic, and historical coincidences.'[53]

Europe is a historical monument whose stones have been erected by centuries of struggle, creation, growth and genius. It is an epic of masculine achievement that has weathered tragedies, failures and wars, to reach unknown heights of material and cultural grandeur. But Europe is tottering, the ground is moving, it is 'about to lose consciousness'. Worst of all is the geographical epicentre of this earthquake, the tremors pouring from the mouth of a nation of 'conscientious labor, the most solid learning, the most serious discipline': Germany. Europe is not being pushed from without, it is crumbling from the inside. Europe's scientific powers have rebounded upon civilization, raining annihilation on 'so many cities in so short a time'. Yet murder is always a moral act, too. Europe's 'spirit is no less ravaged than' its material creations. Germany cannot be discounted as a deviant nation, a horrific mistake, a sordid betrayal – it is the crucible of forces that conspire against the whole of European civilization, that lie deep in its bones.

Four years earlier a lone voice of protest was writing furiously against the war from Germany's prisons, aghast at the capitulation of the Social Democratic Party – the child of Marx and Engels – to an imperialist war of conquest, writing under the protection of the revolutionary pseudonym 'Junius'. Rosa Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet* describes a Europe whose mask has slipped, revealing a grotesque, barbaric visage: 'Violated, dishonoured, wading in blood, dripping filth – there stands bourgeois society. This is it. Not all spic and span and moral, with pretense to culture, philosophy, ethics, order, peace, and the rule of law – but the ravening beast, the witches' sabbath of anarchy, a plague to culture and

52 Valery, *The Outlook for Intelligence*, p. 23.

53 Ibid.

humanity'[54]. Luxemburg unleashes one of the most searing – and one of the earliest – demolitions of the ideal of European civilization of the war.

Luxemburg poses the famous question, 'Socialism or regression into barbarism?' Although she is paraphrasing Engels, Luxemburg invests the idea with a new and more sinister force. It is instructive to juxtapose the *Junius Pamphlet* with the hymn to civilization in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels describe civilization as a dissolvent that absorbs 'all, even the most barbarian, nations', bulldozing through 'Chinese walls', 'clearing out whole continents for cultivation', 'whole populations conjured out of the ground'. It is a maelstrom of creative destruction, revolutionary upheavals, globe-straddling vistas. Marx and Engel's retain a critical, dialectical view of capitalist civilization. They complain of spiralling crises of over-production in which there is 'too much civilization', where civilization suddenly capsizes into its opposite, into 'a state of momentary barbarism'. But it is momentary, a dialectical movement within the capitalist mode of production that presages its transcendence, as contradiction gives way to jolting progress into the next stage of history. Luxemburg breaks sharply from this hopeful vision of conflictual progress. She broaches the possibility of total breakdown, of a regression into ruin and nightmare: 'the collapse of all civilization as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration – a great cemetery'[55]. Germany's 'bloody sword of murder' has tilted the historical scales 'down into the abyss'. Civilization is no longer battering down the gates of China, an unstoppable force sweeping the world's nations into the choreography of progress. It is barbarism, a graveyard, the ruins of Rome. The assumption that European civilization is different, that modernity has led to a qualitative break from the past, falls away.

Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* is, among many other things, a paean to the modernist rhythms of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, from which Berman takes his title[56]. Marx and Engels were able to capture, in a single vision, modernity's vaulting dynamism and pulsating creativity, and the anguish, uprooting and destruction of its millions of victims. It is the death of this 'dialectical' view of modernity in the twentieth century which Berman mourns. In Luxemburg this dialectic exceeds the range of modernism, the belief that capitalism's contradictions are contained by the steadying advance of the developmental whole of civilization, spilling over into the possibility of a total downfall.

For Valery, too, Europe has 'reached the limit of modernism'. His foil is not Marx, however, but another great nineteenth century modernist: Charles Baudelaire. In 'The Painter of

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54 Rosa Luxemburg, 1919, *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy (The "Junius" Pamphlet).* The Socialist Publication Society: New York, USA, p. 8.

55 Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*, p.18.

56 Marshall Berman, 2010, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity.* Verso: London, UK.

Modern Life', Baudelaire famously defined *modernite* as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent'[57]. Nestled in a café on the sidewalk of some European capital, the painter finds in the passing crowd a veritable sensorium of pleasures, 'dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite'. When the painter sleeps, he awakens stricken by the fear that he has missed the bright displays of the modern city, starting upright and casting his eyes out the window-pane, 'What a fanfare of light! Light everywhere for several hours past! Light I have lost in sleep! And endless numbers of things bathed in light that I could have seen and failed to!' Later on evening falls, 'the city lights go on', and a new, darkened crowd emerges – pleasure-seeking, crooked, intoxicated. Yet the aesthetic principle Baudelaire advocates for his painter, is to identify the universal in the particular, the eternal in the transient. There is order beneath the flux in Baudelaire's imagination. Baudelaire towered over French poetry in the early twentieth century, and there is no doubt that Valery – forty-seven at the time of writing 'The Crisis of the Mind' – had carefully studied his work. He lauded Baudelaire's writings as 'the true poetry of modernity'. But the delights of the city lights had taken on a quite different hue.

> 'I see… nothing! Nothing… and yet an infinitely potential nothing. The physicists tell us that if the eye could survive in an oven fired to the point of incandescence, it would see… nothing. There would be no unequal intensities of light left to mark off points in space. That formidable contained energy would produce invisibility, indistinct equality. Now, equality of that kind is nothing else than a perfect state of disorder.
>
> And what made that disorder in the midst of Europe? The free coexistence, in all her cultivated minds, of the most dissimilar ideas, the most contradictory principles of life and learning. That is characteristic of the modern epoch.'[58]

If *modernite* is a condition of radical experimentation, permanent movement, and creative self-overcoming, then it cannot be defined by any fixed institution or idea. It refers to the abstract temporal structure dissected by Koselleck: acceleration into an open future, as the horizon of expectation breaks away from the anchorage of the past. But for Valery this dynamic overflow has a 'limit'. At its culmination modernity burns away all solid ground, and society becomes pure friction, change and light. No guardrails are left standing, no firm principles to cling on to. The light becomes a blinding 'indistinct equality', in which all basis for discrimination is obliterated. Baudelaire's aesthetic postulate of the universal and eternal is replaced by a nihilistic delirium, the 'perfect state of disorder', an infinite nothing. In the

57 Charles Pierre Baudelaire, 2020, *The Painter of Modern Life*. Penguin: London, UK.

58 Valery, *The Outlook for Intelligence*, p. 26.

Europe of 1914, 'the wealth of contrasts and contradictory tendencies was like the insane displays of light in the capitals of those days: eyes were fatigued, scorched'[59].

Valery's Europe stands precariously on the horns of a dilemma. It has been 'bowed under the weight of all the discoveries and varieties of knowledge' that flood through the continent, and is 'incapable of resuming the endless activity' of self-overcoming[60]. For the modern mind, 'the tedium of rehearsing the past' can have no truck, but it must also recognise 'the folly of always trying to innovate'. And so Europe 'staggers between two abysses… order and disorder'. Valery fears that Europeans have 'exhausted… [their] desire for radical experiment', and wish to lay aside their 'hard duties and transcendent ambitions', to take up the mundane pursuits of power, influence and materialism – to become journalists, engineers, Bolsheviks[61]. But the result would be to close the door on the light, to bring the pall of darkness over creativity. Europe would be left with 'the perfect and ultimate anthill', a society of deadened mechanism.

Europe's crisis also has another, geopolitical dimension. Valery asks, what is 'the idea of Europe'?[62] It is distinguished by a 'singular physical property: the most intense power of radiation combined with an equally intense power of assimilation'. Its merchants, soldiers and machines sweep across the world, while it draws in and assimilates other peoples. Valery's Europe is blessed, 'the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body'. It is the master of world history. But all this is now endangered, and Valery must pose a second question: 'can Europe hold its pre-eminence in all fields', or will it 'become what it is in reality – that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia?' Europe's primacy is not a result of any special physical endowment. Its population, acreage and resources are dwarfed by the great tracts of habitable lands that lie beyond its borders. 'In one scale put the empire of India and in the other the United Kingdom; the scale with the smaller weight tilts down!'[63] In Valery's mind this is an extraordinary 'upset in equilibrium', a defiance of the physics of the situation. What then is pushing in Europe favour? It is the intangible quality of its people, Valery deducts, 'the European genius'[64].

Europe's mind is consumed by modern science. It has become, for Europe, 'a means of power, a means of physical domination, a creator of material wealth, an apparatus for exploiting the resources of the whole planet'. But both the conclusions, discoveries and lessons of scientific investigation, and the inventions and industries built on them, have

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59 Ibid., p. 27.
60 Ibid., p. 28.
61 Ibid., p. 29.
62 Ibid., p. 30.
63 Ibid., p. 31.
64 Ibid., p. 33.

become commodities with a transitive exchange value. They are no longer pursued for their own sake, the abode of the scientific artist. Here lies the danger, for science and its products can be 'imitated and produced almost anywhere'. Europe has commodified and sold the technical knowledge on which its power depends, has transported it to every corner of the globe. Its radiation has become its undoing.

> 'Result: the inequality that once existed between the regions of the world as regards the mechanical arts, the applied sciences, the scientific instruments of war and peace – an inequality on which Europe's predominance was based – is tending gradually to disappear.
>
> So, the classification of the habitable regions of the world is becoming one in which gross material size, mere statistics and figures (e.g. population, area, raw materials) finally and alone determine the rating of the various sections of the globe… We have foolishly made force proportional to mass!'[65]

Valery reserves two qualifications, however[66]. The first is an uncertainty about whether Europe's culture, its intellectual genius, can be diffused across the world. Can we expect the globalisation of 'democracy, the exploitation of the globe, and the general spread of technology', or are other societies sheltered by impermeable cultural boundaries? The second is a metaphysical question about whether Europe has any 'freedom against this threatening conspiracy of things', or if this rebalancing has the force of 'fate'. Europe must act, but to do so it will first have to resolve its own, internal contradictions.

I have treated Valery to this long exposition because he gives expression to a crisis that will plague Western visions of world order over the subsequent century. I want to draw out from Valery's 'The Crisis of the Mind' three features of the problematic of Europe's *deminutio capitis*. The first is the *aporia of decline*, the fracturing of the ideal of Europe as a superlative civilization that has broken through the rhythms of history to reach a higher stage of existence opening out into infinite progress. Valery speaks not just for himself but all of Europe, for the shudder that reverberates down to its marrow, that has changed 'every nucleus of her mind'. The First World War is a *caesura*, the dawning of a new self-understanding, a new vision of the world and the future. Europe is qualitatively no different than the civilizations that have risen and fallen since the emergence of the fertile crescent, millennia before Christ. It is suddenly mortal, fragile, wounded. Valery's metonymic image of the Lusitania is an omen that Europe may already be declining; that it has crossed a

65 Ibid., p. 34.

66 Ibid., p. 35.

symbolic threshold, sinking into the barbarism that was once its opposite. Valery's jeremiad is not entirely negativistic. He demolishes the ideal of European civilization by reviving an age-old theory of historical time, of the analogy of civilization to metabolic nature, and the cyclical growth and decay of civilizations. The open future is replaced by the mortality of a lifespan.

But civilization is a global theory of identity and difference that emerged from Europe's encounter with the colonial Other. 'Civilization' only has meaning *relative* to savagery and barbarism, as the highest stage of a continuous developmental sequence. The crisis of the ideal of European civilization therefore at once calls into question a picture of the meaning, history and order of the world. Valery begins with a diagnosis of Europe's crisis as something entirely endogenous, as the result of the aporia of civilization and modernism. But he nevertheless ties this endogenous failure – not on the basis of any visible or causal connection – with the geopolitical diminution of Europe. The logic is implicit in the concept of civilization itself. Valery fears that Europe is losing hold of the techno-industrial might upon which its global supremacy depends. What he fears is a condition of geopolitical democracy: a world in which each person, each land possesses equal potential power. Valery's nightmare is *global pluralisation*. He distinguishes between three features of that pluralisation: the diffusion of Europe's technical, military and economic practices to the rest of the world, and its implications; whether Europe's culture, intellectual and genius can spread to other societies, and what the relationship of the material to the cultural is; and the extent to which this global rebalancing is inevitable, its status in the 'philosophy of history'. All three issues will echo over the next century.

In my reconstruction of Koselleck I distinguished between: (a) the baseline experience of *modernity* as an open and accelerating future; (b) the particular interpretation of that underlying experience as *progress*. I did this because while in the nineteenth century they formed a theoretical whole, in the twentieth century they increasingly pulled apart. The collapse of the idea of progress in the wake of the First World War divests modernity of the stability of meaning and hopeful moral gloss that it had long possessed. We find alarm and anxiety over the dizzying speed of world politics, the uncontrollable dynamics of global technology and capitalism, and a string of attempts to reimpose meaning on modernity: to identify some new pattern within the flux of change, or to revivify an attenuated theory of progress. I will call this complex of concerns *modernity without progress*. Valery's response to Baudelaire is a variation on this theme. In the first third of 'The Crisis of the Mind', he tears down the ideal of Europe as the epicentre of world progress. But in the absence of this higher meaning, what becomes of the bright lights of the city, the cauldron of flaring ideas in Europe's capitals? It is stripped bare into *pure temporality*, a blinding lightshow that

incinerates all solid ground. It is the very negation of progress: a pure nothing, a nihilistic carnival. Change that betrays no pattern is 'perfect disorder'.

I call this three-headed problematic Europe's '*deminutio capitis*'. Originally a term of Roman law referring to the severe diminishment of an individual's civic and legal status, I borrow the phrase from Valery to designate Europe's decapitation as the head of world history and politics: the shattering of the *ideal* of European civilization, and its looming *geopolitical* marginalisation. I treat this as an integrated problematic because, as I have suggested, civilization is a projection of the modern regime of historical time onto the global as a system of inter-societal identity and difference. Its underlying temporal structure and its hierarchical representation of the world are inextricably connected. Historically this means discussion of the two is conjoined. Indeed, the force of Europe's *deminutio capitis* should be understood as the result of the *mutual reinforcement* of these twin registers. Europe's steady geopolitical marginalisation calls into question the truth of the world-historical claims it makes for itself, while the loss of Europe's status as the vanguard of world history undercuts the expectation that it will continue to dominate world politics.

One way of thinking about Europe's *deminutio capitis* is as a 'problem-space' within the discourse of modernity. It is a rupture within a common matrix of assumptions built around the concept of 'civilization'. In this sense it is a problem defined against a shared backdrop of pre-existing beliefs, images and practices that had developed over the last century and a half, not only about Europe's identity and difference with other societies around the world, but within the larger project of European modernity and imperialism. Valery's 'Crisis of the Mind' makes little sense independent of this backdrop. He identifies a problematic *within* a recognised landscape. I want to use the idea of a problem-space to draw out three features of Europe's *deminutio capitis.*

First, the death of the traditional concept of civilization is not a terminus, a point at which the discourse of civilization simply disappears. To interpret this death as opening a new problem-space is to see it as a *generative* moment. It spawned efforts to reckon with and diagnose the nature of Europe's crisis, to repair, adapt and modify the modern regime of historical time, and to reimagine the past, present and future of world history and politics. Second, problems are not fixed and continuous over time. They evolve as they enter into new historical contexts, are thrown into fresh light by shifting circumstances, and are appropriated for new political projects. At the same time new lines are drawn on the sediment of past arguments: historical debates within a problem-space build on the accumulated detritus of their predecessors. It is thus suitable for *genealogical* excavation, as I will argue momentarily. Third, problems only exist relative to a specific belief or interest.

Europe's *deminutio capitis* was an epochal turning point in the context of, and only in the context of, the system of identity and difference through which Europe had understood the world during the long nineteenth century. But this means that any *solution* to the problem presupposes the intellectual terrain on which it is posed. Theorists have tended to assume that to rehabilitate the classical idea of European civilization and the Enlightenment values for which it was thought to stand, it is necessary to vindicate a suitably amended version of the modern regime of historical time: to argue that the future does belong to Europe and America. In this sense debates over Western civilization and world order over the last century have been a story of genealogical change *within* a delimited intellectual space.

I borrow the idea of a 'problem-space' from David Scott's brilliant *Conscripts of Modernity*. Scott contends that the postcolonial imagination is trapped within a *romantic* understanding of its past, present and future based on a vision of totalising revolution and utopian liberation from the degradations of empire[67]. Yet this understanding of the 'problem-space' of colonialism has been systematically undermined by the actual experience of postcolonialism – a slide into corruption, dictatorship and inequality – severing the 'romantic' analysis of the colonial past, from its hopeful vision of the postcolonial future. Scott argues that this problem-space needs to be rejected in its entirety, and replaced with a *tragic* narrative understanding of the past, present and future of the postcolonial world. It is possible to read several other prominent works as analyses of 'problem-spaces' within the discourse of modernity. Enzo Traverso argues that the successive failed revolutions of the twentieth century, culminating in the downfall of the Soviet Union, led to a profound crisis of socialist modernity: its prognostic tools have become otiose, it sees no future or hope for socialism, and the story of the last century has become one, not of emancipation, struggle and revolution, but totalitarian monstrosities and the gulag[68]. Its past, present and future have been thrown entirely out of order. Jenny Andersson has recently shown how social scientists after the Second World War attempted to bring the future back under control after the waning of the idea of progress by inventing a new discipline of futurological prediction[69]. Scott, Traverso and Andersson all use Koselleck's account of the modern regime of historical time to frame their arguments. One can even read Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air* as a self-conscious response to what he describes as the aporia of New Left's future in the 1970s, an attempt to recover the 'modernism' of Marx to revive the status of modernity for socialism[70]. I uncover one more problem-space: the crisis of Europe's imperial modernity.

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67 David Scott, 2004, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment.* Duke University Press: Durham, USA.

68 Enzo Traverso, 2016, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory.* Columbia University Press: New York, USA.

69 Jenny Andersson, 2018, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination.* Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

70 Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, pp. 29-35.

Genealogical Diagnostics

I have set out the genesis of the concept of civilization as a projection of progress onto the global as a new system of inter-societal identity and difference, the different approaches to the intellectual history of civilization in the existing academic literature and the paucity of attention to the changing uses of the concept as a world-ordering device over the twentieth century, and proposed that the starting point for any such history should be the problem-space of Europe's *deminutio capitis*. I have used Valery's 'The Crisis of the Mind' as an exemplary statement of that problematic. But where do we go from here? How can we tell the intellectual history of civilization over the last century, what is the underlying value and goal of such an endeavour in the first place, and how can we possibly bring such an enormous subject within a manageable compass? I set out my answer to these questions in this section, suggesting that we should adopt Wittgenstein's theory of 'meaning as use', rejecting both positivist and normativist forms of political theory in favour of what Hans Sluga has called 'diagnostic thinking', and proposing a 'genealogy' of the history of the concept of civilization through what David Armitage calls 'serial contextualism'. I take these one by one.

The basis for the approach to political thought which I adopt in this thesis is Wittgenstein's theory of 'meaning as use' in the *Philosophical Investigations*. It would be foolhardy to suppose that a comprehensive defence of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language could be had here, nor especially pertinent. What I want to do instead is to lay out the thread of Wittgenstein's argument, beginning with his repudiation of the 'reference theory of meaning' propounded by logical positivists. This will have the benefit of *clarifying* my approach, without pretending to be a vindication of it.

Wittgenstein criticises the reference theory of meaning in which language has the single function of naming, and can be analysed by philosophers into a formal notation of symbolic propositions corresponding to mind-independent objects, chained together by 'logical connectors' that specify how those objects stand in relation to one another. A.J. Ayer provides a famous distillation of this view in *Language, Truth and Logic*, suggesting that sentences can be divided into one of three kinds[71]. Either it expresses propositions that correspond to sense-experience that can be inductively verified and are *true*, it expresses meaningful propositions of this kind but are *false*, or else it does not express propositions that refer to sense-experience and admit empirical verification, and thus is a *metaphysical* claim which is 'literally nonsense'. The humble role of philosophy, for Ayer, is to clarify

71 Alfred Jules Ayer, 1952, *Language, Truth, Logic*. Dover: New York, USA.

scientific propositions, to adjudge what evidence would count in their defence, and to clean up the logical relationship between these propositions.

But is naming the paradigm of all language, a self-sufficient mode of communication, or an accurate description of the phenomenon of language? Wittgenstein thinks not. He asks us to imagine a simple language-game in which one builder shouts out the names 'Slab!', 'Block!', 'Pillar!', 'Beams!', and another builder passes her the items in the order they are called for[72]. On the face of things this is a language with only names, where those names refer to corresponding objects. Yet the four words are not being used simply as names, as an abstract designation for an object. Instead their significance is internal to the social activity of the builders, where they stand for a request, command or invitation for a certain kind of assistance within the interplay of this project. One might protest that the word 'Slab!' is an elliptical statement of the underlying cognitive meaning, 'Bring me the slab!', and that it is this which the builders mean. It is a convenient short-hand for a complete reference. But there is no reason to consider this true. If a 'foreigner' was introduced to the builders and acculturated into their communicative practices, they would use the word 'Slab!' without ever being cognizant of the sentence, 'Bring me a slab!'[73]. It would simply strike them as a recognised action within the rules of the shared game of the builders.

Wittgenstein illustrates the dependence of language on our mastery of the activity in which it takes on significance through another imagined scenario[74]. He asks us to consider a child learning a language solely through ostensive definition, where the tutor announces a name and points to their corresponding reference. Suppose the tutor wants to define the number 'two', and so points to two nuts and utters the word. But in this circumstance the child will struggle to recognise what the word 'two' is signifying. She may think that the word two is the name of these particular nuts, or their colour, or innumerable other qualities of the nuts. Perhaps things would be clarified if the tutor announced that this *number* is called 'two'. But this merely pushes the problem back a step. The child may take the word number in countless ways. Wittgenstein suggests that this kind of ostensive definition can only succeed when the child already knows what role the relevant words are supposed to play within the language game in which they are participating. Ostensive definition is *itself* a language game.

What Wittgenstein is trying to convey in these scenarios is, first, that language only has meaning in the context of its use within shared activity as a *tool*, and second, because there

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72 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 2009, *Philosophical Investigations.* Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Wiley: Sussex, UK, pp. 6-9.

73 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 12.

74 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 17-18.

are as many uses for language as there are distinctive human purposes, the potential meanings of language are *unlimited*. Wittgenstein thinks that there can be no philosophical notation of 'pure' language but only the description of language as it actually manifests itself in space and time. Language, properly understood, is nothing other than its use, and the intersubjective rules to which these uses collectively give rise.

What this suggests for anyone interested in political thought is: (i) language is not a mirror whose structure is determined by the mind-independent world that it reflects but something constructed by humans as a tool of social activity, a creative act that *generates* a picture of the world and serves certain human *ends*; (ii) utterances have to be *interpreted* as moves within a language game, that harness the rules of the game to do things – to satirise, denounce, subvert, eulogise, sanctify, etc. – within a shared social and political field. This presents an anthropological view of the human world, defined by the webs of significance spun by language[75]. It emphasises the way in which linguistic conventions delimit the boundaries of common sense and legitimate action, and how language is used by agents to intervene in and shape politics. On this view, political thought is neither irrelevant arcana *nor* an impotent epiphenomenon – either of a Platonic reality or underlying material forces – but fundamental to the constitution, dynamics and change of politics.

As is well-known, Wittgenstein helped to inspire the linguistic turn in the humanities, from Thomas Kuhn, Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu, to Ian Hacking, Richard Rorty and Paul Fayerabend, and far beyond. In political thought it has been Quentin Skinner and the so-called 'Cambridge School' who have done the most to draw out the implications of the *Philosophical Investigations* for the field. Drawing on the heirs of Wittgenstein in analytic philosophy – J.L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, John Searle – Skinner developed a *contextualist* theory of historical interpretation, set in opposition to Arthur Lovejoy's belief that there are perennial questions of politics to which all canonical texts of political thought answer, and that one should therefore treat these texts as if they were engaged in a single trans-historical conversation[76]. The effect of Loveyjoy's 'history of ideas' was to arrive at the political thinkers of the past with *a priori* expectations about what they were doing, spawning a whole host of confused mythologies, parochialisms, and anachronisms. Skinner argues that, on the contrary, we need to approach texts on their own terms by locating them within the linguistic contexts in which they were intervening, to recover the intended force of their author's utterances: that is, to infer from how they exploited these language games, what they meant. It involves a careful attention to the changing use of concepts over time, the way in which they are constantly transformed to suit new political circumstances, ideologies and projects.

75 Cliffod Geertz, 1973, *The Interpretation of Culture*. Basic Books: New York, USA.

76 See Quentin Skinner, 2002, *Visions of Politics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, especially Chapter 4.

For Skinner the unit of historical interpretation is not Lovejoy's ideal-typical 'idea', but either the individual 'text' located in its relevant context, or an analysis of the genealogical mutations of a 'concept' in successive texts and contexts. It is this last approach that I take up here.

Wittgenstein is commonly said to be an 'anti-philosopher' because he saw philosophy as a form of therapy, that works to cure us of our bewitchment by language. In a striking passage about Frank Ramsay, Wittgenstein said, 'Ramsey was a bourgeois thinker. This is to say, his thoughts had as their goal the ordering of the things in a given community. He did not reflect about the essence of the state – or at any rate he did not like doing this – rather he thought merely how one could arrange *this* state in a rational way. The thought that this state might not be the only possible one partly disturbed him and partly bored him'[77]. When Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge in 1929 for the first time since the eve of the First World War, Ramsey was his closest friend, interlocutor and – Wittgenstein's status at the university was, absurdly, that of an advanced PhD student – his supervisor. Yet he was soon to complain of Ramsey's objection in their weekly meetings, that they fail to 'seize the matter by the root, where the life is, but so far outside that nothing can be rectified'[78]. It would certainly be a stretch to claim that these two passages contain the embryo of a political theory that we can attribute to Wittgenstein. But they are suggestive as to how we might develop a Wittgensteinian political theory.

Ramsey's perspective was confined to the ordering of the existing objects of politics. He did not care to reflect on the complexity of the concepts of those objects, like the 'state', to reveal the variety of possible meanings which they might assume, within different social, political and historical forms of life. It would be fair to say that there is a congruence between this perspective on politics and Ramsey's reference theory of meaning. It conceives of language as a mirror for the representation of objects which exist independent of its use, and so tends toward the uncritical acceptance of the existing concepts of politics. The only role left for the theorist is to establish the logical order of these concepts, to clean up what the relationship between the 'state' is and the other given institutions of society[79]. Ramsey is a 'bourgeois thinker', in this sense, because of his blithely affirmative stance towards society as he finds it. For the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, social institutions are not fixed reflections of a natural order. In any literal sense, the opposite of Ramsey's bourgeois affirmation is radical critique, i.e. to 'seize the matter by the root', revealing how

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77 Raymond Geuss, 2010, *Politics and the Imagination*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA. See p. 167-172, quote on p. 167 (it is Geuss' translation).

78 Ray Monk, 1991, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. Vintage: London, UK, p. 259.

79 Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination*, p. 168.

the concepts which presently organise social life are a contingent part of language games that have been created by humans for particular ends, and can be changed *in toto* by concerted action.

Hans Sluga has recently taken these and other features of Wittgenstein's thought as the starting point for a new form of 'diagnostic' political theory. Sluga's immediate target is the belief that we can identify universal normative rules for the assessment of politics, a view he associates with Plato, Immanuel Kant and John Rawls. He levies two arguments against normativism. First, assessments are always personal statements of individual subjects made within particular situations, expressing a judgement of that state of things and how we should act within it[80]. There is no escaping those limitations to render impersonal assessments of human life as a whole. In particular, there is no supra-language game that stands above all particular language games as a neutral standpoint from which to proffer an assessment of human life independent of any particular conventions of language use. Second, rules are only effective insofar as the subject to which they pertain exhibits an underlying regularity[81]. If life was in total flux rules would be useless. Modern politics is a complex system with many interacting parts, is open to the entrance of new and unforeseeable factors, and is an area of rapid and accelerating change. What characterises this 'hyper-complex' field[82], then, is irregularity, uncertainty and transformation. Closed ethical rules designed within a specific situation will inevitably be superseded by circumstances. What is required is not universal reach but the adaptation of rules to local problems.

While Sluga's primary target is the attempt to formulate universal moral norms for the assessment of politics (*normativism*), he rejects in equal measure the uncritical acceptance of the concepts that organise the existing political world, the position we saw exemplified by Ramsey (*positivism*). Sluga's proposed alternative is *diagnosis*, the identification of symptoms from localised cues on the body and the analysis of their genesis and cause for the practical purpose of aiding the patient. It is rooted in history, exhibits a unity of theory and practice, and attends to the genetic development of the pathology. The metaphor of 'diagnosis' has an obvious kinship with Wittgenstein's belief that philosophy, properly understood, is a form of 'therapy' whose aim is to free us of our bewitchment by linguistic confusions. But it has sharper medical connotations[83]. To diagnose a patient involves several steps:

- Observation of symptoms

80 Hans Sluga, 2014, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, pp. 14-15.

81 Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, pp. 20.

82 Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, pp. 238-242.

83 Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, pp. 33.

- Examination of localised cues
- Determination of genesis and cause
- Diagnostic opinion of pathology

Sluga argues that 'diagnostic' political thinking reached its height in the twentieth century with Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. But he also identifies Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* as one of its pioneering texts[84]. Nietzsche calls into question the value of morality by revealing its genesis in a 'slave revolt' where the natural order of 'life', in which the *good* is associated with the vitality and strength of the noble and the *bad* with the weak, the poor and the enfeebled, was reversed through a sinister ideological *coup d'état* aided by the self-hating pieties of Judeo-Christianity, and the fetters gradually placed on aristocrats by the state to inhibit their barbarian impulses[85]. It is a complex story with various subtleties and sub-plots that can only be reconstructed when read alongside the whole of Nietzsche's later corpus, especially *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Anti-Christ*. The diagnostic structure of Nietzsche's argument, however, is easy enough to summarise[86].

Nietzsche begins with the symptoms of nihilism he believes blight nineteenth century Europe: egalitarianism, nationalism and feminism. Nietzsche then shows that these pathologies depend on the treatment of morality as if it were a natural given, as if ethics could *only* mean forgiveness, charity and guilt, and as if this conception of morality was an unalloyed good. He sets out a genealogy to dispel this linguistic reification by showing that 'morality' is an artificial construct that stands at the end of a long succession of historical battles over its meaning in which it has been repeatedly appropriated and transformed by agents for their own local purposes. We should not, on Nietzsche's view, assume that the meaning of concepts is fixed at their moment of birth, and that they glide across history as stable wholes: 'anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, transformed and redirected for a new purpose by a power superior to it'[87]. They are subject to an ongoing war of ideas, where competing parties seek to bend the linguistic terrain of common sense, legitimacy and debate in their favour. Whenever we take one of the architectonic concepts that organise our political world – 'liberty', 'the state',

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84 Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, pp. 96-11.

85 Frederich Nietzsche, 2013, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Penguin: London, UK.

86 Here I am heavily influenced by Raymond Geuss, 1994, Nietzsche and Genealogy, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2(3), pp. 274-292; Raymond Geuss, 2002, Genealogy as Critique, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 10(2), pp. 209-215. See also Mark Bevir, 2008, What is Genealogy?, *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2, pp. 263-275; Chapter 4, Mathias Thaler, 2019, *Naming Violence: A Critical Theory of Genocide, Torture, and Terrorism.* Columbia University Press: New York, USA; Colin Koopman, 2013, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity.* Indiana University Press: Bloomington, USA.

87 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, p. 63.

'liberalism' – we discover upon examination that it contains the accreted sediment of past battles. Their meaning is not singular and parsimonious but polysemic and contradictory, because they combine all the different meanings foisted upon them by independent historical actors into an artificial whole. It is in this sense that Nietzsche's dictum, 'it is only that which has no history which can be defined', should be taken[88].

A common criticism of this form of genealogical argument is that it betrays the so-called 'genetic fallacy', which is to say, it makes an inference about the truth or value of a thing by virtue of the character of its origins or history[89]. In the case of *The Genealogy of Morality*, for instance, it does not follow that that Judeo-Christian morality is *wrong* because it emerged from the haphazard historical sequence and sordid psychological processes that Nietzsche claims it did. I do not wish to enter the minefield of debate over exactly what Nietzsche himself thought was the philosophical structure of his genealogy. But as I have reconstructed it, the desideratum of genealogy is not to debunk the reified concept which it takes as its target, but to inspect the pathologies which surround a concept through a genealogical examination that separates out its accumulated meanings, and clarifies how certain problems have emerged from within this historical complex of events. It disentangles the confused webs of significance that weigh down our concepts, by unwinding the historical process by which they became enmeshed. Genealogy gives us a kind of historical high ground from which to survey this development in its totality and re-imagine what the concept might be. It is a diagnostic device, not a hammer.

What I am proposing is a genealogy that starts with the re-emergence of civilization to the forefront of politics over recent years in a *discourse of crisis*. This new language wields enormous influence, from Trump's paean to Poland as the frontier of Western civilization against the conspiring threats of Islamic jihadism, Great Power rivalry, and liberal connivance, to Kissinger's thesis that the post-war world order depends on the values, ideas and culture of 'Western civilization', and cannot endure in the face of the pluralisation of world power. Bestsellers and opinion-columns have made a small industry out of dissecting 'the decline of the West'. Our dominant vision of the future is one of civilizational collapse, in which the unintended effects of a decentralised process of global technological development creates the conditions – by destroying the environment, democratising destructive technologies, and forming fragile complex systems – of its own downfall.

Virtually none of this abundant writing reflects on the concept of civilization itself and attempts to locate it within a theoretical problematic that has played out over the last century.

88 Ibid., p.65.

89 Brian Leiter, 2002, *Nietzsche: On Morality.* Routledge: London, UK, pp. 173-179.

It treats the concept of civilization as if it were a natural given. While it draws from theorists of civilizations across the twentieth century – consciously and unconsciously – it makes no attempt to gauge the genealogical development that it stands at the culmination of as a whole. It is ignorant of the politics of its own making, of the formation of the layers of significance built into the concept of civilization, as the embers of past battles became sedimented into an artificial whole. I diagnose the crisis in our language of civilization by placing it within a genealogical perspective. This diagnosis operates at two levels.

At the first level, I locate civilization within the problem-space of Europe's *deminutio capitis*. Civilization emerged as a global system of identity and difference in which the status of Europe was redeemed by the privileged role it was accorded within the modern regime of historical time. It entered into common sense that Europe was the centre of world change and progress, and this became a malleable pretext for its imperial conquest and exploitation of other societies. This system broke down in the wake of the First World War as Europe sank into barbarism and power began to rebalance through the world system, undercutting the conditions that had made Europe's status as a superlative civilization plausible. In the century since theorists have tried to vindicate the value, durability and vitality of 'the West' in a post-European world order, while presupposing the modern regime of historical time as the context within which any solution must be offered. I trace the emergence of this problem-space and the way in which it was reinscribed in a succession of historical conjunctures.

At the second level, I unfurl the genealogical mutations of the concept of civilization. One of the principal reasons that studies of civilization have erred is that they mistake the concept with its particular instantiation in the long nineteenth century, and on this assumption conceive of the crisis of civilization after the First World War as a historical terminus. I suggest, in contrast, that Europe's *deminutio capitis* was a highly generative problematic. By destroying the matrix of assumptions through which Europe understood itself, the nature of world politics and history, and justified its globe-straddling empires, it catalysed an interrogation of the basic categories of modern political thought, a diagnosis of the afflictions of European civilization, and a search for a new post-European world order. Embroiled in debates over imperial decline, world government, totalitarianism, and liberal humanitarianism, I reconstruct three transformations in the concept of civilization across the twentieth century: its pluralisation, liberalisation, and deterritorialisation. In each case these conceptual innovations have been used to imagine and legitimate world-ordering projects, from the idea of the British Commonwealth as a multicultural conciliator of the plural civilizations under its dominion, to the reimagining of liberal democracy as the constitutive ideology of 'Western civilization', threatened by the totalitarian barbarism of communism, to prognoses of an ever-expanding 'democratic peace' bringing the world into the limitless

compass of liberal civilization. An index of the shifting self-conception of 'the West', the detritus of these battles help us to untangle the contradictory meanings of civilization today.

I merge these two levels into a single historical narrative by offering a close exegesis of a succession of theorists trapped within the problem-space of Europe's *deminutio capitis*, who at one and the same time serve as representatives of each stage in the genealogical mutation of the concept of civilization. Here the starring roles are played by Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Karl Popper, James Burnham, Francis Fukuyama, and John Rawls, though cast within a wider ensemble. It is the collapse of faith in European civilization and the consequent transformation of what 'civilization' is, on the one hand, and the desire to rekindle the dreams that dominated European thought in the long nineteenth century, on the other, that provide the explanatory key to their visions of world order.

In *The History Manifesto*, David Armitage and Jo Guldi chronicle the dramatic contraction of the time-horizon of history[90]. The pressures of academic specialisation have led to a situation in which mastery over minute detail, archival paper-trails and historiographical politics are prized above all else as markers of sophistication, while incredulity towards grand narratives and the linguistic turn have, at the same time, created a methodological drive towards 'microhistories' focused on discrete episodes, historical texts and institutions. Where in the past historians charted narratives of a century or more, today the average history dissertation covers a period between five and fifty years. The inevitable result is that history has retreated from confronting 'big ideas', ceding whatever ground it once had in the public sphere to economic, biological and psychological explanations of the social world. For Armitage and Guldi this is nothing less than the surrender of the ethical vocation of history.

Serial contextualism is Armitage's simple but powerful answer. If we intelligently select a series of fine-grained synchronic analyses of discrete historical contexts and string them together into a diachronic narrative, we will be able to combine all the benefits of micro-historical specificity with the *long durée*[91]. Armitage has provided a masterclass in exactly this, in his recent *Civil War: A History in Ideas*[92]. Armitage traces the concept of 'civil war' from its genesis in ancient Rome, through a series of periods of conceptual rupture, all the way to twentieth century[93]. If this is Armitage's methodological design, his justification is genealogical. Armitage, in other words, takes serial contextualism as a guide for *how to do*

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90 Jo Guldi and David Armitage, 2014, *The History Manifesto.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. See especially Chapter 3.

91 David Armitage, 2012, What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Duree, *History of European Ideas,* 38(4), pp. 493-507.

92 Inspiration can also be drawn from the combination of breadth and depth found in several outstanding works of intellectual history from international relations theorists in recent years: Patricia Owens, 2015, *Economy of Force: Counterinsurgency and the Historical Rise of the Social.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; Jens Bartelson, 2017, *War in International Thought.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; Antoine Bousquet, 2018, *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone.* University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, USA.

93 David Armitage, 2017, Civil War: A History in Ideas. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, USA.

genealogy. This is no small benefit, given that the usual exemplars of genealogical history – Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* – are anything but straightforward and fastidious works of historical scholarship, but eclectic contributions to philosophy, psychology and sociology in their own right[94]. I adopt my own (modest by Armitage's proportions) version of serial contextualism. I offer a series of synchronic portraits of thinkers who are representative of critical junctures in the development of the concept of civilization, and pull these together in a diachronic narrative running the gamut of the last century. This allows me to offer fine-grained reconstructions of their thought, and how they navigate the problem-space of Europe's *deminutio capitis*, while also allowing me to trace the history of civilization's mutations as a whole.

Answering Two Objections: Paradigms and Chronology

Before I start, I want to pre-empt two objections that might be made of the argument I have made thus far. The first objection is that I have drawn an overly simplified straw-man of how the concept of civilization was used in the long nineteenth century. 'Progress' was a far more ambivalent concept than I have allowed for. The second objection is that the traditional concept of civilization died long *before* the outbreak of the First World War, and that the basic chronology of the story that I am telling is therefore false. I address each of these concerns in turn.

The first objection might take one of two forms: methodological and interpretive. Methodologically, it might be objected that Koselleck's account of the modern regime of historical time relies on implausible meta-historical assumptions about the phenomenological conditions of experience, which in any case, are incompatible with the historicist theory of 'meaning as use' which I have endorsed. I do not share Koselleck's historical anthropology, the idea that it is cognitively *impossible* to understand history without organising one's thoughts into a 'space of experience' and a 'horizon of expectation'. But that does not mean we cannot identify how different historical actors have, on their own terms, organised the social world along the indices of past, present and future, and compare these temporalities to identify broad patterns over time. One might simply say that the space of experience and horizon of expectation are contained in or associated with many of the fundamental concepts, theories and ideologies of Western political thought, translating Koselleck's

94 See also Quentin Skinner, 2009, A Genealogy of the Modern State, *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 162, pp. 325-370. Armitage notes that Skinner himself has moved from concentrated micro-historical studies to a greater engagement with intellectual history over the longue durée.

anthropological thesis into a historicist one. In any case, Koselleck's description of the modern regime of historical time *stands or falls* on whether it is an adequate interpretation of Enlightenment thought in Europe's 'saddle-period'. Koselleck is one of the great intellectual historians of the twentieth century, as the driving force behind the *Begriffsgeschichte* (an encyclopaedic compendium of German political concepts), and his argument is rooted in careful and sophisticated readings of historical texts. I wish to commend his thesis on these grounds.

The other version of this objection is interpretive. It may be said that Koselleck's account of the idea of progress (asymmetric, infinite, collective singular) is a caricature of what is in reality a far more *variegated* discourse. While it may suffice as a description of, say, Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind*, many other thinkers of Europe's 'saddle-period' took a far more ambivalent view of progress. Up to a point, I want to allow for this objection: one cannot summarise how a canonical concept was used over an entire historical period without generalisation. But generalisation is different from falsification. If we descend from this height to inspect the writings of individual thinkers we will, to be sure, identify finer and finer distinctions between their theories of progress and civilization. But this in itself does not mean that the decisive majority of those individuals did not operate within the broad discursive parameters identified by Koselleck. Indeed, this level of generalisation is common to intellectual history – often captured in concepts like 'paradigm', 'episteme', 'discourse' or 'imaginary' – and is an acceptable simplifying assumption. We do not only care about particular differences, but about what a period of thought holds in common. Of course, we also must be reflexive about the fact that these always *are* simplifications, and be ready to shift to the granular level of analysis where necessary.

I do not think this in itself will suffice to quiet the interpretive objection. One may reply: even at this level, the discourse of progress never exhibited this kind of optimistic homogeneity. Here I think it will help to say something about the relationship between the *fact* and *value* of progress. Brett Bowden draws this distinction, and it is a helpful one[95]. But it can also mislead if taken too literally. One reason that it can mislead is that 'progress' and 'civilization' are evaluative-descriptive concepts. To speak of one society as more progressed or civilized than another is not a neutral description but an act that carries with it a whole series of hierarchical associations. Of course there is a long counter-discourse that inverts these terms to speak of such things as the 'barbarism of progress', but the very efficacy of this rhetorical usurpation lies in the subversion of the normal connotations of 'barbarism' and 'progress'. A more serious reason for caution is this: the fact and value of progress are

95 Bowden, *Empire of Civilization,* p.28-29.

nearly always fused together. It is rare for a thinker to cleanly separate the two. This is especially important given that even the most emphatic proselytisers of civilization rarely assume that progress is something *uniformly* good. Indeed, to do so would be to surrender all critical faculties in the face of the new; a kind of Panglossian modernism. Most theorists of progress make some attempt to distinguish within the process of development what is valuable and what is not. Both the *balance* of that evaluative judgement in the ratio of civilization identified as good and bad, and the *predication* of the ailments of civilization – whether they are contingent or eradicable, arise from within civilization or without, are barriers to progress or signs of its incompleteness, etc. – vary drastically. Yet even for its critics, progress is generally taken to be a net good despite its deficiencies (e.g. Adam Ferguson), or its deficiencies are thought to be surmountable through *further* progress (e.g. Jean-Jacque Rousseau). It is here that we run up against the outer limits of the 'paradigm' of progress.

We find this fact illustrated in the figure over whose theory of civilization more ink has been spilled than any other: John Stuart Mill. In April 1836 Mill published a long essay with the *Westminster Review*, 'Civilization'[96]. Mill clarifies at the outset that he is not interested in the use of the word civilization as an everyday synonym for that which is morally good or beneficial, but in the idea of civilization as a universal process of development in whose earlier stages exist 'savages' and 'barbarians', and in whose later stages exist commercial Europe. On these terms Mill's explanation for the development of civilization is redolent of Ferguson's: it emerges from habituation into the lessons of experience[97]. What distinguishes the civilized merchant from the savage hunter-gatherer, for Mill, is their ability to submit their will to the discipline of cooperation, to learn the value of a division of labour for human property and intelligence. This means the history of civilization is also the story of the movement from the individual to the mass. And here lie the dangers for modern Europe. Mill's complaints about 'mass civilization' reflect common anxieties about the emergence of the public sphere, and the democratisation of European life (Mill was writing just four years after the Great Reform Act). Politics has lost its aristocratic dignity, becoming a simple contest for the attention and support of the masses. As individuals have increasingly been subsumed within the division of labour, regard for public life as a whole has given way to individual money-getting. Individuals shrink from pain, endurance and violence, leading to the death of the 'heroic'. The influence once exercised on political life by the educated elite has diminished. And so on.

96 John Stuart Mill, 1977, 'Civilization', in J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essay on Politics and Society*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Canada, pp. 117-147.
97 Mill, 'Civilization', pp.121-122.

But despite this variegated assessment of the valence of civilization, Mill leaves no ambiguity whatsoever that civilization is a *net good* and that the negative effects of mass society can be eradicated by *further progress*. Indeed, this last point is emphatic: 'All that we are in danger of losing we may preserve, all that we have lost we may regain, and bring to a perfection hitherto unknown'[98]. If we turn to Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*, he has no trouble in applying the concept of civilization as a hierarchical theory of development to justify the paternal tutelage of 'savage' and 'barbarian' peoples[99]. Given that peoples of this kind lack the discipline and forbearance to manage their affairs in the way representative government demands, 'a civilised government, to be really advantageous to them, will require to be in a considerable degree despotic: to be one over which they do not themselves exercise control, and which imposes a great amount of forcible restraint upon their actions'. Mill's objections operate *within* the confines of the idea of civilization as a hierarchical scale of progressive development.

A second objection to the argument I have laid out is that it appears to be contradicted by one of the outstanding studies of imperial political thought of the last decade, Karuna Mantena's *Alibis of Empire*. Mantena dates the death of the civilizing mission to some sixty years *before* the First World War. The insurrection of the Bengali army against British rule in India in 1857-58 – followed seven years later by the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica – was met with shock, bewilderment and bitter calls for reprisal in Britain, precipitating an imperial legitimation crisis that, Mantena contends, led to 'the repudiation of central assumptions and imperatives underlying the civilizing mission'[100]. In the first half of the nineteenth century the paradigm of the British empire had been to reform native forms of life on the model of European history in order to bring about their civilization. Indian resistance violated the basic assumption of the convertibility of the native that underlay this liberal paradigm. Whether a failure of ability or desire, the Indian's renunciation of the gifts of civilization demanded explanation. What followed, Mantena suggests, was a decisive *culturalist* turn in which Indian customs and institutions were taken on their own terms as an integral whole resistant to aggressive liberal engineering. A new alibi of imperial rule emerged: British control was necessary to protect India's fragile cultural ecosystem from the dissolving forces of modernity. It was this culturalist shift, Mantena proposes, that laid the basis for the emergence of the 'indirect rule' of colonies through native structures of authority, pioneered by Frederick Lugard in the British protectorate of Nigeria, and later taken up by the League of Nations' 'Mandates System'.

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98 Mill, 'Civilization', p.136.

99 John Stuart Mill, 1869, *Considerations on Representative Government.* Harper & Brothers: New York, USA, p.15.

100 Karuna Mantena, 2010, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism.* Princeton University Press: New Jersey, US, p. 2.

Mantena makes her case through a careful exegesis of the eminent jurist Henry Maine, who she positions as the fountainhead of the culturalist 'alibi of empire'. But can Maine bear this interpretive weight as the pivot of the entire imperial imaginary? Duncan Bell has suggested that while Mantena provides an exacting analysis of Maine as the creator of a new form of culturalist imperialism, and tracks its influence upon British colonial policy in India, this alone cannot support Mantena's claim to have identified a *general transformation* of imperial ideology[101]. For this would only support Mantena's thesis if we assume an equivalence between 'British liberal ideology and Indian imperial policy'. But Mantena does little to vindicate this assumption and, Bell protests, the facts do not bear it out. Bell proceeds to enumerate sundry examples in defence of the counterclaim that 'the liberal civilizing mission remained a central feature of imperial ideology deep into the twentieth century'.

I want to suggest that *both* Mantena and Bell are broadly right and that the source of their disagreement lies in a confusion over the nature of the concept of 'civilization'. Mantena does not treat civilization as a protean 'meta-concept' that unified diffuse theories, ideologies and representations through an abstract index of identity and difference: differential social progress. Her use of civilization is stipulative. She is concerned with a peculiar form of 'civilizing mission' that she associates with James Mill and John Stuart Mill[102]. On this view the object of imperial policy is the reengineering of native society to bring it as rapidly up to speed with civilization as possible. Mantena equivocates on this point, but Maine's culturalism is *not* a theory that calls for the indefinite and pristine preservation of 'traditional societies'. Rather, Maine retains the language of civilization as a hierarchy of development while arguing that progress along that hierarchy is more difficult and arduous than has been hitherto acknowledged. It is not a displacement of the language of civilization but a modulation of it.

This is true of the substance and method of Maine's most famous work, *Ancient Law*. Maine sketches a universal theory of development, modelled upon European history, of the movement from a society founded on the law of *status* in kinship-based networks of reciprocal rights, to the law of *contract* among free and independent individuals[103]. Maine explicitly disavows the idea that Indian society is different in kind from Europe and stands outside of this developmental timeline. What Maine suggests, instead, is that India and all other non-European societies have been afflicted by a medley of ailments that have slowed, retarded and arrested their progress. Here the list is long: they failed to extricate themselves

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101 Duncan Bell, 2016, Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, pp. 57-61.

102 Mantena, *Alibis of Empire,* pp. 25-39.

103 Henry Maine, 1861, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and its Relations to Modern Ideas*. John Murray: London, UK, pp .167-170.

from the dependency of the family[104], they are inhibited by the bio-social inheritance of the past mistakes of their race[105], they adopted a formal legal code at too late a time in their social development[106], despotic rigidity and religious dogma have prevented them from making the kind of incremental legal improvements that Europe has[107]. It is this, for Maine, which explains ‘a civilization as feeble and perverted as that of the Hindoos’[108]. But it *does* participate in a universal process of civilization. At the same time, Maine’s guiding method – the comparative study of legal systems – is little more than a reformulation of the idea of the contemporary non-contemporaneous. Given that ‘societies do not advance concurrently, but at different rates of progress… men trained to habits of methodical observation’ can compare past and present at one and the same time[109]. ‘Sometimes the Past *is* the Present’, Maine muses[110]. As Mantena herself writes:

> ‘In practical terms, this meant that ethnological data of extant “primitive” societies such as India provided a crucial link in the attempted reconstruction of a universal history of civilization, with Western society as its apex. The Aryan or Indo-European idea implicated India, ancient Rome, and feudal and modern Europe in a singular (evolutionary) history of institutional development and, thus, became a vehicle through which universal history could be imagined.’[111]

This is not a peculiarity of Maine. If we follow the thread of ‘indirect rule’ to Lugard’s *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Mandate* we find the congratulatory pronouncement that ‘the civilised Powers of the world have asserted the unequivocal right and obligation of the more advanced races to assume responsibility for the backward races’, and that in Britain’s relationship to its colonies the ‘obligation before civilisation [is] to promote their progress and welfare’[112]. In her magisterial study of the League of Nations’ Mandates System, Susan Pederson concludes that during the ‘first half-dozen years of the mandates system… the ‘civilizational’ and overtly racial framework of trusteeship elbowed ‘self-determination’ off the liberal-international stage’[113]. In the two sites of Mantena’s argument – Maine’s jurisprudence

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104 Maine, *Ancient Law,* p.134.

105 Maine, *Ancient Law,* p.116.

106 Maine, *Ancient Law,* pp.16, 76.

107 Maine, *Ancient Law,* pp.17, 23-23.

108 Maine, *Ancient Law,* p. 20.

109 Maine, *Ancient Law,* p. 120.

110 Henry Maine, 1871, *Village Communities in the East and West.* John Murray: London, UK, p. 7.

111 Mantena, *Alibis of Empire,* p. 74.

112 F. D. Lugard, 1922, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa.* William Blackwood and Sons: Edinburgh, UK, pp. 38-39.

113 Take one of Pedersen’s many revealing anecdotes: when the Samoans rose up against the injunctions imposed on them by a zealous colonial administrator, and the case was referred to the ‘Permanent Mandates Committee’ responsible for holding the mandate powers to the principles of the League, they simply dismissed the Samoans as children who needed to be trained into the civilized discipline of obedience.

and the practice of 'indirect rule' – the language of civilization not only endured but dominated.

It is helpful to place Mantena's *Alibis of Empire* side-by-side with Theodore Koditschek's *Liberalism, Imperialism and the Historical Imagination*[114]. It was in the second year of the Sepoy Mutiny that Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace first published their theories of natural selection. The following year Darwin brought *On the Origin of the Species* to print. Koditschek shows that a rupture in the temporality of imperial thought took place at the coincidence of these events. Just as the Sepoy Mutiny prompted the question as to why Indians were failing to accept the lessons of civilization, evolutionary theories emerged that upended the Biblical chronology and recast progress onto a vast geological timescale. Koditschek argues that a new generation of 'chastened liberals' – including George Campbell, Henry Maine and E.A. Freeman – drew from evolutionary theory to reconceive of the *velocity* at which the progress of 'backwards peoples' could be hoped for. Civilization was reinvented as an incremental process that took place over the *long durée*, not something achieved in a generation or two. This had the effect of simultaneously attenuating native reform and reaffirming the civilizing mission.

Mantena is certainly right that after the Sepoy Mutiny certain streams of British imperial thought shifted from a universalist to a culturalist register, and that the emphasis of British policy in India shifted towards the conservation of native institutions. But this transformation took place *within* the discourse of civilization and retained the assumption that all societies partake in a stadial process of development modelled on European history. Culture modified the movement and velocity of societal progress, but it did not annul it. In this sense it was a culturalism subsumed within a higher universalism. 'Conservation' was not an admission of immutable difference. Non-European progress was stuttering, laboured and slow – not impossible. The underlying issue is that Mantena begins with a stipulative definition of 'civilization' which fails to track how the concept is actually used. She betrays her own framing of *Alibis of Empire* when she claims that Maine does, in fact, proffer a 'universal history of civilization'. *This* is why Mantena's central thesis can hold true while, at one and the same time, Bell is able to provide a catalogue of examples attesting to the continued vitality of the 'civilizing mission'.

114 Theodore Koditschek, 2011, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. See Chapter 5.

Section 2: Fall

Chapter 2: Revolutionary Petrifaction

Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (Der Untergang des Abendlandes) was published in July 1918. In the spring, Germany had rerouted the armies freed by the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Russia to the Western front, in a gambit to achieve a breakthrough before the full might of the United States could be brought to bear on Europe. It had failed, at great human cost, and Germany was now only weeks away from the Allied offensive that would end the war. In this unhappy atmosphere Spengler was received as something of a prophet. The war was, of course, followed by revolutionary paroxysms, the Carthaginian peace of Versailles, the economic ruin of the early 1920s, the gradual disintegration of the Weimar Republic, and the victory of Nazism. Spengler, more than any other German thinker, captured the spirit of the times: he became, for this generation, the philosopher of crisis par excellence.

The Decline of the West is a text of great interest for several overlapping reasons. First, it is the seminal statement of Europe's deminutio capitis. Spengler revives a metabolic theory of nature to conceive of civilizations as cyclical phenomena in whose progress is, time and again, met by the equal and opposite force of decline. In this 'Copernican revolution', the West is decentred from world history. It is qualitatively no different than other civilizations of the past, present and future, an ageing flower that is wilting into death. *The Decline of the West* would exercise a decisive influence on figures as diverse as Jack Kerouac, Ludwig Wittgenstein, George F. Kennan and John Rawls. Arnold Toynbee's own cyclical philosophy of history followed directly in its footsteps.

Second, it stands at the culmination of the German counter-discourse of civilization. There have, of course, been multitudinous lamentations of the godless atheism, industrial monstrosity and utilitarian calculation of civilization. But in the case of Germany, this became incorporated into the semantics of the language. Zivilisation was made into the subordinate pair of Kultur - the spiritual depth and cultural learning of the German nation. Spengler stands at the climax of a long tradition of Kulturpessimismus, reacting to the breakneck industrialisation of Germany after unification.

Third, Spengler's writings exhibit a paradoxical temporality. As the name implies, *The Decline of the West* is a jeremiad. Spengler believes the West is in the throws of decline, that this is a natural movement with the force of gravity, and that all we can do is embrace Nietzsche's amor fati. But Spengler was also the leading figure of the 'Conservative

Revolution' in Weimar Germany. He espoused an affirmative vision of revolutionary dictatorship, corporatist socialism, and imperial expansion. I suggest that Spengler brings these two temporalities into unison in a vision of what I call 'revolutionary petrifaction'.

Spengler is a Delphic thinker. Despite his sympathies Adorno regarded his philosophy as little better than astrology[1], and Lukacs prosecuted him as the penultimate stage of an irrationalist movement culminating in Hitler[2]. The path to any clear interpretation of Spengler's meaning is, therefore, winding. We shall have to take three byways: one into Goethe's theory of living nature, which gives Spengler's history its form, another into the origins and texture of the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction, which gives Spengler's history its content, and a third Nietzsche's 'life theory', which Spengler uses to bind Goethe and the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction together into a coherent whole. If we understand these sources well enough, we shall be in a position to decipher Spengler's application of them. I therefore use these three histories to frame my interpretation, treating them one by one, in the first, second and third sections of this chapter.

Living Nature

The first of these ingredients was Goethe’s ‘morphological’ theory of living forms. Goethe’s theory represents a seminal contribution to *naturphilosophie*, and it is worth beginning by defining the problematic of this wider movement. One aim of Kant’s transcendental idealism was to escape from the materialist paradigm of the world promulgated since Newton, not least because it threatened atheism. Kant tried to carve out a noumenal realm of agential freedom, standing apart from the phenomenal realm of causal mechanism. The obvious cost of Kant’s dualism is that consciousness is rendered as a mysterious entity whose interface with the material world is left substantially unexplained. *Naturphilosophie* was largely conceived of as a response to Kant, offering a new solution to the problem of materialism: a monist philosophy that reconceives of the material world as *living nature*, containing what had previously been understood as the ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ as two heterogeneous expressions of this single animating life-force[3]. For our purposes, I want to highlight two features of *naturphilosophie*.

First, this monist philosophy was often combined with organicism, in the sense defined by Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*[4]. In Kant’s philosophy the world reveals a regular pattern of cause-and-effect – Newtonian mechanics – because the categories of the understanding

1 Theodore W. Adorno, Was Spengler Right?, Encounter, January 1966, pp. 25-28.

2 Georg Lukacs, 1981, *The Destruction of Reason*. Humanities Press: London, UK, pp. 459-475

3 Frederick Beiser, 2017, ‘The Enlightenment and Idealism’, in Karl Ameriks (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, pp. 21-42.

4 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. pp. 187-212.

impose this form and coherence on perception. Causation is presented as a unilateral series, where if the kinetic energy of my foot causes you to fall over, that might have the forward-looking cause that you are wet, but it cannot be the backward-looking cause of my kick itself. Now, in *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant suggests that these mechanical categories are insufficient to understand living phenomena. Kant believes that life exhibits a reciprocal nexus of cause-and-effect. A tree is both the cause of a leaf on its branches, and the effect of the leaf's capture of light energy[5]. Its parts are not accidental conjuncts, but can only be understood as part of a rational design, as subservient to the purpose of the organism as a whole. Its various elements – leaves, blossom, trunk, fruit, roots – are delicately interrelated in a way that can only be understood *with reference to* the purpose of its whole.

Kant did not think this was a dispositive theory, only that we must assume, for the practical purpose of investigating life, that there is an ideal design – an *intellectus archetypus* – immanent within the development and organisation of organisms[6]. It is a heuristic. This significant caveat was largely discarded by the Romantics that followed, allowing them to attribute a teleological design to the world as an organic unity[7]. Goethe recounts that when 'the *Critique of Judgement* fell into my hands… a wonderful period arrived in my life', not least because Kant suggested that the same form of teleological judgement that pertained to organisms, applied equally to aesthetics[8]. Goethe felt that this gave philosophical license to his poetic approach to the natural world.

Second, the *naturphilosophen* argued that the principle of life within nature could not be apprehended through canonical standards of empirical and rational analysis. Schelling, for instance, a close friend and interlocutor of Goethe, argued that the objective products of nature are conditioned by the *non-objective* productivity of nature[9]. Accordingly, Schelling divided the empirical study of the 'being' of these products of nature, from the *a priori* study of the vitalistic stream of 'becoming' that animated those products. Where the first would examine the laws of physical motion, for example, the second would reflect on the primitive source of motion within nature's inner fecundity. The *naturphilosophen* 'launched a full-scale attack upon any form of mechanism used to explain natural phenomena and attempted to narrate the history of the universe, considered as a living entity developing itself according to

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5 Ibid. pp. 199-200.

6 Ibid. p. 236.

7 Beiser, *The Enlightenment and Idealism*, p.38; Robert J. Richards, 2002, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. University of Chicago Press: Illinois, USA, pp.237, 450.

8 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 2007, 'The Influence of Modern Philosophy (1817)', in (ed.) Mathew Bell, *The Essential Goethe*. Translated by John R. Williams. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA. See pp. 983-986.

9 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 2004, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by Keith R. Peterson. State University of New York Press: New York, USA, pp. 193-232.

inherent principles'[10]. The effect was to sacrifice 'epistemological modesty at the altar of certainty, raising reflective introspection to the status of universal truths of nature, spirit and humanity'. It is the fact its method of intuitive perception is entirely self-grounding, that it has no further basis in reason or fact that can be tested or corroborated, that has sustained the charge that *naturphilosophie* is a species of irrationalism.

Goethe thought the taxonomic approach to natural history typified by Carl Linnaeus' towering *Systematic Naturae* was radically incomplete. It limited itself to the description of the outward appearance of life without attempting to identify the underlying principles through which the magisterial course of life could be understood as a whole. Goethe took Spinoza's metaphysics seriously, especially the distinction between the 'infinite' attributes that must exist in potential given the omnipotence of God, and the 'finite' attributes that actually exist in the world[11]. Spinoza thought the 'adequate idea' of an object connected its finite character to the infinite attributes of God through intuition, and we might say that it was Goethe's ambition to locate the adequate idea of life-forms. Goethe's breakthrough came in his journey across Italy in 1786-88, inspired not only by the country's verdant landscape but its antique art. Goethe regarded Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *The History of Art in Antiquity* (1764) to be of pivotal importance, both in its analysis of the 'high' and 'beautiful' ideals of art in the classical world, and the aesthetic mode of judgement that Winckelmann used to identify those ideals[12]. It was this which served as the kernel of Goethe's pre-Darwinian science of life[13].

Goethe thought of morphology as an entirely new science, to be superadded to chemistry, physics and natural history. Its subject is the form, formation and transformation of life, but it is just as much distinguished by its method of 'intuitive perception', Goethe thinks. Goethe accepts something close to Kant's definition of the organism, but argues that it is *life* which vivifies its parts and organises them into a purposeful whole[14]. It follows that to understand an organism we have to identify the principles of life which guide its development, 'to discover the laws an organism is destined to follow as a living being'. These are not laws of its fixed character but of its metamorphoses. In *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, published in the same year as *The Critique of Judgement*, Goethe converged on a similar idea to Kant's *intellectus archetypus*. By juxtaposing images of the successive metamorphoses of plants,

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10 Peter Hanns Reill, 2005, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. University of California Press: California, USA, p. 202.

11 See, for example, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 2007, 'A Study Based on Spinoza (C.1785)', In Mathew Bell (ed.), *The Essential Goethe*. Translated by John R. Williams. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA; p. xviii; Gordon L. Miller, 2009, 'Introduction', in *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. MIT Press: Massachusetts, USA.

12 Joan Steigerwald, 2002, Goethe's Morphology: Urphänomene and Aesthetic Appraisal, *Journal of the History of Biology*, 35(2), pp. 291-328. See p. 305.

13 For a detailed overview of the development of Goethe's theory of morphology, Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, pp. 407-502.

14 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 2007, 'Observations on Morphology in General (C. 1795)', In Mathew Bell (ed.), *The Essential Goethe*. Translated by John R. Williams. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA, pp. 948-951.

Goethe thought he could isolate the ideal of the plant – the prime plant, or *Urphanomene* – independent of all individual differences in his mind's eye. Goethe contended that all of the various elements of the plant had, through a gradual process of expansion and contraction, evolved from the protean organ of the leaf[15]. It was the *ideal leaf* which contained, *in potentia,* all the actual plants found in the botanical world. For Goethe, it was a bridge from the finite to the infinite, a leap aided by artistic intuition, or Spinoza's 'Reason':

> 'The understanding will not reach her; man must be capable of elevating himself to the highest Reason, to come into contact with the Divinity, which manifests itself in the primitive phenomena (*Urphenomenen*), which dwells behind them, and from which they proceed.
>
> The divinity works in the living and not in the dead; in the becoming and changing, not in the become and the fixed. Therefore reason, with its tendency towards the divine, has only to do with the becoming, the living; but understanding with the become, the already fixed, that it may make use of it.'[16]

Spengler says of this last paragraph that 'it comprises my entire philosophy'[17]. At the outset of *Decline*, Spengler reports that he owes 'everything' to Goethe and Nietzsche, the first of whom 'gave me method', the second 'the questioning faculty'[18]. In order to interpret what the crisis of West-European culture *signifies*, Spengler believes that we need some method for penetrating through the outward events of history into the underlying metaphysical structure that governs their metamorphoses. This 'method' is Goethe's morphological theory of living forms, 'extended, to a degree hitherto undreamed of, over the whole field of history'[19]. Spengler's self-assigned task is to map the morphology of 'world history', a period stretching across roughly the last six-thousand years of human history[20], and comprised of eight 'higher cultures': Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Aztec, Classical, Arabian, and West-European.

Spengler approaches universal history at two levels: he has a *universal theory of cultural forms*, and an *individual theory of cultural styles*. At the first level Spengler identifies the stages of morphological development that define the history of *all* cultures. Spengler treats the great cultures as organisms whose life-course exhibits an identical 'rhythm, form and

15 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 2009, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. MIT Press: Massachusetts, USA, p. 102.

16 Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, 1850, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret: Volume II*. Translated by John Oxenford. Smith & Elder: London, UK, pp. 131-132.

17 Oswald Spengler, 1922, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality. Volume I*. Translated by Charles Francis Atkinson. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, USA, p. 49.

18 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I*. p. xiv.

19 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I*. p. 113.

20 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I*. p. 104.

duration[21]'. In the same way that all butterflies pass through the same stages of metamorphosis – egg, larva, pupa, adult – cultures are formed and transformed according to the principles of life inherent in their organism. They 'belong, like the plants and the animals, to the living Nature of Goethe, and not to the dead Nature of Newton'[22]. Spengler distinguishes between the phenomenal realm of actualised matter that can be dissected with mechanistic principles of cause-and-effect ('become'), and the inward principles of life that bind together and organise the higher cultures as organic wholes and can only gleaned through intuitive perception ('becoming')[23]. Spengler's aim is to conduct a comparative study of the higher cultures that looks past the phenomenal surface of world events, to reveal the quasi-Platonic ideal of culture that defines the morphological development of all existent cultures, Goethe's 'prime phenomenon'. In Spengler's words, we need to isolate 'the *idea* of a culture, which is the sum total of its inner possibilities, from its sensible *phenomenon* or appearance upon the canvas of history as a fulfilled activity'[24]. For that is the master-key that reveals the destiny of West-European culture, as it does all cultures.

But if Spengler takes the *form* of all cultures to be the same, to follow an identical pattern of growth and transformation, he takes the *content* of all cultures to be entirely individual. It is not immediately obvious what the appropriate metaphor is for an organism that exhibits this combination of morphological homology and stylistic individuation. Spengler suggests that we should treat the higher cultures as we would separate species of plant, each 'with its peculiar blossom or fruit, its special type of growth and decline'[25], who follow the same pattern of metamorphoses by virtue of belonging to the same genus[26]. Spengler proposes that there are principles of morphological development specific to each species which define the shape and possibilities of its 'expression-forms'. He calls these *styles*, though its remit is wider than this might suggest. In animals these living principles shape the tools and behaviour a species uses to meet its needs. In the higher cultures, however, it 'dictates the style of every life-expression… the form of the state, the religious myths and cults, the ethical ideals, the form of painting and music and poetry, the fundamental notions of each science'[27]. Spengler's method for investigating the morphology of individual species of culture, is much the same as his method for studying the morphology of the genus of culture:

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21 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 21.

22 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 21.

23 Spengler builds a long chain of dichotomies around this distinction: law and form, causality and destiny, space and time, systematic and physiognomic, and culture and civilization.

24 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 104.

25 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 21.

26 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 206.

27 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 175.

a comparative study that reveals a 'prime symbol' that contains the possibilities of its expression-forms *in potentia*.

But what are these 'prime symbols'? The prime symbol of West-European culture is 'Faustian', the *reaching for the infinite*. It is this, Spengler contends, that holds together the multifarious elements of West-European culture over the last millennia (beginning c.900 AD). Its church spires rising to the divine, its multiplication of finance capital, its conception of morality as a universal imperative, its deep sense of its own place within history, its restless will-to-power over nature, the ethereal swells, eruptions and flashes of classical music, its lust to dominate the world: all of these are of a piece, as emanations of the Faustian soul. Echoing Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Spengler contends that the soul of classical culture is 'Apollonian'. It is the diametric opposite of Western culture, prizing the somatic and the immediate – reflected, Spengler thinks, in the smallness and simplicity of its architecture, the sensuous God's of Olympus, its historyless focus on the present, Oedipus and the phallic-symbol, and its division into individual city-states. Egypt's prime symbol can be gleaned from *The Book of the Dead*. At its heart lies a simple idea: that life is a unidirectional path that must be followed without deviation or break, until one is placed before the dead for final judgement[28]. It is refracted across Egyptian expression-forms, for instance, in the 'Egyptian tomb-temple in which columns are ranked to mark the path for the traveller'[29]. The soul of these and other cultures can only be recovered through a form of hermeneutic self-estrangement in which the historian works their way into alien expression-forms to perceive their underlying unity. Spengler advises that 'these basic determinations of meaning are largely incommunicable by specification, definition or proof, and in their deeper import must be reached by feeling, experience and intuition'[30].

What is of crucial importance, for our purposes, is how Spengler uses Goethe's morphological theory to overturn the modern regime of historical time. Like Valery, he reconceives of Europe as something *mortal* and *relative*. Let us take these in turn.

Spengler reverses one of the conceptual transformations that Koselleck takes to have been fundamental to the 'saddle-period' of modernity, namely, the idea that polities can be thought of on analogy with nature as entities which follow a metabolic pattern of growth and decline. This is how Spengler reinstates 'decline' as the equal and opposite concept of progress, as not merely a temporary lull in progress, or accelerant to further progress, but something that will ultimately negate progress *in toto*.

28 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* pp. 188-189.

29 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 166.

30 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 55.

If the higher cultures are organisms, then they must have a lifespan, a finite potential for growth that will eventually relapse, and give way to degeneration and death. For Spengler, this is not an abstract possibility but a determinate inevitability. Western decline is not a contingent phenomenon that admits political solution. It does not reflect a volitional cause, some disorder of state, society or economy that can be rectified. It is predestined, in the true sense of the word: it had to happen because degeneration is inherent in its lifespan as an organism, and it would always have occurred at roughly *this* moment in history. For all cultures follow an isomorphic pattern of growth and decay according to the inward principles of their genus. This commits Spengler to an extreme kind of historical determinism that grants almost no agency to human beings. Like Nietzsche, Spengler considers the French Revolution to have inaugurated Europe's slide into nihilism. But the location of the Revolution, Spengler insists, was entirely accidental: if it had not occurred in France, it would have elsewhere[31]. Its explanation stands outside of the phenomenal realm of cause and effect, and so the peculiar historical configuration in France that is commonly said to have catalysed the Revolution is, to Spengler's mind, irrelevant. Spengler's prognosis of Western decline is therefore, at the level of his second-order philosophy of history, entirely fatalistic. Its future 'is not a matter of choice', but something for which we must have the courage to look squarely in the face and accept[32]. As I will argue in Section 2, however, Spengler builds his reactionary political programme *into* his first-order description of what decline involves, creating a paradoxical combination of declinism and revolutionism.

It should be emphasised that the organicism of *naturphilosophie* does not lead ineluctably to declinism. Indeed, many *naturphilosophen* defended a kind of proto-evolutionary theory of natural progress, of the slow diversification and perfection of primordial species towards the ideal of the infinite[33]. Spengler leans upon two sources in adopting this reading of Goethe's morphological theory. First, he finds some support for his position in a passage from Goethe's essay 'Winckelmann and His Age', that artistic movements are living things 'that must have an inconspicuous beginning, a slow growth, a brilliant moment of fulfilment, and a gradual decline like every other organic being'[34]. This is not so much Goethe's view as Winckelmann's. We cannot be sure that Spengler read Winckelmann, but he appears to have at least a second-hand knowledge of his cyclical theory of the successive rise and fall of artistic styles. Indeed, this may well be the inspiration of his own attempt to trace the life-cycle of cultures through a study of their artistic forms: plastic, architectural, musical.

31 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I*, p. 148

32 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 37.

33 On this point, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, pp. 207-237.

34 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 205.

Second, he finds a more direct source of support in Goethe's essay 'The Stages of Man's Mind' (*Geistesepochen*), a sombre vision of world history with four stages: (1) a primitive epoch in which nature is grasped through poetic imagination; (2) a sacred epoch that searches for a higher spirit behind the world of appearances; (3) an age of reason where naturalistic explanations are sought for phenomena, without renouncing either poetry or religion; (4) and following swiftly upon the last, a 'prosaic epoch' in which the old and venerable is vulgarised, where there is no attempt – poetic, religious, or intellectual – to identify a laudable purpose behind phenomena, and where humans have no centre to orient themselves as they fall into chaos and death. Spengler's philosophy of history tracks this scheme to a remarkable degree, especially with regard to (4)[35]. Like Goethe, Spengler argues that the final stage of culture is marked by the vulgarisation of tradition, a turn to the practical and utilitarian, and the rise of mechanical theories of the world that fail to penetrate phenomena to identify their underlying purpose. It is also notable that Goethe considers the first and second of these stages to be dominated by the 'noble'. This dovetails with the Nietzschean theory of 'will-to-power' that Spengler places at the heart of Volume 2 of *Decline*. I return to these subjects in the following section.

Spengler also *relativizes* Europe, stripping it of its superlative status. Against the idea of a universal chain of progress along which societies are hierarchically organised relative to their similarity to modern Europe, Spengler counterposes a vision of separate organisms that follow the same cycle of growth and decay. The 'higher cultures' are, formally, equal to one another because they all belong to the same genus, and separate from one another because they are independent organisms. One of the cardinal features of the modern regime of historical time diagnosed by Koselleck is the idea of the contemporary non-contemporaneous. Societies which are chronologically contemporaneous with one another are represented as occupying different stages of historical development, ranging from the savage to the civilized. Spengler's theory of historical time is precisely the opposite of this. On his view, societies that are chronologically non-contemporaneous with one another can be said to be morphologically 'contemporary' when passing through the same stage of their organic life-cycle. Alexander the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte are, Spengler muses, contemporary with one another in that they both stand on the precipice of their culture's declension[36].

Western thought, Spengler complains, treats Europe as the natural centre of history around which all other cultures revolve. 'From it all the events of history receive their real light, from

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35 Goethe, Geistes-Epochen: Nach Hermanns neusten Mittheilungen, in Christoph Michel (eds.), *Johann Wolfgang Goethe - Gottfried Hermann*. Narr Francke Attempto: Dischingerweg, pp. 97-99.

36 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I*. p. 112.

it their importance is judged in *perspective*'[37]. But if one may assume the superiority of one's culture as the premise of history, then 'the Chinese historian is quite entitled to frame a world history in which the Crusades, the Renaissance, Caesar and Frederick the Great are passed over in silence'[38]. What is required is a revolution of historical vision:

> 'The most appropriate designation for this current West-European scheme of history, in which the great Cultures are made to follow orbits round *us* as the presumed centre of all world-happenings, is the *Ptolemaic system* of history. The system that is put forward in this work in place of it I regard as the *Copernican discovery* in the historical sphere, in that it admits no sort of privileged position to the Classical or the Western Culture as against the Cultures of India; Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, Mexico - separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in the general picture of history'[39].

Spengler's attempt to decentre Europe from world history is not without serious complications. It is worth at this stage adding two preliminary caveats, to which we shall add in the subsequent sections. First, as with so much of his philosophy, Spengler pushes the assumption that the higher cultures are equal and independent to *extremis*. He treats cultures as hermetically self-contained, historically and epistemologically.

Historically, cultures do not casually impinge upon one another because their life-history is pre-determined by their inward morphological principles of life. This means that all of world history can be explained at the level of individual cultures, without remainder. In a bizarre feat of illogic, Spengler cites the fact the Aztecs were ruined by Cortez and a handful of conquistadores acting upon their own initiative as *proof* that the interactions of cultures are 'unimportant and accidental'. Spengler himself admits that Aztec culture was quashed 'in the full glory of its unfolding'[40]. This stands in manifest contradiction with the whole thrust of his philosophy of history, and he attempts no further explanation of the Aztec's untimely demise. It should be noted that in the unpublished drafts of his updated philosophy of history, written in the following decades, Spengler appears to recognise just how implausible explanatory hermeticism is, and allows for the possibility of meaningful cultural interaction.

Epistemologically, Spengler is a relativist *all the way down*. He does not make the merely sociological observation that different cultures are built around different customs, languages and symbols, and have their own conceptions of art, religion and philosophy. He claims that,

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37 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 17.

38 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 17.

39 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 18.

40 Oswald Spengler, 1922, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History. Volume II.* Translated by Charles Francis Atkinson. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, USA, p. 43

epistemologically, standards of validity are entirely internal to each culture, and that this is true of *all* knowledge claims. This means, for example, that biology, physics and mathematics admit no supra-cultural truth. 'Universal validity', Spengler tells us, 'involves always the fallacy of arguing from particular to particular'[41]. It is not entirely surprising that when Lukacs castigated Spengler as a consummate 'irrationalist', he focused his ridicule on Spengler's 'solipsism of cultural cycles' and 'denial of all objectivity'[42].

Second, against the grain of his 'Copernican Revolution', Spengler continues to privilege Europe. Spengler does not divide his attention evenly between the 'higher cultures'. Classical and West-European culture are foregrounded. It is obvious that Spengler's knowledge of his six other 'high cultures' is, at best, piecemeal. In practical terms, then, these are the archetypes around which he draws the contours of world history, and for the most part, the rest is merely an attempt to fill out this historical picture. One might nevertheless credit Spengler's 'Copernican' doctrine, even if he does not entirely live up to it himself. Yet there are glaringly Eurocentric assumptions built into the details of Spengler's philosophy of history.

Following a long tradition of European historiography, Spengler relegates non-Western cultures to various states of disrepair. They have either turned to ash, or lie prostrate on world history as inorganic corpses. India, China and Arabia, Spengler tells us, are 'worn-out giants' of a primeval forest, who have 'thrust their decaying branches towards the sky for hundreds or thousands of years'[43]. Arabian culture was, in any case, stillborn. It was afflicted by what Spengler calls 'pseudomorphosis'[44]. Born in the cradle of Byzantium, it swelled up within the cracks of its predecessor, stiffened and constricted, failing ever to develop its full creative power. Spengler concludes that 'the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfilment – the West-European-America'[45]. By arranging cultures according to their relative position in their respective life-cycles, Spengler effectively invents a new form of temporal inequality. This is scarcely triumphal, given that Spengler announces Europe the only living culture in the world, only to proffer the diagnosis that it is terminally ill, but it robs his 'Copernican Revolution' of any straightforwardly anti-imperial force.

Spengler breaks from his epistemological relativism in one crucial regard: he claims that West-European culture has a unique sense of world history. Classical culture possesses 'no

41 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 23.

42 Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason*, pp. 466, 470.

43 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 106.

44 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 189.

45 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 3.

memory, no organic of history in this special sense'[46], while Indian culture is 'the perfectly ahistorical soul'[47]. Individuals in the West, in contrast, have a deep sense of historical place. This is not an incidental aspect of Western culture, but an immense privilege of perspective. 'No Culture is at liberty to *choose* the path and conduct of its thought, but here for the first time a Culture can foresee the way that destiny has chosen for it'[48]. Spengler, of course, presumes that it is he who has brought the West's historical sense to its culmination in *Decline*, stepping outside of his own culture to reach an Archimedean view of world history. Spengler claims to have achieved a vantage 'that is independent of the accident of standpoint', a radical 'emancipation from the evident in the name of infinity'[49]. Absurdly: all knowledge claims are relative, *except* for West-European history in general, and the contents of *Decline* in particular.

Kultur/Zivilisation

We have seen how Spengler was able to invert the modern regime of historical time by reviving Goethe's morphological theory of organic development, but this gives us little sense of why Spengler thought this necessary. He was not, suffice it to say, inspired to write Decline by an antiquarian interest in Goethe's pre-Darwinian theory of life. Rather, Spengler was one of the most prominent of a whole swathe of German writers who were moved by the dawning of war to extend a long-standing tradition of Kulturpessimus. The aim of this movement was twofold: to delegitimise the effects of industrial capitalism on Germany's conservative intelligentsia – working-class politics, liberal democracy, the economisation of life, the dilution of high culture – as inherently anti-German, and to associate these pathologies with the 'Western' powers of the war, namely Britain, France and the United States. It achieved both of these things through a simple conceptual contraposition: between Kultur and Zivilisation. Kultur was taken to represent the autochthonous character of Germany, the spiritual enrichment and Bildung achieved through its great works of art, religion and philosophy. Zivilisation stood for the artificial trappings, calculative reason and deracinated cosmopolitanism of liberal capitalism. In Goethe, Spengler simply found an auspicious vehicle for the extension of a genre of polemics circulating in Germany since unification, brought to a cacophony by the drum-beat of war.

Spengler takes the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction and hypostasizes it as the axis of the life-cycle of cultures. 'In this work, for the first time, the two words, hitherto used to express an indefinite, more or less ethical, distinction, are used in a periodic sense, to express a strict

46 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 9.

47 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 11.

48 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 159.

49 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* pp. 93-94.

and necessary organic succession'[50]. Kultur is the burst of growth, vitality and creativity of a society. Zivilisation is the decomposition of a society, the breakdown of it as an organic structure with an inward soul. 'Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable… a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion'[51]. In this sense, Spengler explains, 'the "Decline of the West' comprises nothing less than the problem of Civilization'[52].

In Keywords, Raymond Williams describes culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language', not least because of its convoluted relationship to civilization[53]. Culture derives from the Latin cultura, whose meaning was originally agricultural, in the sense of the cultivation of land, but was given a wider meaning by Cicero when he spoke of cultura animi – the cultivation of the soul. It was later expanded to denote a process of human development, and 'culture' (Kultur) originally entered German in this capacity as a synonym for civilization. Williams suggests that it was Herder who augured its transformation. We find a faint intimation of the Kultur/Zivilisation in Kant, when he writes in Idea for a Universal History that 'We are cultivated to a higher degree by art and science', but 'We are civilised to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties'[54].

As Jean Starobinski notes, while not the origin of the antithesis between Kultur and Zivilisation, it was Nietzsche who gave it paradigmatic expression[55]. By redescribing civilization as its opposite, a degeneration into nihilism, and lauding the barbarian Kultur of the noble, Nietzsche overthrows both the moral and historical basis of the modern regime of temporality. Many of these themes are taken up by Freud in the 1930s in Civilization and its Discontents[56], but it is Spengler who harnesses Nietzsche to reconceive of world history and politics – to attack civilization on the plane for which it had been the fundamental ordering principle since the late eighteenth century. I will return to the Nietzschean themes of Decline, but to understand the force of what Spengler is doing, we need to map the origins and context of the Kultur/Zivilisation antithesis.

In this respect, our path is laid for us by two classic works: Norbert Elias' The Civilising Process, and Fritz Ringer's The Decline of the German Mandarins. Born in 1897, Elias was

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50 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 31.

51 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 31.

52 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 31.

53 Raymond Williams, 1988, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Fontana: London, UK, pp. 87-93.

54 Immanuel Kant, 1991, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'. In H.S. Reiss (eds) Kant: Political Writings. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, p. 49.

55 Jean Starobinski, 1993, *Blessings in Disguise; Or, the Morality of Evil.* Harvard University Press: Cambridge: USA,p. 28.

56 Sigmund Freud, 2004, *Civilization and its Discontents.* Penguin: London, UK.

a member of the war-time generation who came of age when the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction pervaded German intellectual and cultural life. Elias says of his youth that he was ‘steeped in Kultur’. After fighting on both fronts of the First World War, Elias went on to study under Alfred Weber at Heidelberg[57]. At the time, Weber was trying to transform the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction into the operational categories of a dialectical sociology of world history[58]. On his view, world history was bifurcated into a progressive stream of increasing rationalisation over nature and self (Zivilisation), and a vitalist stream standing behind these objective actualities where spirit and world meet, the fount of individual creativity (Kultur). Weber's politics were, to put it crudely, an attempt to reconcile these two processes, to establish the conditions under which Zivilisation could succeed without colonising the sphere of Kultur. Elias ultimately decided to join Mannheim in Frankfurt, and it is Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge that underlies Elias’ method in The Civilizing Process. But it was Weber who defined his aim: to create a science of Kultur and Zivilisation to allay the contemporary crisis and secure their mediation.

Elias explains that The Civilizing Process grew out of ‘the crisis and transformation of Western civilization as it had existed hitherto’[59]. By investigating the socio-psychological process through which Europeans have become civilized, Elias hopes to establish the basis of understanding through which civilization can be manipulated and preserved. One reason that Elias begins with an analysis of the ‘sociogenesis’ of the concept of Kultur in the German language, and its opposition to Zivilisation, is merely preparatory: it brings into relief what is distinctive about the civilizing process. But the other reason is ameliorative, the hope that it might reconcile the conflicting national ideals of Germany on the one hand, and Britain and France on the other. Elias wants to bridge the intellectual fissure along which another European war is forming. Elias largely eschews evaluation in favour of explanation, but at the outset of The Civilizing Process he frames his own position as judiciously balanced between the German critics of civilization, and its Western proselytisers. Civilization is neither ‘the most advanced of all humanly possible modes of behaviour, nor… the worst form of life and one that is doomed’ (i.e. the view of Spengler).

Elias proposes that the German antithesis between Kultur and Zivilisation has two registers, social and national. The social element was foregrounded at its inception. Germany had never fully recovered from the Thirty Years War and, into the nineteenth century, remained systematically under-developed compared to England and France[60]. This had two

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57 For the background, see Adam Kuper, 1999, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA, pp. 29-34.

58 See, for example, Colin Loader, 2014, Alfred Weber: The Sociological Concept of Culture, *Cultural Sociology*, 2015, Vol. 9(2), pp. 256–270.

59 Norbert Elias, 2000, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Blackwell: Oxford, UK, pp. ix-xv.

60 Ibid., pp. 5-25

consequences. First, borne of this inferiority, the German upper class adopted French as the language of court, and imitated the manners, ceremonies and behaviour of the French nobility. Second, unlike France and England, Germany's politics were not transformed by an ascending bourgeoisie. Instead, excluded from the absolutist state, Germany's anaemic middle-class valorised the one sphere surrendered to it: scholarship. 'Kultur', Elias maintains, is nothing other than the crystallisation of the self-image of this middle-class intelligentsia, priding itself on the inward enrichment of spirit found in art, religion and philosophy, and on the accomplishments of German scholarship. It defined this habitus against the superficial pomp, political machinations, and Francophone pretensions of the German court. This was an exercise in class legitimation, redirected from the political to the intellectual.

It was only after the French Revolution that this social distinction was transposed onto the national plane[61]. In part this was a result of the rise of the German middle-class to hegemony and the redefinition of the nation in their image. But it was also a reaction against the marginal position that Germany occupied within the imaginary of 'Western civilization', the fact that its imperial and industrial might lagged behind that of Britain and France. It was an attempt to redefine the standard of values through which European states understood themselves through a time-worn rhetorical intervention: conceptual reversal. To denigrate 'Zivilisation' was to turn Britain and France's imperial pretensions against them, and to raise 'Kultur' above it was to redefine Germany's standing in the ranks of Europe. Elias maintains, in the same spirit, that civilization was a sociological expression of 'the self-consciousness of the West', of its claim to superiority over its imperial subjects[62]. It is imperialism, Elias suggests, which gives 'civilization' its form: it is a process in perpetual motion, spilling over national barriers to flood the world. The geopolitical coordinates of 'Kultur' are quite different:

> 'But that situation is the situation of a people which, by Western standards, arrived at political unification and consolidation only very late, and from whose boundaries, for centuries and even down to the present, territories have again and again crumbled away or threatened to crumble away. Whereas the concept of civilization has the function of giving expression to the continuously expansionist tendency of colonizing groups, the concept of Kultur mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as in a spiritual sense, and again and again had to ask itself: "What really is our identity?"'[63]

61 Ibid., pp. 27-30.

62 Ibid., pp. 6-7.

63 Ibid., p. 7.

The Decline of the German Mandarins can be read as an extension of Elias' thesis. Ringer contends that the transposition of the Kultur/Zivilisation distinction onto the national plane did not eclipse its social origins. On the contrary, its status as a class distinction was intensified, only the object of its denigration was no longer the absolutist court but the burgeoning economic classes of industrial Germany. Ringer makes this case in an argument of three parts.

First, a description of the status quo ante built around the ideal-type of the 'mandarin', a cultural elite who owed their position in German society to educational qualifications, rather than hereditary privileges, and centred in the nation's bureaucracy, clergy and universities[64]. Insulated from the nation's economic classes by their professions, and by Germany's stratified education system – separating gymnasiums from burgher schools, and only admitting those with a classical Abitur into universities – the mandarin habitus was one of extra-economic learning, and spiritual cultivation.

Second, the threat posed to this non-economic elite from the results of Germany's rapid-fire industrialisation after 1870[65]. The mandarin's national influence was undercut by a rising bourgeoisie and trade union movement, the mandarin's approach to politics, which had prized rhetorical ornamentation, cultural creativity, and national greatness, was replaced by factionalism, bargaining and compromise rooted in socio-economic interests, and the mandarin's humanistic ideal of cultivation was diluted as the nation's universities were slowly subordinated to the needs of the economy. Ringer insists that Germany's late industrial take-off imposed 'unusually severe' strains on the country's society and culture[66], that it was the delirious speed and explosive intensity of these changes which stoked alarm, despair and radicalism among the mandarins.

Third, the response of the mandarins divided between an 'orthodox' majority who saw the economisation of German life as pure decadence, and those 'accomodationists' like Alfred and Max Weber who – often reluctantly – accepted rationalisation, capitalism and liberalism as irreversible features of modernity, and searched for a mediation between Zivilisation and Kultur[67]. Spengler's thought reflects three central features of the mandarin response: the ideal of the state as a supra-political force standing above partisan interests[68], a corporatist vision of socialism in which bourgeois and worker are subordinated to the higher end of the

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64 Fritz K. Ringer, 1969, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA, pp. 14-40.

65 Ibid., pp. 44-80.

66 Ibid., pp. 3, 42-43.

67 Ibid., pp. 129-130.

68 Ibid., pp. 208.

nation[69], and a polemical discourse of disintegration and decomposition, lamenting the death of German Kultur[70]. Like the other great declaration of German Kultur in the First World War, Thomas Mann's *Reflections on a Nonpolitical Man*, it is to Nietzsche who Spengler turns to launch his own political response.

Great Politics

I want to turn to Spengler's treatment of Kultur and Zivilisation by asking how he is able to reconcile the distinction, as it was understood by the mandarins and those on the German right, to his morphological theory of world history. If these are the two arches of *The Decline of the West*, what is the keystone that holds them together? The answer is to be found in Germany's most iconoclastic mandarin: Friedrich Nietzsche. To see why Nietzsche can fill this bridging role, we need to step back for a moment to reflect on what Tom Stern has called his 'Life Theory'[71].

This theory revolves around Nietzsche's well-known concept of the 'will-to-power'. Arthur Schopenhauer had conceived of the will as the thing-in-itself, the noumenal reality that underlies the world of appearance. It courses through all living things, and the human will is nothing other than the emanation of this metaphysical will. Nietzsche took on this concept of the will, with some variations.

Schopenhauer had spoken of the 'will to life' because of the way in which it compels living beings to preserve their being and to sexually reproduce[72]. Nietzsche redefines the object of the will as 'power', drawing succour from theories of evolution and biological degeneration circulating in late nineteenth century Germany, that depicted life as a brutal and unending war. On this view, life is simply domination, self-assertion, greatness, exploitation. Nietzsche takes it to be a basic fact that these qualities of life are possessed by individuals to different degrees, and can only be sustained by the domination of the noble over the weak, by what Nietzsche calls the 'pathos of distance'[73]. Domination 'does not pertain to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it pertains to the essence of the living thing as a fundamental organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power which is precisely the will to life'[74].

69 Ibid., p. 188.

70 Ibid., pp. 221-222.

71 Tom Stern, 2020, *Nietzsche's Ethics*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

72 Ibid., pp. 6-15.

73 Friedrich Nietzsche, 2013, *Genealogy of Morals*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 15.

74 Friedrich Nietzsche, 2003, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 194.

It is this equivalence of life and nobility that provides Spengler with the formulae for mixing Goethe and Nietzsche. Goethe had set out to discover the inward principles of life that animate plants and animals, not humans – and certainly not societies. There is no difficulty in identifying the signs of life in the natural world. One only needs to hold a blossoming flower side-by-side with a stiffened, browning leaf. It is significantly less clear what the signs of vitality in a 'higher culture' are. Spengler's answer, provided by Nietzsche, is that life is strength, domination and exploitation, and that these qualities are concentrated in an aristocratic minority. Aristocracies represent 'a natural build which in its evolution and action forms the basic structure of Culture's life-course'[75]. If world history is the unfolding of the morphological principles of the genus of cultures, and those principles are realised in the aggressive world-building of aristocracies, then those aristocracies are, by extension, 'world-history at highest potential'[76]. Aristocracies bring cultures to life, animate them, and give them their form.

Spengler's use of Nietzsche is not as unlikely as it first appears. Schopenhauer, as I have mentioned, thought of the will as the 'thing-in-itself'. After his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche turned against dualism. He complains of moralists who 'distinguish strength from the expression of strength, as though behind the strong man there existed some indifferent neutral substratum... But there is no substratum, there is no 'being' behind action, the effect, the becoming'[77]. Nietzsche shares with Heraclitus the view that the world is a realm of change and becoming, and that it is the prejudice of philosophers 'in favour of reason' that compels them 'to posit unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality'[78]. It is easy to see how Spengler was able to match Nietzsche to the outline of Goethe: he is a monist who conceives of the world as a realm of becoming, a flux of struggle and domination for life, and considers reason, materialism and causality to be futile in our efforts to understand it. It is worth pointing out, finally, that Spengler's admiration for Nietzsche was doubtless strengthened by his own affinity with Heraclitus, on whom he wrote his doctoral thesis.

But how does any of this relate to Kultur and Zivilisation? Again, we need to return to Nietzsche. He was, as I have suggested, one of Ringer's mandarins, and he builds the familiar antithesis of Kultur and Zivilisation into his life theory. Life is not simply the struggle for physical power, for Nietzsche. Above all, it is a ceaseless process of self-overcoming, the transcendence of the given through the creation of new art, new values – new Kultur. 'And life itself told me this secret: 'Behold', it said, 'I am that which must overcome itself again and

75 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 347.

76 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 331.

77 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 33.

78 Friedrich Nietzsche, 1968, *Twilight of the Idols & The Anti-Christ*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 36.

again'[79]. A society's vigour can be measured by the greatness of its Kultur. On this index, ancient Greece, the Renaissance, the Germany of Beethoven and Goethe, all show signs of life. But in Nietzsche's Germany, 'the 'good old days' are gone'[80]. Nietzsche quips that when asked, 'Are there any German philosophers? are there any German poets? are there any good German books?', he blushes and replies, 'Yes, Bismarck!'[81] Germans are, Nietzsche muses, 'bored with intellect'. Their attention has been consumed by the prosaic world of 'politics, economic affairs, world commerce, parliamentary institutions, military interests'. For Nietzsche, these two worlds stand in a zero-sum relationship. Every quantum of energy expended upon the state, represents a subtraction from the realm of culture. Nietzsche reserves his greatest ire for the seat of the mandarins, Germany's universities. Culture is no longer treated as the end of education, but subordinated to the instrumental needs of 'the Reich', while higher education is 'no longer a privilege', but has opened itself up to 'the most dubious mediocrity'. The democratisation of culture is its death knell.

Culture's opposite is not barbarism, but civilization. Every 'higher culture on earth', Nietzsche informs us, has begun when barbarians with 'an unbroken strength of will and lust for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful' peoples[82]. The natural order of the state is therefore for the strong to assert themselves over the righteous and the squalid. Nietzsche tells a complicated story in The Genealogy of Morality and The Anti-Christ about how Christians, and later socialists, invented lies, fabrications and deceptions to reverse the dominance of life over sickness, to institute a slave morality in the service of the weak and degenerate, and to civilize and tame the cruelty, instincts and vigour of the aristocracy. We do not need to detain ourselves with the details of this story here. What is important is that, for Nietzsche, if 'the essence of all civilization is to produce the tame and civilized animal', then it must 'represent the decline of humanity'[83]. Civilization is anti-life, a system of deception and dissemblance that constrains and lowers the aristocracy, and therefore, strangles the taproot of culture:

> 'The high points of culture and civilization stand far apart; one must not be led astray as regards the profound antagonism between culture and civilization. The great moments in the history of culture have always been, morally speaking, ages of corruption; while on the other hand, those epochs in which man was deliberately and forcibly tamed ('civilized') like an animal have always been ages of intolerance towards the men who were by nature the most intellectual and most audacious. The

79 Friedrich Nietzsche, 1969, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 138.

80 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 176.

81 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols & The Anti-Christ*, pp. 60-66.

82 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 192.

83 Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 30.

> goal of civilization is altogether different from the aspirations of culture, and perhaps even at odds with them…'[84]

Spengler cannot borrow from Nietzsche without difficulty, however. Nietzsche's favourite explanation for European decline was, basically, that Judeo-Christian fabrications - slave morality, asceticism, and bad conscience - had reversed the ethics of the domination of the weak by the strong. Spengler cannot accept this explanation. Classical and Faustian culture are separate organisms whose life-courses have to be explained independent of each other, entirely by endogenous factors. Europe's decline, on this view, cannot be accounted for by a story ranging from the founding of Judaism all the way through to the present. As we have seen, Spengler also believes that all of the higher cultures are members of the same genus and follow the same morphological pattern of growth and decline. This means that the agents of cultural decline have to be general to all cultures. Once again, Judeo-Christian religion does not provide the right kind of explanation.

What Spengler must do, instead, is use Nietzsche's life theory to explain the organic growth and decay of societies in a narrative built around the Kultur/Zivilisation while eliminating those elements of Nietzsche's theory incompatible with this historical arc. Spengler frames Judeo-Christian religion as historically innocuous in order that it can fit the timeline of decline of modern Zivilisation (i.e. modernity). A culture's soul is expressed in two estates, the nobility and the priesthood. Indeed, 'culture and class are interchangeable expressions; they arise together and they vanish together'[85]. Cultures are not something given but are bred from the stock of a 'historyless' peasantry, and a culture ripens when its two estates are 'in form'[86]. Nobility and priesthood are alike as an elite that sustain themselves through the pathos of distance, by holding their rank superior to, respectively, 'the people' and 'the laity'[87]. But it is the nobility who are the true estate, an outgrowth of blood, race and soil, emerging from the peasantry, and who are bred in families stretching across centuries[88]. The priesthood are not an estate proper, but a 'counter-estate' defined by the negation of race and worldliness: celibate, floating, self-emasculating. Spengler suggests, however, that the priesthood often collapses into the function of a nobility, taking up the sword to defend cross and Papacy in the realm of temporal politics.

It is not Judeo-Christian religion which is the locus of decline, but the economic classes that emerge with the advent of Zivilisation. Two splinter-groups break away from the nobility and

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84 Friedrich Nietzsche, 2017, *The Will to Power*. Penguin: London, UK, p.81.

85 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 332.

86 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 331.

87 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 333.

88 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* pp. 336-338.

priesthood to form the embryo of city life[89]. Where the nobility are a plant-like formation rooted in the soil for whom property is an ancestral marker of status and not something of value in itself, in late Culture property is extricated from its roots and held to an abstract index of money-value. Among its conquests, spoils and trades, the nobility gives birth to the economy. For the Priesthood learning was nothing but a handmaiden for the contemplation and glorification of the divine. At some point, however, the concept of causality is invented and set in opposition to the sacred, generating a reflexive discourse of science calling into question received tradition, hierarchy and form. Eventually a 'Third Estate' emerges from the nexus of science and economy in the megalopolis' of the dying Culture[90]. While the burgher has no positive content in itself and imitates the customs and symbols of the nobility, it reduces the clergy and aristocracy to a 'privileged' class with no natural title to rule, and invents the party-form to ally with labourers, artisans and scientists under the masthead of liberalism. Peasants are uprooted from the soil and transformed into floating labourers, money is fetishized and pursued for the sake of decadent luxury, rationalist politics obliterates piety and tradition. Zivilisation is the deconstruction of everything built by Culture, the replacement of the form of a nobility with nihilistic formlessness. At its nadir Zivilisation creates the antipode of the nobility: 'the Mass'[91]. If the third estate exhibited at least the trappings of aristocracy, the mass stands for the total negation of culture. A nomadic cosmopolis, the 'mass is the end, the radical nullity'.

Socialism proliferates in Zivilisation among the plebeians, but contra Nietzsche, not as a morality of servility and emasculation. The will-to-power is not an ethic peculiar to the nobility, but is the style of ethics of all Faustian men. Whether their proponents know it or not, all Western ethics is will, action and struggle[92]. 'Nietzsche's "slave-morale" is a phantom, his master-morale is a reality'[93]. Socialism is simply the re-instantiation of the Faustian will-to-power in the practical and materialist atmosphere of Zivilisation, 'an intensification of the Kantian imperative, a slackening instead of a tautening of directional energy'[94]. Spengler distinguishes between the ethical socialism propounded by the plebeian classes, dressed in the language of health, happiness, peace and compassion, and the true nature of socialism which 'is neither understood nor desired by the masses', the idealisation of work, the duty of self-discipline, the Prussian conception of state socialism - it is this into which all socialism will ripen[95]. Nietzsche was a socialist without knowing it. For his notion of breeding a

89 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* pp. 345-347.

90 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* pp. 355-358.

91 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 358.

92 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 344.

93 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 350.

94 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* pp. 351, 357.

95 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 362.

superman is a materialist and utilitarian idea that can only be prosecuted by a disciplined society under the organisation of an authoritarian state[96]. We who live in the twilight of Zivilisation, Spengler advises, are all socialists who embrace an ethic that redirects the will-to-power towards the practical, mechanical and imperial[97]. Caesarism beckons.

Once all is destroyed, when every tissue of Kultur has been burnt by Zivilisation into formless smoke, the world of democratic party politics, financial cosmopolitanism and profane rationalism is supplanted. Politics reasserts itself over economics, and 'the unchecked will-to-power of the race-strong few' prevail[98]. The 'economic politics' of liberalism and Marxism, where power is pursued as an end in itself, is replaced by an era of 'grand politics', where politics becomes the instrument of the will-to-power[99]. Yet this is not the 'in form' instinct of the noble, but the 'beast-life' of the jungle[100]. In this 'conflict between money and blood', capitalism gives way to socialism[101]. Rhodes and Lenin are the prototype of a new leader, with no political programme or moral pretence, that uses the masses as a tool to further their will, to stamp their domination on the world[102]. No legislation, party or law must stand in their way[103]. A Caesar will emerge, bringing Zivilisation to ruin through blood. Humans will return to barbarism, and the circle of Culture will be completed. Spengler's vision tracks Nietzsche's prophecy of a coming age of 'great politics'. The quote Spengler offers of Nietzsche's view might stand in as his own:

> 'A higher sort of men, who thanks to their preponderance of will, knowledge, wealth and influence make use of democratic Europe as their aptest and most mobile tool, in order to bring into their own hands the destinies of the Earth and as artists to shape 'man' himself. Enough – the time is coming when men will unlearn and relearn the art of politics.'[104]

After the publication of *The Decline of the West*, Spengler became the lodestar of the 'Conservative Revolution', a loose constellation of reactionary intellectuals who excoriated liberal republicanism and the national emasculation of the Weimar settlement as a surrender to Zivilisation, while rejecting calls for the restoration of the Wilhelmine establishment. They espoused the need for violent revolution to forge a hyper-nationalist state, based on socialist

96 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 371.

97 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 361.

98 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 452

99 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* pp. 449-450, 472.

100 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 339.

101 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 506.

102 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* p. 475.

103 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume II.* pp. 506-507.

104 Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I.* p. 350.

corporatism, authoritarian dictatorship, and imperial expansion. Spengler's Prussianism and Socialism (1919) and The Hour of Decision (1933) were, respectively, visions of the domestic and international politics of what Spengler's friend, Moeller van den Bruck, had named Germany's 'Third Reich'. Spengler was read favourably by Mussolini, and courted by the Nazi regime, but his rejection of scientific racism, disdain of the Volkisch movement, and his philosophical obscurantism, meant that he could never assume the role of Carl Schmitt or Alfred Rosenburg. Spengler saw the Nazi Party as the penultimate stage of Zivilisation, not its culmination, a prelude to the emergence of a Caesar entirely unconstrained by party or mass.

What world order did Spengler envision? He grossly oversteps the professed relativism of his philosophy of history and anoints Germany the future of the world. Europe stands diminished. Russia has been conquered by the Asian creed of Bolshevism[105]. Britain spent its 'precious blood' in the cause of conquest during the nineteenth century, while its empire it has drawn its orbit out of Europe entirely[106]. America is soulless, a mass life of no qualitative difference to communist Russia[107]. The 'white ruling nations have abdicated their former rank', negotiating today where yesterday they commanded[108]. World war was not simply a loss for Germany; it destroyed all respect for Europe. Class war threatens to impose plebeian dictatorship on the white world, at the same time as race war looms on the periphery. Only one country remains: Germany. Faustian civilization was born in Western Europe, and here it will have its last victory, or will perish[109]. Spengler imagines a Caesarist dictatorship, combining Prussian socialism to subordinate workers to the state at home[110], and a global imperial mundi to quash the 'coloured world-revolution' abroad[111]. It may yet 'become the "educator" of the "white" world, and perhaps its saviour'[112].

Spengler combines two temporal registers. One is a cyclical theory of growth and decay built with Goethe's theory of life, and tracing an arc from Kultur to Zivilisation. It is a culmination of a long line of German Kulturpessimismus, and the seminal philosophy of Europe's deminutio capitis. The other is the reactionary modernism of the Conservative Revolution. After the rampage of Zivilisation won out in the First World War, and liberal republicanism was imposed on Germany, in the minds of Germany's extreme right, what few traces of Kultur remained in the country were extirpated. Conservatism capsizes into revolution. The

105 Oswald Spengler, 1934, *The Hour of Decision*. George Allen and Unwin: London, UK, 32.

106 Ibid., p. 72.

107 Ibid., p. 66.

108 Ibid., p. 209.

109 Ibid., p. 58.

110 Ibid., p. 187-189.

111 Ibid., p. 23.

112 Ibid., p. 202.

Conservative Revolution 'understands that what it would 'conserve' is already lost (if indeed it ever existed, which is doubtful), and hence must be created anew. It recognises that under such circumstances the chance presents itself fully to realise this 'past' for the first time'[113]. But where for most of Germany's radical right, the result was a revolutionary doctrine of palingenesis[114] (Griffin, 2015), the rebirth of a mythic past in new and splendid glory - the thousand-year Reich - for Spengler it was the capstone of culture, a final exertion before the veil of death falls. Spengler was able to combine these two registers by positioning revolutionary Caesarism as the climax of Zivilisation. It represents a paradoxical simultaneity of victory and defeat, the overthrow of Zivilisation in favour of the will-to-power - the final vindication of the German right - and the return to violent barbarism breaking from all Kultur - the passing of the West from the stage of world history. It is a horizon of revolutionary petrifaction.

113 Peter Osborne, 1995, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avante-Garde.* Verso: London, UK, p. 164.

114 Roger Griffin, 2015, Fixing Solutions: Fascist Temporalities as Remedies for Liquid Modernity, *Journal of Modern European History*, 13(1), pp. 5-23.

Chapter 3: Unity in Diversity

Arnold J. Toynbee's A Study of History represents one of the most systematic contributions to the philosophy of history ever attempted, spanning ten volumes published in three tranches - 1934, 1939, 1954 - over a period of twenty years. A work that bears comparison to Spengler, Toynbee's ambition is to reconceive world history as the rise and fall of a succession of civilizations in order to provide a vantage from which to assess Europe's deminutio capitis. He too appeals to a heterodox theory of evolution to ground his construction, adopting a version of 'evolutionary holism', and speaks of civilizations as forming a common organic 'species'. If Spengler wanted to overturn the Versailles settlement retrieve Europe's former glory through a German imperium mundi, Toynbee sees the incorporation of national self-determination into the post-war settlement as the basis for the rejuvenation of Western civilization through the mutation of the British Empire into a decentralised 'Commonwealth'. In both cases their aim is the reversal of Europe's diminution through the restoration of empire by new means.

Unlike Spengler, however, Toynbee is scarcely a neglected figure among intellectual historians. On the contrary, he is widely recognised as one of the founding figures of the discipline of International Relations. Scholars have tended to either try and distil the entire content of Toynbee's philosophy of history - a daunting task by any measure - or to focus on the specifics of Toynbee's role as the Research Director of Chatham House, or his work for the Foreign Research and Press Office when Chatham House was brought into the Foreign Office during the Second World War[1]. What has not yet been attempted is any systematic accounting of Toynbee's philosophy of civilization and its relation to his vision of empire over the interwar period. It is this which shall be my focus. I show that Toynbee combines the cross-cutting temporalities of cyclism and progress by conceiving of civilizations as members of a common species with a shared life-cycle, but who are capable of vitalistic movement beyond civilization to the superhuman. Rejecting determinism, Toynbee maps out competing evolutionary pathways of the future. It is this, I argue, that allows him to, at one and the same time, endorse the British Commonwealth as a multicultural conciliator whose parts move at different evolutionary rates, and to sympathise with anti-colonial nationalism in the

1 Cornelia Navari, 2000, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975): Prophecy and Civilization, *Review of International Studies*, 26(2), pp.289-301; Christopher Brewin, 1995, 'Arnold Toynbee, Chatham House, and Research in a Global Context', in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Interwar Idealism Reassessed*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, UK; Inderjeet Parmar, 2004, Think Tanks and Power in Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of the Role and Influence of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1939-1945. Palgrave: Hampshire, UK.
Ian Hall, 2014, 'Time of Troubles': Arnold J. Toynbee's Twentieth Century, International Affairs, 90(1), pp.23–36. One outstanding exception to this summary is Michael Lang, 'Globalization and Global History in Toynbee', Journal of World History, 22(4), pp. 747-783.

Middle East, predict the replacement of Western civilization by Russia, India, Islam and China, and conceive of global Westernisation as a process of creative destruction.

Origins

A Study of History is a meta-theory of world history that analyses the nature and trajectory of civilizations for the specific purpose of diagnosing the crisis of Western civilization after the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Any interpretation of *A Study of History* must therefore begin by identifying what Toynbee thought the 'crisis' was that required diagnosis in the first place. For this is the problematic that defines the horizon of his thought. I believe it can be understood as one version of what I have been calling Europe's *deminutio capitis*. We are aided in this assessment by the fact that, some ten years before the first volume of *A Study of History* was published, Toynbee wrote a sweeping survey of how world politics had been transformed by the First World War for Chatham House: The World After the Peace Conference.

In Toynbee's outline the world of 1914 was organised around a small number of Great Powers centred in Europe. On the eve of war 'the Great Powers of the day appeared to be beyond the reach of destruction except by some upheaval so terrific that it would uproot, with them, the very foundations of human life'[2]. Yet the naturalisation of this arrangement had always belied historical myopia. Independent sovereign states only emerged in Europe in the fifteenth century. Before then the supra-territorial powers of the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire dominated the continent. And comparable states have emerged across world history, only to be overtaken by empire. Yet in 1914 this belief had the weight of historical momentum behind it. For over the preceding centuries the number of independent states in the world system had been declining, consumed by a small number of expanding Great Powers. Italy and Germany marked the high point of the consolidation of European territories into unified states. Since the 1870s the whole of the African continent was partitioned between Europe, with the exception of only Abyssinia and Liberia. Despite the continent's independent republics, Latin America fell under the pall of the Monroe Doctrine as America's 'sphere of interest'. Britain and Russia divided the Middle East, alongside the creaking edifice of the Ottoman Empire. France reigned over Indochina, the United States over the Philippines, and the Great Powers divided the spoils of China between them. Japan, the one true extra-European power, claimed Korea and Southern Manchuria. In summary, by 1914 'eight Great Powers – France, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary; Russia and Great

2 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1926, *The World After the Peace Conference*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 6-13.

Britain; Japan and the United States – had brought the greater part of the earth's surface, resources, and population within their respective spheres of administration, control, or influence'[3]. China was the only major country that had yet to be fully digested. The only three notable powers outside this group were Abyssinia ('semi-barbarous'), Turkey ('under servitudes… which hardly left her fully sovereign') and Spain ('unquestionably sovereign and civilized').

By 1919 this picture had been torn apart. Toynbee submits that a long-term social contradiction had been playing itself out over the preceding century, and that the First World War was simply the moment at which these pent-up forces were released, bursting through the existing geopolitical map of the world[4]. Here Toynbee incorporates a basic liberal internationalist nostrum into his emplotment: war is the result of nationalist parochialism and the incongruence of the worldwide extent of the market, communications and transport, and the individual sovereign state[5]. Indeed, the very ascendancy of the Great Powers, Toynbee suggests, had been on account of the need to organise economic life at higher and higher levels of organisation. It was this imperative which drove Italian and German unification. But the First World War demonstrated that even the Great Powers are not self-sufficient economic units, that they are dependent on a complex nexus of international institutions and networks. Russia was imperilled by the blockade of the Central Powers, the British Empire's merchant shipping was menaced by German U-boats, and the Allies achieved victory only by collectively pooling their resources and drawing upon the economic support of neutral dependencies overseas. At the same time nationalism sowed revolution across the world, turning a world of empire into a patchwork of nation-states. The demand of Europe's settler colonies for independence found recognition in the remaking of the British Empire as a Commonwealth, and the refounding of America's relationship with the Latin American republics as a 'partnership' through the Pan-American organisation[6]. In East and Central Europe, and the Middle East, nationalism was cutting at the seams of the Great Powers. The war ultimately exploded the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires, creating a slew of fledgling nation-states[7]. In the years after the war, however, it was the Middle East where nationalism could be found at its most 'militant'[8]. Egypt, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria: all rose violently against Britain and its agents. Britain's empire was tottering, and it is only a matter of time until the earthquake hits France. At the same time, Italy and Japan – whose strength had ostensibly gained during the war – suffer from another

3 Ibid., p. 12.

4 Ibid., p. 63.

5 Ibid., pp. 13-17.

6 Ibid., pp. 17-18, 27-28.

7 Ibid., p. 28.

8 Ibid., pp. 41-43.

ailment of parochial sovereignty: grossly over-populated, they have no colonial lands for the outlet of this surplus[9].

Before the war, Toynbee calculates, only sixteen 'lesser states' played an active role in world politics, fifteen of which were located in Europe[10]. After the war, this number shot up to no less than forty-seven, twenty-two lying outside of Europe. Several new 'intermediate powers' had also emerged: Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe, and Brazil in Latin America. Toynbee estimates that Brazil, with its voluminous acreage and resources, and its land open for migration from Europe, is fated to become a power of equal diplomatic and material strength to France. Indeed, the distinction between 'great' and 'lesser' powers may lose its meaning entirely. Power in the world system is rapidly decentralising, pouring into scores of new nation-states. 'In other words', Toynbee concludes, 'Europe has been merged in the World'[11]. At once, 'Europe seemed to have reversed her role and to have changed from the focus of international affairs into a half-derelict continent'. Austro-Hungary has disappeared, Germany is decisively weakened, France focuses inward on its national security, Austria-Hungary no longer exists, Russia has been overtaken by Bolshevism, Italy looks to its own self-aggrandisement. The keystone of world order, the Concert of Europe, has been evacuated of its power. A new reality dawns on Europe's wreckage:

> 'In 1914 educated persons in the West were, of course, aware that other great civilizations had gone down to destruction. The fall of the Roman Empire was the familiar background to the history of Western society itself; and, for a century past, the enterprise of Western archaeologists had been bringing to light, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Crete, Central Asia, and Yucatan, the magnificent remains of civilizations so utterly cut off that their scripts had become extinct and their very names forgotten; but this memento mori which the archaeologist had been holding silently before the eyes of the scientist and the entrepreneur had not deeply impressed the Western imagination. The general proposition that not only individuals but societies are mortal might be admitted by the rational Western intellect, but how could this apply in practice to the apparently triumphant vitality of Western civilization on the eve of the War?'[12]

On Toynbee's analysis two contradictions internal to Western civilization, nationalism and industrialism, have led to the degeneration of the European continent, at the same time that great and small non-Western powers have imposed themselves upon the world with bursting

9 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

10 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

11 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

12 Ibid., pp. 87-88.

vigour. This is Europe's *deminutio capitis*: European decline and global pluralisation are two sides of a single movement, a geopolitical rebalancing which on Toynbee's forecast, is only just beginning. This is the underlying historical catalyst of *A Study of History*, the 'crisis' unleashed by the First World War that the book is cast as the diagnosis of. Yet at the time of writing *The World After the Peace Conference* Toynbee had already formulated the rudiments of what would become his meta-theory of history. If we turn back to the two seminal moments of inspiration from which that project issued, we shall see once more the two sides of the compound of Europe's *deminutio capitis.*

First, Toynbee found in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* a historical analogue for the degeneration of Europe. As he recounts, 'the general war of 1914 overtook me expounding Thucydides to Balliol undergraduates reading Literae Humaniores, and then suddenly my understanding was illuminated'[13]. Toynbee came not simply to the quotidian observation that the First World War and the Peloponnesian War share some number of incidental qualities, but that the two events represent identical moments in the life-course of their respective civilizations, classical and Western. 'Thucydides' world and my world… now proved to be philosophically contemporary'. Comparing the ancient and modern worlds was scarcely new. Toynbee took his undergraduate in Classics ('Literae Humaniores') at Oxford before being awarded a tutorship in the subject at Balliol. One of his mentors, Alfred Zimmern, had written *The Greek Commonwealth* in 1911, a paean to the Solonian legal system, Periclean values and imperial 'commonwealth' of Athens, that served at one and the same time as an Anglophilic celebration of these same virtues in the British Empire[14]. Another of Toynbee's Oxford mentors, Gilbert Murray (whose daughter he would marry) published an extended comparison between the Peloponnesian War and the Great War in 1918[15]. It was Murray who had, three years earlier, commissioned Toynbee to write a history of Greece for the Home University Library. Toynbee only got round to finishing the book in the 1960s, for the simple fact that the war intervened, and the book metamorphosed into *A Study of History*. In a summary lecture of the manuscript in 1920, entitled 'The Tragedy of Greece', Toynbee traced the decline of the Hellenistic world back to the failure of the Greeks to erect an 'interstate federation' during the Peloponnesian War[16]. The implied lesson for the contemporary world was not difficult to discern. Zimmern and Murray treated ancient Greece and modern Europe as two moments in the story of a single superlative civilization, in a

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13 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1948, *Civilization on Trial*. Oxford University Press: New York, USA, pp. 7-8.

14 Zimmern, 1961, The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

15 Gilbert Murray, 1918, Aristophanes and the War Party: A Study in the Contemporary Criticism of the Peloponnesian War. George Allen: London, UK.

16 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, p. 96.

traditional scaffolding of 'Ancient-Medieval-Modern' Europe. They ransacked the ancient world to lavish Europe, Britain and the Allies with a classical pedigree. Toynbee diverged.

Second, in studying the Greco-Turkish war Toynbee came to believe the conflict stood at the axis of a triangle of civilizations: Near Eastern, Middle Eastern, and Western. After the First World War and before joining Chatham House, Toynbee became Koraes Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History at King's College London. It was in this capacity that he travelled across Greece and Anatolia in 1921. It is worth recounting the origins of the conflict. Lloyd George had promised Greece that if it joined the Allied cause it would receive territorial gains from the Ottoman Empire at the conflict's end. But in 1919-1920, as the Allies occupied Constantinople, the Greeks landed at the Turkish port of Smyrna to 'reclaim' Greek-speaking territories, and the Treaty of Sevres began the partition of the Ottoman Empire, a nationalist insurgency emerged in Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The Allies turned to Greece to put Ataturk down, and backed their irredentist designs to construct a new 'Byzantine Empire' along the Aegean coast of Turkey. Opinion in Britain was broadly sympathetic to Greece, a fallen outpost of Western civilization seizing territories from Ottoman despotism to restore its antique glory. Where then did Toynbee fall? Toynbee had played a vital role in the Foreign Office during the war assiduously documenting the Armenian genocide. At Versailles, he had advised Lloyd George to cleave Europe from Asia by giving Greece Constantinople, and leaving Anatolia intact for the new Turkish nation-state. But he came away spurned, his advice ignored[17]. After touring with the Red Crescent and witnessing the gruesome aftermath of several Greek massacres, however, Toynbee began to telegram a series of missives to the Manchester Guardian, rounding on Lloyd George and the Allied policy.

Upon returning he quickly put together a short book, The Western Question in Greece and Turkey[18]. Toynbee makes four key moves. First, he denounces Greece's 'devastating war of aggression', and the Allies 'blind prejudice and partiality' in persisting 'to give Greece material and moral support in her enterprise as an apostle of their civilisation'[19]. His argument was conceived as nothing less than a frontal attack on the so-called 'civilizing mission'. Second, he prosecutes this attack by a revision of its conceptual terms. Greece was not an apostle of Western civilization, wrenching Turkey out of a barbaric past. Both Greece and Turkey belonged to entirely separate civilizations, of the 'Near East' and the 'Middle East'. Third, Toynbee's underlying explanation for the degeneration of Greece and Turkey into immorality, violence and massacre – from Armenia to Smyrna – was that both

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17 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, pp. 81-82.

18 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1922, *Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilisations*. Constable: London, UK.

19 Toynbee, *Western Question*, p. 35.

civilizations had broken down, and been impinged upon by the deleterious forces of Western civilization[20]. On Toynbee's view, it was the defensive Westernisation of the two civilizations, the influx of Western nationalism, customs and technology, that had cast the region into flux. Europe's 'Eastern Question', properly understood, was in fact a 'Western question'. Fourth, Toynbee thought that if Turkey was partitioned, if it continued to fall under the imposing pressure of Westernisation, that the last remaining centre of Muslim civilization would fade – and that this would be a loss for the world[21]. Toynbee recognised not just the existence of a plurality of civilizations, but the cultural value of that plurality. It was while travelling back from Constantinople on the Orient Express, that Toynbee was hit by a crack of inspiration, and jotted down the outline of *A Study of History*[22]. Just as he had found in Thucydides an analogue for the decline of Europe, he saw in Anatolia the bloody convergence of plural civilizations. Yet there was one more formative moment. In the summer of 1920, Toynbee placed his hands on Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. It was a revelation:

'As I read those pages teeming with firefly flashes of historical insight, I wondered at first whether my whole inquiry had been disposed of by Spengler before even the questions, not to speak of the answers, had fully taken shape in my own mind...But when I looked at Spengler's book for an answer to my question about the geneses of civilizations, I saw that there was still work for me to do, for on this point Spengler was, it seemed to me, most unilluminatingly dogmatic and deterministic… Where the German a priori method drew blank, let us see what could be done by English empiricism.'[23]

Let us now turn to the product of this 'English' method, to the meta-theoretical system of *A Study of History.*

System

In this section I want to map out Toynbee's historical method, his meta-theory of history, and his evolutionism. Let us take these in turn. The methodological postulate from which Toynbee begins is that civilizations are the only 'intelligible unit' through which history can be analysed[24]. British history, for example, cannot be understood independent of Christian, feudal and economic influences general to the whole of 'Western civilization'. They are explanatorily self-sufficient 'wholes' with delimited spatial and temporal boundaries.

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20 Toynbee, *Western Question*, p. 27.

21 Toynbee, *Western Question*, pp. 13, 23.

22 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, p. 100.

23 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, pp. 9-10.

24 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1946, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volume I-VI*. Edited by D.C. Somervell. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 1-3.

Civilizations can be assessed on three ‘planes’, according to Toynbee: economic, political and cultural[25]. It is crucial for Toynbee’s argument, as we shall see, that these three planes do not always overlap, and that civilizations are defined in the last instance by a hard cultural core. Toynbee identifies twenty-one civilizations in total: Egyptian, Andean, Sinic, Minoan, Sumeric, Mayan, Yucatec, Mexic, Hittite, Syriac, Babylonic, Iranic, Arabic, Far Eastern, a Japanese offshoot of Far Eastern civilization, Indic, Hindu, Hellenic, Orthodox Christian, a Russian offshoot of Orthodox Christian civilization, and Western. Only six of these civilizations (Egyptian, Sumeric, Minoan, Sinic, Mayan, Andean) are incipit points in the monotonous millennia of primitive life, breaking away to create a ‘civilization’ from nothing. The other fifteen have all been parented by either these six civilizations, or their immediate children. In this sense the history of civilizations can be broken down into genealogical families across three generations.

In mounting this argument Toynbee must say something about the reigning assumption that world history is properly understood as a universal stream of development culminating in a single centre: Western civilization[26]. Toynbee counters, briskly, that the assumption of the ‘unity of history’ belies four illusions. First, it mistakes the worldwide material expansion of Western civilization, through economic, technological and imperial networks, with the worldwide victory of the West tout court. But this is only true if we already accept the universalist belief in the identity of all humans. This is, in reality a dehumanising falsehood: the individuals Westerners are wont to call ‘natives’ have their own, indigenous cultures. Second, it is an outgrowth of the tendency of all societies to assume that the world revolves around them, what Toynbee calls the ‘egocentric illusion’. Third, it depends on the demonstrably false belief in the ‘unchanging East’, that the contemporary dominance of Western civilization must have as its explanation that the ‘East’ has stood still from time immemorial. Toynbee, a student of the ‘Near East’ and ‘Middle East’ and champion of the modernising nationalism of Ataturk and other anti-colonialists in the region, regards this as little more than prejudice. Fourth, it expresses the ‘illusion of progress’, a myopic historical simplification that assimilates Hellenistic and Western civilization into a linear periodisation of ‘Ancient, Medieval and Modern’. Against the division of chronologically contemporaneous societies into historically non-contemporaneous moments within a stadial theory of progress, Toynbee proceeds on precisely the opposite assumption, that civilizations are chronologically non-contemporaneous but historically contemporaneous. The First World War and the Peloponnesian War, for instance, are not just ‘alike’, but in some deep sense ‘philosophically contemporaneous’, for they mark the same moment in the historical life-cycle

25 Ibid., p. 7.

26 Ibid., pp. 36-40.

of the two civilizations. This cyclical theory of history rests on Toynbee's conception of civilizations as separate instances of a single species. Civilizations abide by the same pattern of growth and decay because of the uniformity of their natural constitution. This implicit naturalism also allows Toynbee to cast civilizations onto an evolutionary timescale. Civilizations have flourished across six-thousand years, but this represents just 'two per cent' of the entire history of humankind. From the perspective of this evolutionary longue durée civilizations are historically coeval.

So much for Toynbee's historical method. What is the structure of the meta-theory of history that Toynbee derives from a comparative study of his twenty-one civilizations? It follows from two of Toynbee's starting assumptions – that civilizations are explanatorily self-sufficient wholes, and individual manifestations of a single species – that world history is composed of nothing more than the unwinding of the life-cycles of its twenty-one separate civilizations. As such the crux of any theory of world history is the 'life-cycle' of civilizations, and *A Study of History* is structured as a search for the principles of that life-cycle. Toynbee models this historical life-cycle on a metabolic cycle of genesis, growth, breakdown and degeneration. In this sense he, much like Spengler, reverses the denaturalisation of historical time that Koselleck had identified as a preliminary step in the emergence of the idea of progress. But in *The Decline of the West* the principles of life guiding the morphological development of civilizations are a metaphysical given, something built into the structure of the organic whole. In the tradition of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, individuals simply act out the superior dictates of 'life', they are not the originary source and creator of 'life'. Toynbee takes a different view. He effectively uses Darwin's theory of natural selection to define the environmental pressures acting upon civilizations to winnow away the weak from the strong, and a vitalist theory to explain the emergence of the variations among civilizations on which those selection pressures act. For Toynbee, that is, life adapts to nature through a form of self-creation that is entirely free of physical determining conditions. It is the interaction of these two things – the structure of external challenges, and fecundity of internal creativity – that determines the success or failure of civilizations. Toynbee calls this thesis, 'Challenge and Response'. This means that, contra Spengler, the growth and vitality of civilizations is not a deterministic function of principles that are given within nature, but a result of a non-deterministic form of creativity whose ultimate locus is the individual. Indeed, Toynbee takes this principle of variation and selection to operate at three levels of generality: between civilizations as a whole[27], between societies within a civilization[28], and between individuals within those societies. It is the last level which is, in the final analysis, the 'source' of human

27 Ibid., p. 140.

28 Ibid., pp. 3, 241.

evolution[29]. Civilizations grow and evolve only insofar as the individuals within them creatively respond to environmental challenges. For Toynbee, this is not a collective endeavour but an elite one. In his view the overwhelming majority of humans across history have languished in a condition of uncreative indolence. Primitive societies are static because the individuals within them exhibit no creative spark[30]. New generations imitate older generations and their ancestors, extrapolating the past into the future in an unchanging lifeworld. Civilizations grow and flourish only on account of a rarefied few 'superhuman souls that break the vicious circle of primitive human social life', who instil their adaptive lessons into the rest of society through a mimetic process of 'social drilling'[31].

Civilizations grow and decay according to this evolutionary logic of challenge-and-response. In Toynbee's view the original six civilizations emerged from creative responses to challenges within their physical environment. Second and third generation civilizations emerged in response to social challenges arising from the breakdown of their parent civilizations. Civilizations continue to grow when their response to these initial challenges carries them through equilibrium and overbalances into further challenges[32]. For a perfect adaptation would result in a homeostatic condition lacking the pressures for continued growth and movement. Significant for Toynbee, in all three stages of growth, is both sides of the equation of challenge-and-response. On the one hand, it is not the case that the same initial conditions, the same combination of environmental pressures and/or social variables, will always give rise to the same response. Toynbee rejects the assumption of the uniformity of nature[33]. Responses are always creative acts entirely free of determining conditions. They break from the materialist logic of cause-and-effect. On the other hand, it is not the case that the nature of the environmental pressures and society make no difference. If the environmental challenge is too weak, it will fail to provoke a society into crisis, contemplation and response. But if it is too strong, it may either kill the society at birth ('abortive civilizations'), or be so severe that it can only be met through a kind of homeostatic immobilisation, as found in the Eskimos ('arrested civilizations')[34]. At the same time, if a society is too specialised, rigid or uniform, it will fail to produce the internal variation and diversity that leads to experimentation and evolutionary adaptation[35]. The perfect (if non-deterministic) conditions for creative evolution are environmental pressures that lie within the

29 Ibid., pp. 210-211.

30 Ibid., p. 49.

31 Ibid., pp. 209-216.

32 Ibid., pp. 187-189, 199.

33 Ibid., p. 67.

34 Ibid., pp. 153-181.

35 Ibid., pp. 3, 182, 231, 321, 329-330.

‘Golden mean’, that pose a serious challenge but are not overwhelming, and a society which is internally diversified, elastic and adaptable.

If this explains the genesis and growth of civilizations, how do they break down and disintegrate? Here Toynbee’s theory admits a far greater degree of specificity. Inherent in the fact that civilization can only grow when a creative minority drills its adaptive responses into the uncreative majority, is the threat of mechanisation[36]. The response to a foregoing challenge becomes accepted as an automatic feature of society, and the creative minority are hypnotised by their own genius, achievement and power. They become docile and indolent, unable to see the necessity of remaking society to meet new challenges. As new dynamic forces rush forward, they crash against the stale walls of society. Over time the pressure of these contradictions either explode in revolutionary moments of rapid social adjustment, or metastasize into 'social enormities', into a condition of permanent crisis, stuttering and nervousness. In this sense the breakdown of civilizations is invariably a result of exhaustion. Their deaths always ‘return a verdict of suicide’.

Where a growing civilization responds to a challenge with enough vigour that it overbalances into a new challenge, a civilization ailing under a social enormity will run up repeatedly against the same challenge[37]. Either it will eventually find a creative solution, or it will precipitate the disintegration of civilization. The creative minority which won the support of society through its powers of elasticity, innovation and élan, can now only maintain its social position by resort to force. It becomes a ‘dominant minority’, turning to violence, expansion and exploitation. Civilization begins to fracture along two axes[38]. Vertically its constituent states fragment into parochial states and enter into a period of violent clashes, a ‘Time of Troubles’. Horizontally its ‘internal proletariat’ rises up against the oppression of the dominant minority, and an ‘external proletariat’ of barbarian war-bands begin to threaten civilization from without. Eventually one state lands a ‘knock-out’ blow against its several competitors to resolve the ‘Time of Troubles’ by sheer force, imposing a ‘Universal Empire’ on the disintegrating civilization[39]. In this declension, groups within the civilization's internal proletariat enter into a period of ‘withdrawal-and-return’, establishing a nascent religion that will serve as the embryo to a new apparented civilization – here the archetype is the emergence of Christianity from the embers of the Roman Empire, forming the chrysalis of Western civilization[40].

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36 Ibid., pp. 275-307.

37 Ibid., p. 363.

38 Ibid., p. 365.

39 Ibid., p. 318.

40 Ibid., p. 369.

I now want to draw out two features of this meta-theory of history. The first is the immediate lesson it carries for Western civilization. On Toynbee's view the mutual recognition of the sovereignty of independent states was a creative response to the Wars of Religion. But in the nineteenth century two dynamic forces threw the sovereign state into flux: democracy and industrialism[41]. It was in the democratic outpouring of the French and American Revolutions that the world first bore witness to total wars. In violence and sweep they had no precedent, conscripting entire populations, expanding to consume vast continents, and abrogating the limitations of the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century. After the apex of free trade in the mid-nineteenth century, industrialism was yoked to the nation-state in a flurry of protectionism, as the first-industrialisers tried vainly to safeguard their markets. Toynbee surmises that the 'essence' of democracy and industrialism cut against the limits of the sovereign state, and tend towards the establishment of a system of worldwide political cooperation. It was these twin pressures which exploded across Europe in the First World War, and if the West fails to resolve this social enormity its faces only one outcome: disintegration and death.

The menu of possible options open to Western civilization can, Toynbee thinks, be ascertained by analogy with the 'Time of Troubles' of Hellenistic civilization[42]. In the Solonian Revolution of the seventh and sixth century BC the Hellenic world transitioned from subsistence farming to cash-crops, catalysing a tide of commerce, maritime trade and industry. Suddenly, the city-states of Greece were wrenched out of isolation, and cast into a volatile nexus of economic interdependence. Absent any corresponding unification upon the political plane, the effect could only be war, destruction and fracture. Toynbee goes so far as to claim that 'from the opening of the fifth century B.C. onwards the whole of the rest of Hellenic political history can be formulated in terms of an endeavour to transcend city-state sovereignty and of the resistance which this endeavour evoked'. But how exactly could Greece 'transcend' the city-state? The ideal solution, Toynbee offers, would be voluntary unification. But that was not to be. After expulsing the second Persian invasion from Greece at the Battle of Plataea, Athens established the 'Delian League' on a cooperative basis to guard the Greek peninsula. In time, however, Athens succumbed to the temptations of hegemony, using its leadership of the league for self-aggrandisement, and eventually triggering the Peloponnesian War. It was only several centuries later that a people on the periphery of the Hellenistic world, free of the Greek's infatuation with the parochial city-state, delivered a 'knock-out' blow to its rivals and unified the Mediterranean basin under the yoke of force: the Roman Empire. By this time Hellenistic civilization had already broken down;

41 Ibid., pp. 281-291.

42 Ibid., pp. 294-297, 311, 317-319.

the Roman Empire ruled over a disintegrating carcass. It is on the strength of this analogy, not only with Hellenistic civilization but every one of the twenty-one civilizations to have existed over the last six millennia, that Toynbee concludes that we can only expect a solution to the crisis of Western civilization's 'Time of Troubles' through a qualitatively new kind of international organisation, federated in structure and voluntary in membership.

I now want to turn to the crux of *A Study of History*, its underlying philosophical structure. I have suggested that Toynbee arrived at his meta-theory of history upon confronting Europe's *deminutio capitis*. Reformulating the concept of civilization as something both plural and mortal was a response, in The World After the Peace Conference, to the self-destruction of Europe and the faltering of its empires as new nation-states proliferated across the world, and at its origins, to Toynbee's discovery of the chronologically non-contemporaneous but historically contemporaneous parallel between the First World War and the Peloponnesian War, and his polemic against Allied support for Greece's 'civilizing mission' in Turkey that reconceives of Anatolia as the meeting point of three separate civilizations. *A Study of History* is an attempt to diagnose this problematic. In large part that diagnosis consists of a grandiose reconception of world history in the light of the lesson of Europe's *deminutio capitis*. Toynbee positions himself against the assumption of the 'unity of history', of a universal developmental stream with Europe at its apex. He treats Western civilization as one member of a species with twenty-one members who have all, up to this point in history, observed the same metabolic pattern of genesis, growth, breakdown and disintegration. The direct contemporary lesson of *A Study of History* is that Western civilization is already in the process of breaking down, that it stands on the precipice of death. It is easy to mistake this as the whole of Toynbee's diagnosis for the fact that his twelve-volumes are concerned with the comparison of civilizations to identify the life-cycle of their rise and fall. It is an inductive comparison, a theory based on what has happened. But Toynbee's diagnosis is not a scholastic, fatalistic or nihilistic attempt to survey world history to define the structure of the problematic in which Europe finds itself so that it can know the terms of its own death, but in order that it can escape this fate. Yet how can this be possible if Western civilization is a species with a defined life-history that can be calculated from precedent? This would seem to violate the metabolic logic of treating civilizations as 'species'.

The first step towards an answer is Toynbee's vitalism. Human society grows and flourishes when an elite among them mount successful creative responses to environmental challenges. But creativity is a vital spark contained in potential in animate life, that stands outside the physicalist logic of the causal interaction of inanimate matter. For this reason the duration of a civilization's growth is not a deterministic given that can be calculated ex ante. Its life-cycle is not a closed process but is susceptible to being transcended by force of pure

creative self-actuation. In Toynbee's words, history contains an 'unknown quantity… the reaction of the actors to the ordeal when it actually comes'[43]. When he rejects Spengler's theory of civilization as organicist, he is objecting to the idea that principles of life fixed in the organic whole of society determine the development of human societies[44]. Societies themselves are not organisms in any literal sense because they are made up of individuals, and it is the vitalistic fecundity of those individuals which determine the nature and length of a civilization's growth. Toynbee offers his reader the following consoling words: 'The dead civilizations are not dead by fate, or 'in the course of nature', and therefore our living civilization is not doomed inexorably in advance to 'join the majority' of its species… The divine spark of creative power is still alive in us'[45]. Writing again on the eve of the Second World War, Toynbee modifies the emphasis but not the substance of this claim. 'Even if all other civilizations that have come into existence so far were to prove in fact to have followed this path, there is no known law of historical determinism that compels us' to the grave, yet 'at the same time, such precedents from the histories of other civilizations and from the life-course of nature are bound to appear formidable in the sinister light of our present situation'[46].

But this simply rebalances the weight of tension in Toynbee's philosophy back to his cyclism. If growth is a result of a vitalistic spark that stands outside of physical cause-and-effect and cannot be calculated by precedent, then why do civilizations follow an identical life-cycle in which their growth matures, withers and relapses in exactly the same pattern? The answer is to be found in Toynbee's wider theory of evolution. As a metaphor the idea of evolution allows for the idea of both the existence of species whose member's shared biological constitution generates a common pattern of growth, life and death, and the possibility of an evolutionary leap to a new species who break from those limits. Three features of Toynbee's thought lend this interpretation weight. First, Toynbee emphasises that while civilizations vary and this is part of the explanation for their differential success in responding to challenges, 'we should be in danger of losing our sense of proportion if we lost sight of the equally certain and more significance fact that the variety manifested in human life and institutions is a superficial phenomenon which masks an underlying unity without impairing it'[47]. In this sense the space for differential evolution through creative self-actuation is bounded by the structural limits of civilizations as a species. What they share in common is both greater than their differences, and the explanation for why their differences are slight.

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43 Ibid., p. 68.

44 Ibid., p. 210-211.

45 Ibid., p. 254.

46 Ibid., p. 553.

47 Ibid., p. 242.

Second, in treating civilizations as a species, Toynbee locates them within the wider 'genus' of human social wholes[48]. Within this genus there belongs one other species: primitive societies. A telling indication of the extent to which Toynbee takes the idea of evolution as an empirical theory of human development and not an idle metaphor, is his discussion of the evolutionary leap from the 'higher mammals' to humankind, or from 'sub-man into man'[49]. This was 'a more profound change, a greater step in growth, than any progress which man has yet achieved under the aegis of civilization'. Of profound importance is that Toynbee arranges the evolution from sub-man to primitive man, from primitive society to civilization, and from civilization upwards, upon a continuous evolutionary scale. Third, Toynbee illustrates the identity of species as stages within an evolutionary progression through a metaphor drawn from Goethe's Faust: of climbers scrambling up a cliff face. It is worth quoting Toynbee at length:

> 'Primitive societies, as we know them by direct observation, may be likened to people lying torpid upon a ledge on a mountainside, with a precipice below and a precipice above; civilizations may be likened to companions of these sleepers who have just risen to their feet and have started to climb up the face of the cliff above; while we for our part may liken ourselves to observers whose field of vision is limited to the ledge and to the lower slopes of the upper precipice and who have come upon the scene at the moment when the different members of the party happen to be in these respective postures and positions… After all, the recumbent figures cannot be paralytics in reality; for they cannot have been born on the ledge, and no human muscles except their own can have hoisted them to this halting-up place up the face of the precipice below. On the other hand, their companions who are climbing at the moment have only just left this same ledge and started to climb the precipice above; and, since the next ledge is out of sight, we do not know how high or arduous the next pitch may be. We only know that it is impossible to halt and rest before the next ledge, wherever that may lie, is reached. Thus, even if we could estimate each present climber's strength and skill and nerve, we could not judge whether any of them have any prospect of gaining the ledge above, which is the goal of their present endeavours. We can, however, be sure that some of them will never attain it. And we can observe that, for every single one now strenuously climbing, twice that number (our extinct civilizations) have fallen back on the ledge, defeated.'[50]

We need to draw out several of the implications of this elaborate metaphor. First, one obvious implication is that there is a strict identity between progress and movement. Indeed, on this view, progress is nothing more than the creative transcendence of habit, indolence and stasis in vigorous rhythm that carries through into a new challenge, that again catalyse society's creative dynamism. Toynbee builds the modern regime of historical time back into

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48 Ibid., p. 8, 35.

49 Ibid., p. 49, 329-330.

50 Ibid., p. 49-50.

his theory at this point. Civilizations are plural and mortal as members of a species following a common metabolic trajectory, but they are distinguished from primitive societies by the fact of their progress and succeed only and insofar as their forward movement continues. We can turn to the source of Toynbee's metaphor, Goethe's Faust, to find an apt summation of Toynbee's evolutionism: 'Let us plunge into the rush of things / Of time and all its happenings! / And then let pleasure and distress / Disappointment and success / Succeed each other as they will / Man cannot act if he is standing still'[51]. Second, Toynbee speaks of the leap from primitive society to civilization as a genuine evolutionary 'mutation'. In t[52]he same sense for any society to break out of the life-cycle inherent in the limits of its biology as a member of the species of 'civilization', it must make a creative leap into a qualitatively new species. Civilizations climbing to the next pitch of the cliff are trying to raise themselves 'to the height of some superhuman kind of living'[53]. Or more bluntly, civilizations move towards 'the goal of human endeavours: the mutation of Man into Superman'. Third, this evolution is not random or non-linear but a genuine progression. Like many others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Toynbee reads a teleological moral purpose into Darwin's theory of evolution. In order to locate the inspiration of this synthesis of teleology and evolution, however, we shall have to turn to the uses to which Toynbee put his meta-theory of civilization to survey the interwar world.

Imperial Triptych

Curtis, Smuts and Zimmern are all children of the so-called 'Round Table'. The group was an outgrowth of Alfred Milner's 'kindergarten', a medley of Oxford graduates steeped in the neo-Hegelian New Liberalism of T. H. Green who Milner recruited to join him in South Africa, where he served as High Commissioner after the Boer War. When they returned to England in 1909, anxious to consolidate the position of South Africa and other Dominions within the British Empire, they founded the Round Table. Somewhere between a think tank, secret society and lobby, the Round Table was made up of a series of discussion groups threaded throughout the Dominions, coordinated and led by the kindergarten in London. Its important to emphasise, for our purposes, that its original agenda was fixed in place before the outbreak of the First World War. Morefield characterises the concerns of the Round Table as typically 'Edwardian', observing that their basic political programme – the transformation of

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51 Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, Faust: Part One. Translated by David Luke. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. On Toynbee's use of Faust, see Arnold J. Toynbee, 1934, A Study of History: Volume 1. Oxford University Press: London, UK, p. 261.

52 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Volumes I-VI*, p. 50.

53 Toynbee, *A Study of History: Volumes I-VI*, p. 245.

the British Empire into a globe-straddling state – differed only slightly from the Federationist dreams of 'Greater Britain' that had so dominated the late nineteenth century[54].

The Round Table's raison d'etre was to revivify the British Empire in order that it could withstand a panoply of emerging threats in the twentieth century. America, Germany and Russia's vaulting ascent threatened to undercut the hegemony Britain had enjoyed since the Napoleonic wars. Anti-colonial insurgencies raged across the empire at the same time as socialists, pacifists and internationalists merged to form Europe's first coherent anti-imperial movement. The animus in Britain towards what was felt to be the autocratic, oppressive tendencies of German imperialism, only added to the legitimacy crisis of the empire. It looked as if the Dominions were moving steadily towards independence, repeating the example of the United States. Worse still, the explosive rate of population growth in the dependencies incited fears that Britain and the Dominions would be swamped by a tide of savagery, anarchy and disorder.

Its solution was to reimagine the British Empire as a 'Commonwealth', a rechristening that culminated in Curtis' *The Commonwealth of Nations* (1916). I want to use this text to isolate three features of the Round Table's vision of the British Commonwealth: teleological deflection, multicultural conciliation, and white world order. I will go on to suggest that Toynbee adopted all three in the 1920s.

First, Curtis' history of the idea and practice of the 'Commonwealth' encodes two mythopoetic stories. One the one hand, particular historical episodes are treated as parables. For Curtis the mistake of world history was the British Empire's failure to extend self-government to the American colonies. Precipitating a 'schism' down the centre of the two great organs of the Commonwealth, it foreclosed the possibility of an Anglo-American behemoth ruling unchallenged over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, spreading the fruits of Anglo-Saxon politics, freedom and peace. Curtis treats this as the great 'what if' of the Commonwealth, but the intended lesson is a contemporary one. Britain ought to grant the Dominions self-government and bind them to itself as equal partners in a global imperial state. If it fails in this task, another fateful schism in the body of the Commonwealth awaits. Another curiosity of Curtis' history is that he grants the idea of the Commonwealth an Athenian pedigree[55]. His gloss anticipates Toynbee. While the Greeks had mastered Commonwealth government in the personal legislatures of city-states, they repeatedly

54 Morefield, 2013, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, pp. 104-105.

55 Lionel Curtis, 1918, *The Commonwealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire, and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Communities Thereof*. Macmillan: London, UK, pp. 26-27.

struggled to incorporate the Hellenes into a federal Commonwealth. Greece was wrecked by its division 'into a multitude of sovereign states, and the result was anarchy'.

On the other hand the form of this history is teleological. Past events are situated within a trans-historical story of the gradual perfection of Commonwealth governments. As Morefield has analysed[56], one effect of this Whiggish narrative is a rhetoric of teleological deflection. Britain's misdeeds, abuses and conquests are minimised, elided or excused. They are read as preambles to the full realisation of the Commonwealth, as aberrations that have since been resolved into a higher unity, or simply overshadowed by the splendour of the Commonwealth's pageant. When Curtis does raise the 'serious abuses' of the British Empire, his leading concern is exculpation[57]. The 'evils of British rule in India were slight', after all, when 'compared to those which developed in the American dependencies of Portugal and Spain'. As for slavery, Britain was simply conforming to a natural pattern. The 'first contact' of all European peoples with 'subject races' is a source of 'shame'. But this is a superseded past, and attempts to dwell on this sordid subject are 'as fruitless as they are invidious'.

Second, the most obvious rhetorical effect of renaming the British Empire as a 'Commonwealth' is to replace a series of hierarchical, oppressive and mendacious connotations, with the ideal of a partnership. For the Round Table, Commonwealths are cooperative, decentralised and filial communities. But what is the nature of this partnership? What is essential for Curtis is the common devotion of all members of the Commonwealth arising from their juridical duty to the imperial state[58]. Yet the rights corollary to those duties are not evenly shared. The foil of Curtis' argument is a conventional distinction between tribal, Asian and European modes of government[59]. Tribal life is oriented around the unquestioned obedience of parental authority, a condition which is 'correctly described as uncivilized'. Asian societies have broken out of this procrustean condition, only to harden back into theocracies. Asian peoples conceive of the social and political order as something fixed in place by the divine. Turning away from the mundane world, they focus on the supersensuous, imaginary and impractical. Europeans see the socio-political order as something made by and for the people. The complement of this belief is the expectation that subjects of the law should contribute to its formulation. But that contribution, for Curtis, does

56 Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, pp. 115-131.

57 Curtis, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, p. 166.

58 In 1916 Philip Kerr, another leading voice in the Round Table, defined a Commonwealth as a 'society of human beings… united by a common obedience to laws the purpose of which is the enlargement of liberty. It is not an abstract personality, like the Prussian State'. This justification is little different from the classic civilizing mission: subjugation is justified as necessary to expedite the progress of backwards peoples. Only here the progress in question is not that of the individual colony, but the Commonwealth as a collective. See Philipp Kerr, 2010, 'The Principle of Peace', in Alex May (ed.), *The Commonwealth and International Affairs: The Round Table Centennial Selection.* Routledge: Oxon, UK, p. 34.

59 Curtis, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, pp. 3-15.

not necessarily take the form of participation. Rather, it falls to the qualified members of a community - intellectually and morally - to define the public interest on the basis of which policy can be made. In the case of the British Empire, the dependencies fall squarely outside of this category. Imperial governance is the prerogative of Britain and the settler colonies. 'The idea that the principle of the commonwealth implies universal suffrage betrays ignorance', Curtis curtly pronounces, for the 'principle simply means that government rests on the duty of the citizens to each other, and is to be vested in those who are capable of setting public interests before their own'[60].

Curtis wishes to admonish the title of 'empire' in another sense, too. Far from imposing the culture of the metropole onto the periphery by diktat, in a starkly hierarchical relationship of superiority and inferiority, the British Commonwealth beneficently mediates cultural difference. It is the world's great multicultural conciliator. In Curtis' estimation, 'the ultimate problem of politics, [is] that which arises from the mutual contact of the principal families of mankind, and of one level of civilization with another'[61]. The role of the Commonwealth is to reconcile its parts to one another into a constant process of organic adjustment. Diachronic difference is resolved into a synchronic unity. Curtis begins *The Commonwealth of Nations* by noting that while the Chinese and British Empires each encompass a quarter of the human race, the Chinese Empire is a homogenous population at single stage of development, whereas in Britain's case it include a patchwork of territories from across the width and breadth of the world, at every grade of civilization[62].

Third, Curtis wants to revivify the British Empire as the guardian of white world order - in two senses[63]. We have just seen that Curtis takes the multicultural heterogeneity of the territories encompassed within the British Commonwealth to be one of its great virtues. But this sits uneasily with his belief that the Commonwealth is properly governed by an exclusive class of white Europeans. Suddenly the empire appears fatally lopsided. Its rulers are overwhelmed by its subjects, in a precarious numerical balance: 'today some forty-five millions of Europeans are responsible for the peace, order, and good government of some three hundred and fifty millions of the backward races'. At the same time, the British Empire is responsible for the prohibition of war and the maintenance of world peace. But its relative power in the world system is shrinking, as other Great Powers begin to pull alongside it. The solution to both problems is to consummate the Commonwealth through the extension of self-governance to the Dominions, creating a globe-straddling state with a parliament

60 Ibid. p. 181.

61 Ibid. p. 169.

62 Ibid. pp. 1-2.

63 Ibid. pp. 698-704.

drawing members from across the reach of the empire. To do so would rebalance the scales of Europeans to non-Europeans in the governance of the empire, while simultaneously serving to bind the Dominions into a pact of mutual security as separate parts of a single sovereign state. It solves, in one stroke, the ebbing racial stock of the empire, and Britain's anxious grip on world order, as Germany, America and Russia jostle for power.

After the outbreak of war this vision of the British Commonwealth was repurposed as the blueprint of a post-imperial world order by Smuts. Born to Afrikaner farmer in the Cape Colony, an outstanding law student at Cambridge, a Boer General in the Boer War, Defence Minister in the new Union of South Africa, and member of the British Imperial War cabinet during the First World War, where he helped to found the Royal Air Force – Smuts was the prodigal Dominion statesman. Smuts certainly knew Milner's kindergarten from South Africa, though as an Afrikaner he was never a part of the same Anglophile milieu. Yet both Milner and Smuts shared the hope of a federated South Africa, and extended this same principle to the question of world order. If Curtis' desire was to protect Britain from the rising tide of non-white populations in the dependencies then by federating with the Dominions then, as Morefield and Mark Mazower have shown, Smuts' desire was the obverse of this[64]. He was concerned to protect the white union of British and Afrikaners in South Africa, and to extend South Africa northwards in a new colonial empire, by working to preserve South Africa's status under the guardianship of the British Empire, reconceiving of the Empire as a decentralised body in which South Africa could pursue its own continental empire, and strengthening the British Empire and the world order upon which this all depended. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Smut's vision of world order can be reduced, in a zipline, to his desire to preserve and extend South Africa's racialist status quo in the face of the quantitative imbalance between the country's white population, and its black and Indian population. Smuts' liberal dreams of the British Empire were not a mere pretence. Yet this background is, nevertheless, vital.

Smuts was the delegate from the Imperial War Cabinet sent to represent the British Empire in Paris in 1919 on the question of the League of Nations. But it was not so much this fact, as that Smuts' blueprint for the League – *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* – was adopted by Woodrow Wilson as a concrete rendering of his own vision of post-war world order, that ranks Smuts as one of the leading architects of the League[65]. One of the British civil servants assigned by the Foreign Office to assist Smuts on that trip was Arnold Toynbee[66], and it was Smuts' reimaging of the British Empire that Toynbee would adopt as

64 Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Ch1; Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism*, Ch.5.

65 Ibid. pp. 39-44.

66 Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, p. 169.

his own. What, then, was Smuts' 'practical suggestion'? Smuts' mantra, repeated throughout the text, is that Europe's empires have been liquidated, and that 'the sweeping away of the Imperial systems of Europe leave the space vacant which the new institutions must occupy'[67]. Split into its national atoms, Europe had to be re-embedded in a new, world order under the League of Nations.

The foil of Smuts' argument is a surprisingly grandiose historical interpretation of Europe's condition[68]. First, he observes a general historical pattern. Societies have tended to agglomerate into ever-higher unities, moving from tribe to nation, and then upwards to empire. In some crude sense, 'all such composite Empires of the past were league of nations... but unfortunately doing so not on the basis of freedom but of repression. Usually one dominant nation in the group overcame, coerced, and kept the rest under'. Curtis' main point is not simply that this is a normative wrong, but that empires created and sustained by force and oppression are weak, fragile and liable to disintegration. Humankind's evolutionary progression into larger and larger forms of associations has, for this reason, repeatedly given way to catastrophe. Smuts applies this pattern directly to post-war Europe: the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires broke down precisely because they were evil, oppressive and centralised. The resemblance of this thesis to the crux of Toynbee's meta-theory of history is startling. It is the seed of *A Study of History*.

The obverse of this claim is that 'the British Commonwealth of Nations remains the only embryo league of nations because it is based on the true principles of national freedom and political decentralisation'. In this sense, for Smuts, the problem of creating a new world order to replace the European empires is one and the same as imitating the success of the British Commonwealth. Smuts casts his argument in evolutionary terms. He believes the British Empire was vindicated by the fact it survived the struggle of the First World War. Its singular success 'depends not on its having following any constitutional precedent of the past but on having met a new situation in history with a new creation in law, that 'grew empirically and organically out of the practical necessities of the colonial situation'[69]. It follows that the constitution of the new, post-war world order should 'avoid all rigidity, should be elastic and capable of growth, expansion, and adaptation'. Smuts concludes that the League of Nations should eschew the role of a 'super-sovereign', and model itself on the Conference system of the British Empire. Europe's empires have broken down into national 'atoms'. Any new world order has to be based on the recognition of the fact. The materials are in place for a new

67 Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, pp. vi, 10-11, 25-27, 30, 70.

68 Ibid. pp. 9-10.

69 Ibid. p. 31.

decentralised world order, and so the world has before it 'one of the great creative acts of history'[70].

But if the League of Nations is to be a post-imperial and decentralised body disclaiming the powers of a super-sovereign, this does not mean that all its members should enjoy the right of self-government[71]. As with Curtis, there are qualifications to rule. The peoples of the German colonies are ‘barbarians’ and endowing them with even a modicum of self-rule is out of the question. As for the colonies of the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman empires, ‘it will be found that their conditions for self-determination, or self-government vary very considerably’. Smuts goes on to elaborate a blueprint of what would become the League of Nations Mandate system, setting out a taxonomy of A, B and C mandates according to their capacity for self-government. He reasons that, because the League has no experience of colonial administration, and would be liable to discredit itself if it ventured into this hazardous field, it should delegate the governance of the colonies under its supervision to League members. Following a similar line of argument to Morefield and Mazower, Adom Getachew has recently made the case that Smuts is an epochal ‘counter-revolutionary’, rerouting Wilson’s war-time promise of self-determination to create a quasi-imperial international body[72].

Smuts adamantly rejected the basic suggestion of the Round Table that the reinvention of the British Empire as a Commonwealth would be tantamount to the creation of an international state. For Smuts, the Commonwealth ‘is not merely a state but a system of states’[73]. It is to be administered not through the pooling of sovereignty but a continual, organic process of consultation, focused on setting the common basis of the Empire’s foreign policy[74]. The British Commonwealth was, he waxed lyrical, a qualitatively new form of political constitution.

> ‘You do not want to standardise the nations of the British Empire; you want to develop them towards greater, fuller nationality. These communities, the offspring of the Mother Country, or territories like my own, which have been annexed after the vicissitudes of war, must not be moulded on any one pattern. You want them to develop freely on the principles of self-government, and therefore your whole idea is different from anything that has ever existed before. That is the fundamental fact to bear in mind – this British Commonwealth of nations does not stand for standardisation or denationalisation, but for the fuller, richer, and more various life of all the nations comprised in it’.

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70 Ibid. pp. 10-11, 49.

71 Ibid. pp. 15-23.

72 Adom Getachew, 2019, *Worldmaking After Empire*. Princeton: New Jersey, USA, see chapter 2.

73 Jan Smuts, *War-Time Speeches: A Compilation of Public Utterances in Great Britain.* George Doran: New York, USA, p. 15.

74 Ibid. pp. 27-31.

As Mazower stresses, Smuts did not only conceive of the League in analogy to the British Commonwealth, but saw it as its essential complement, a system of world order that would help prop-up and support the Commonwealth. Yet his writings during the First World War are pregnant with this idea. It is helpful to jump forward to the third of Morefield's protagonists, Zimmern, and his 1926 work The Third British Empire.

Zimmern was a leading member of both the Round Table and the League of Nations Union. What I want to focus on is his synthesis of these two projects. Zimmern's writings overflow with unbridled Anglophilia. Like Smuts, he panegyrises the ingenuity, diversity and liberty of the British Empire, and how these virtues have allowed it to blossom at the same time as its Russian, German, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarians rivals have disappeared. Zimmern traces the Commonwealth back to the establishment of representative assemblies in Canada in 1791, but the Third British Empire - the first being the empire of America, the second of India and Africa - was born of the extension of self-government to the Dominions. It is now an empire that comprises societies with their own diplomatic systems, who have the autonomy to determine the course of their foreign policy and sign whichever treaties they desire. But this adaptation has its limits[75]. Air-power has obliterated whatever security the English Channel had once afforded. Britain's naval supremacy was tamed by the Washington Conference, establishing a ratio of battleships between Britain, the United States and Japan of 5:5:3. America, Germany, France and Russia are beginning to out-compete British industry. At the same time, the British Empire is crumbling from below: 'our benevolent trusteeship in Asia and Africa is being sharply challenged by the spread into these regions of the doctrines of European nationalism'. Zimmern believes the League of Nations has stepped into the breach. Its system of collective security, open commerce and mandates, are a panacea for Britain's flagging power. But just as the Commonwealth depends on the League, so the League relies on the Commonwealth. In Zimmern's view the Commonwealth's great virtue is that it is a 'multi-national association of peoples in five continents'[76]. It conciliates cultural, racial and linguistic differences, and its immense 'authority and momentum' in colonial affairs distinguish it sharply from the fledgling League.

Superhuman

75 Alfred Zimmern, 1926, *Third British Empire.* Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, pp. 50-60.
76 Ibid. pp. 66-67.

We are now in a position to return to Toynbee. I want to suggest that Toynbee shares a version of the three rhetorical strategies that I identified in Curtis' *The Commonwealth of Nations*. He deflects the past wrongs of the British Empire by sublating them into a meta-historical story of evolutionary progress (teleological deflection). The collision of civilizations, races and peoples under the centrifugal forces of global modernity is, Toynbee believes, being worked out within the framework of the British Commonwealth (multicultural conciliation). And while Toynbee largely eschews Curtis' overt racism, he believes the British empire can only endure if responsibility for its governance is pooled with the white settler colonies (white world order). But his analysis of the post-war conjuncture derives less from Curtis, than Smuts. His writings over the next fifteen years are suffused with references, quotations and allusions to Smuts, including the 1934 volumes of *A Study of History*. This is true of both his empirical assessment of world order, and his underlying philosophy.

Recall how Toynbee thinks civilizations decline. At first they breakdown when their ruling minority loses creativity, and splinter into warring states. From there, they have one of two options. Either they can enter into a voluntary federation, or a state will eventually rise up to conquer the whole expanse of civilization and impose a 'Universal State' by force. All civilizations up to this point in history have taken the second path, and have slowly withered and disintegrated under a dominant minority which compensates for its lifeless indolence with brute force. Toynbee thinks that the goal to which all these civilizations have reached is the creative resolution of parochial sovereignty through cooperative federation. This is the ledge to which Faust's climber ascends. What is incredible is that a distillation of this entire theory is found in the first ten pages of Smuts' *Practical Suggestion*. We know this is not a coincidence. Our evidence is not simply that Toynbee was present at the Paris Peace Conference where Smuts' *Practical Suggestion* was debated, or that Toynbee quotes Smuts more than perhaps any other living author. It is, above all, that Toynbee adopts Smuts' underlying philosophy of evolutionary holism.

Smuts only published his complete philosophical system in *Holism and Evolution* (1926). Smuts starts from the belief that the theory of evolution has cast traditional philosophical categories into crisis[77]. Darwin's discovery that life originates in matter forces us to radically rethink the materialist theory of the universe. If it is matter which births life, matter must be something animate, vital and moving. Smuts thus adopts a vitalist theory of life. Evolution stands at the interaction of two factors: a mysterious internal and creative factor that positively forms the variation that serves as the material of progress; and an external factor that negatively selects variations according to their fitness to the environment[78]. Darwin's

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77 Jan Smuts, 1927, *Holism and Evolution*. Macmillan: London, UK, pp. 1-22.

78 Ibid. pp. 196-197.

mistake was to focus on the mechanistic pattern of selection, rather than on the creative animus of life. Smuts is careful to emphasise that the two factors of this interaction are not sequential, that the inner factor does not create variations which then, in a second step are acted upon by external pressures. Creative adaptation always takes place under the stimulus of external pressures. This is what he means by saying that the two factors are 'interactive', not isolated[79]. Smuts' conception of evolution is also purposive. This is clearest from his belief that life has a kind of organic path-dependence[80]. The functions, pressures and habits of an organism give it a direction and momentum of travel. When variations take place in this direction, then, 'the dice are loaded in its favour'. There is a correspondence between the purpose of the organism, and its evolution. One expression of this view is Smuts' claim that evolution takes place through a constant overbalance that pushes the organism into further development, carrying with it a directional momentum:

> 'Complete equilibrium is never attained, and would be fatal if it were attained, as it would mean stagnation, atrophy and death. And so the overbalance in a certain direction or with a definite orientation continues indefinitely, and all small developments and adjustments and 'variations' which have the specific orientation have the momentum of the whole behind them and tend to survive and grow while others in other directions are dropped and discarded.'[81]

A final feature of Smuts' theory is that evolution is synthetic. The tendency of the universe - of all matter, life, mind and personality - is towards 'ever more closely unified and synthetic forms'[82]. The dual tendency of organisms is towards ever-greater internal differentiation and the synthesis of these new parts into higher coordinate wholes. Holism is, then, 'a process of creative synthesis', of adaptive variation and organic assimilation[83]. One can easily see this principle in Smuts' belief that the history of humankind is a story of society's organisation into larger and more diverse wholes, and that Europe's empires failed because they exhibited unity but not evolutionary variation, whereas the Commonwealth succeeded because it boasted both unity and an elastic ability to adapt to a shifting world landscape.

It should be clear that Toynbee's theory of challenge-and-response - the theoretical bedrock of *A Study of History* - is a reworking of Smuts' evolutionary holism. Toynbee conceives of evolution as taking place at the interface of internal creativity and external selection, and of

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79 Ibid. pp. 227-228.

80Ibid. pp. 220-221.

81 Ibid. p. 223.

82 Ibid. pp. 328-330.

83 Ibid. p. 89.

creative variation as a ‘response’ to the ‘challenge’ of environmental pressures in a genuine interaction. Toynbee believes that continued growth depends on a civilization’s response to a challenge over-balancing into another challenge, to avoid the aridity of a homoeostatic equilibrium. Toynbee also considers growth to be something purposive, carried forward by the superhuman ingenuity of a refined elite. And as we have seen, Toynbee accepts Smuts’ analysis of post-war Europe as the model of the evolutionary dilemma that civilizations face in their ‘Time of Troubles’. Toynbee was able to write in 1966, ‘I owe much to’ *Holism and Evolution*, and that he ‘read it in early summer of 1927, when I was poised for starting my first long-vacation stint of work for my own book *A Study of History*. The comprehensive view of the Universe that Holism opens up was just what I was needing at that moment’[84].

We need to append three caveats to this interpretation. The first is simply to re-emphasise the point that Toynbee is an evolutionist of a different order to Smuts. He uses evolution to combine two registers of historical time, cyclical and progressive. Civilizations follow a common pattern of metabolic growth and decay because they belong to a common species. But there remains the possibility, despite all precedent, for an evolutionary leap to a higher mode of life - to a superhuman condition. The second is that while Smuts is the principal source of Toynbee’s theory of challenge-and-response, he is neither the first nor only inspiration. Toynbee had imbibed the evolutionary idealism that was au courant at Oxford while he was an undergraduate, and was particularly drawn to Henri Bergson’s vitalism[85]. Within *A Study of History* Bergson fills out Toynbee’s conception of vitalist creativity in the larger framework provided by Smuts. It is also Bergson who gives Toynbee his account of mimesis, mechanisation and idolisation. The third is that while Holism and Evolution was not published until 1926, it is implicit - at times explicit - in Smuts’ political writings long before then, including but certainly not limited to the *Practical Suggestion*. Toynbee was influenced by the spirit of Smuts’ evolutionary holism from at least 1919.

After the First World War Toynbee hoped that the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations would resolve Western civilization’s Time of Troubles through a worldwide system of decentralised cooperation, or what Toynbee called ‘unity in diversity’. Heaving humankind up the evolutionary cliff-edge, they had the potential to break all historical precedent through what Smuts had declared to be ‘one of the great creative acts of history’. But the modality of this belief was hope, not prophecy. Whether this monumental creation would succeed could not be calculated ahead of time. Despite this qualification, Toynbee set up the historical situation, and the nature and actions of the Commonwealth and League, as if they were

84 Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, pp. 169-170.

85 Lang, ‘Globalization and Global History in Toynbee’, pp. 758-759.

ingenious adaptations to the post-war world. He was an advocate and enthusiast, even if this was a vision that was, ultimately, stated in the conditional.

Remember, Toynbee's basic problematic is Europe's *deminutio capitis.* A small class of Great Powers centred in Europe had ruled over the international system since the fifteenth century. War brought this settlement to an end. The German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian empires disintegrated. Released from the fetters of empire, new nation-states emerged in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the former colonies of the European empires. Power was rapidly flooding across the world, the Great Powers replaced by scores of 'lesser' and 'intermediate' powers. Toynbee's over-arching explanation for this transformation was that Western civilization was reeling from having failed to resolve the contradiction between the parochial nation-state, and the new forces of nationalist democracy and industrialism.

I now want to return to *The World After the Peace Conference* to sketch Toynbee's account of the adaptive response of the British Commonwealth and League of Nations to this challenge. Like Smuts, Toynbee frames the First World War as an evolutionary filter. It winnowed away the weak from the strong, the rigid from the elastic. The 'Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, and Romanov Empires' took a stance of 'uncompromising resistance to the national principle, with such fatal consequences to themselves'[86]. All three had brought heterogeneous populations within a common political authority, but this 'had not been followed by the creation of great nations with a common consciousness transcending differences of language'[87]. Britain and the United States, in contrast, met the demands for decentralised national self-government 'before it was too late, by substituting the conception of partnership for that of ascendancy'[88]. The British Empire transformed itself into a 'Commonwealth' by granting self-governance to the Dominions, running the empire as a partnership among equals. Toynbee believes the United States began upon a similar path from the time of the inaugural Pan-American Conference in 1889, a movement which has been consummated by Woodrow Wilson. The Latin American Republics are no longer the subjects of the Monroe Doctrine, but partners who cooperate in determining a joint foreign policy for the Western hemisphere. In both cases, Toynbee emphasises, 'the secret of their strength was the elasticity of their political methods'[89]. They were capable of evolutionary adaptation. Accordingly, the British Commonwealth and American Entente have to be understood as a qualitatively new species of organisation that defy all received 'logical

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86 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, p. 28.

87 Ibid. p. 21.

88 Ibid. p. 28.

89 Ibid. p. 29.

definition'[90]. The fruit of their creative 'metamorphosis' cannot be prophesied, 'but it was clear already that they were developing into institutions of a different structure from that European species of Great Power which had dominated the international landscape'.

On Toynbee's view, any new world order has to reckon with three features of the post-war landscape: the death of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, the worldwide extent of Western markets, technology and politics, and the diminution of the Great Powers and rise of decentralised nation-states around the world. A response to this challenge has to be worldwide in its governance, global in its field of action, and decentralised in structure. It is not only the fallen empires of Central and Eastern Europe that are inadequate to this task, but three of the ostensible victors of the First World War: France, Italy and Japan. All three retain the shape of a traditional nation-state, even if they have managed to unify their peoples under a common nationalist ethos. Toynbee hints that their reckoning will come, that their gains are not the result of creative genius, but the losses of others. But he also identifies other of their weaknesses, structural and political[91]. Absent colonial lands for the release of surplus labour, Italy and Japan are paying for their parochialism with overpopulation. France, in contrast, is depopulating. Worse, all three of these powers turned away from the responsibility for world order. Japan has alway held itself 'aloof' from European affairs. It is a regional power, not a world-power. France is preoccupied with its narrow 'security and reparation', and Italy with self-aggrandisement. In this situation 'the responsibilities of the former Concert thus threatened to fall with crushing weight upon Great Britain, for the world-wide distribution of British territories and British commercial interests compelled the British Commonwealth… to take a comparatively broad view in international affairs'. Yet it could not bear this strain 'single-handed'. Toynbee's answer to this problematic is that Britain has to be supplemented by a League of Nations, appealing to a page-long quote from Smuts' *Practical Suggestion*. Toynbee assents to Smuts' verdict: 'Europe is being liquidated, and the League of Nations must be the heir to this great estate'. In Toynbee's words, the British Commonwealth, the Pan-American Congress and the League of Nations are 'deliberate attempts to substitute a world-wide for a European organization'[92].

Toynbee extends this analysis in *The Conduct of British Empire Foreign Relations* (1928). The occasion for the book was the 1926 Imperial Conference in London, and specifically the remark in the final report of the delegates that the Commonwealth 'considered as a whole, defies classification and bears no real resemblance to any other political organisation which now exists or has ever yet to be tried'. Toynbee seizes upon this 'paradox', and tries to unfurl

90 Ibid. p. 30.
91 Ibid. p. 47.
92 Ibid. p. 26.

its significance. The empire is a state, municipally, given that all of its subjects share a common allegiance to the Crown, and internationally, since no part of the empire can be at peace when another part is at war[93]. What makes the Commonwealth distinct from any other known state is its polymer structure, combining peoples from every reach of the earth: 'territories in all regions - climactic and political - of the world, and citizens representing all the chief living races and civilizations, so that there was no major part of human affairs of any description in any part of the world at that time in which the British Empire was not concerned'[94]. Of special significance is that the Commonwealth contains representatives from all of the five living civilizations: Hindu and Muslim civilization (India), Western civilization (Britain, Ireland, Canada, South Africa), Far Eastern civilization (China), and Orthodox Christian civilization (Greece). It is defined, that is, by its multiculturalism.

Toynbee quickly demurs from the report of the Imperial Conference, however. In reality the Commonwealth is not unique: it finds an analogue in the League of Nations. Toynbee draws four parallels between the Commonwealth and the League[95]. First, a condition of membership to both organisations is full self-governance. Second, both organisations studiously reject the powers and functions of a super-state, operating instead as decentralised partnerships. Third, the League is bound to the outlawry of war. According to Toynbee, this 'was part of the birthright inherited from the British Empire', whose Dominions would never 'dream' of the 'sinister right of going to war with one another'. Finally, the Commonwealth and League form collective security pacts among their members. Yet this identity does not mean that the two institutions are competing for the same role. On the contrary, Toynbee insists, they are 'mutually indispensable'.

The League helps the Commonwealth in two respects, geopolitical and constitutional. We saw that in 1923, Toynbee feared that Britain was 'staggered under the burden of Atlas', that 'almost all the national problems left behind by the War were weighing upon her shoulders'[96]. The League lightens this weight considerably[97]. Through a system of dispute resolution, open commerce and collective security, it safeguards the foundations of a free and prosperous world order. Britain is merely the junior partner in this geopolitical project. At the same time, the League resolves perhaps the constitutional aporia of the British Commonwealth: its pact of collective security[98]. Under the Commonwealth, whenever any member enters into a state of war with another country, its other members are

93 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1928, *The Conduct of British Empire Foreign Relations Since the Peace Settlement*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 1-2.

94 Ibid. pp. 4-6.

95 Ibid. pp. 14-23.

96 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, p. 91.

97 Toynbee, *The Conduct of the British Empire*, p. 24.

98 Ibid. pp. 24-26.

constitutionally bound to enter into a posture of 'passive belligerency' with that country, but not to launch hostilities and enter into 'active' belligerency. The underlying issue is that the Commonwealth members did not want to be automatically committed to war by the actions of other states without any contemplation or decision. As Toynbee discusses, a crisis of this kind emerged when Britain threatened to enter into hostilities with Turkey in 1922, and several of the Dominions wavered as to whether they would enter 'active' belligerency.[99] The League effectively solves this problem. Every member of the Commonwealth is also a member of the League, and in their capacity as signatories to the collective security pact of the League's Covenant, independent of their membership in the Commonwealth, they are committed to come to one another's aid in the event of international aggression. The Commonwealth is able to consult among its members to form a common foreign policy and system of Imperial Defence, while eschewing the role of a supra-sovereign and granting all members the constitutional freedom to decide upon matters of peace and war for themselves. The League envelopes the Commonwealth, as concentric circles of defence.

But the Commonwealth is equally essential to the League in regulating what Toynbee calls the 'contact of civilizations'[100]. Toynbee estimates that 'the contact of civilizations, which was perhaps the greatest of all movements in the contemporary world, was largely working itself out within the boundaries of the British Empire'. Unlike Curtis, Toynbee did not consider this a question of adjusting civilizations at different stages of development to one another, but of mediating between the autochthonous cultures and activities of coequal living civilizations. It is the first time in history that a civilization's field of action encompasses the entire world. Western civilization's industries and technologies have swept around the planet, destroying ancient civilizations, sparking anti-colonial nationalism, and bringing civilizations together in the swirling vortex of global modernity[101]. Hindus, Muslims and Westerners are in 'violent collision with one another' in India. Migrants pour out of Britain, and Ireland and India, rushing into Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Southern Rhodesia. Conflict flares between Africans, Indians and Westerners in South Africa. The Middle East erupts in successive waves of anti-colonial revolt. From Turkey, to Japan, to Russia, countries are torn between indigenous tradition and the power, security and ideals of Westernisation. Under the strain of these pressures, Western civilization is buckling. 'In 1920 several of these surviving non-Western societies - enmeshed in the Western system but not yet domesticated or assimilated - were struggling to break away, and their convulsions threatened serious damage to the delicate filaments in which they were entangled'[102]. The

99 Ibid. pp. 46-52.

100 Ibid. p. 24.

101 Toynbee, *The Conduct of the British Empire*, pp. 11-13, 24, 35-36; Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 68-87.

102 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 68-69.

British Empire stands in the midst of this epochal upheaval, regulating the flow of global migration, taming nationalist energies through decentralisation, concessions and policing, and creating a new multicultural Commonwealth - simultaneously united and multiplicitous. Toynbee concludes that the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations are 'two great experiments towards the solution of this world-problem… allied both in spirit and aim'[103].

The explicit construction of *The Conduct of the British Empire* is evolutionary. He recapitulates Smuts' thesis that the Hohenzollern, Hapsburg and Romanov dynasties had failed to reconcile themselves to nationalism by 1914, and 'when the tempest caught them, they were driven helplessly, one after another, to shipwreck on a lee shore, while the British Empire - re-rigged in time with an eye to heavy weather - successfully rode the storm'[104]. Britain had 're-rigged' because it had suffered its own calamity. It had betrayed a 'sluggish gait… on one fatal occassion', failing to extend self-government to the American colonies, and triggering the Revolutionary wars. In a parable redolent of Curtis, Toynbee holds this up as the great lesson of the history of the British Empire. For Toynbee, 'the British Empire was attempting to adapt itself to a changing environment through the progressive evolution of the British commonwealth in response to' four new problems[105]:

1. The system 'to which the British Empire belonged had ceased to be a European system with overseas appendages and had become a world-wide system in which Europe no longer retained a predominance'
2. The 'world as a whole had become what only Europe had been before, that is, a one and indivisible field of action'
3. The 'third change in the world to which the British Empire had to adapt itself was the ferment which the leaven of Western civilization was producing in all mankind'
4. The Empire had to overcome 'the great change for the worse which had recently come over the institute of War'

'The response of British statesmanship' has been the gradual devolution of power to the Dominions[106] But the conditions for this 'metamorphosis' have not been equally adventitious across the colonies. In the 'young communities of European origin overseas', Toynbee suggests that 'the evolution of Dominion Status has been carried on under exceptionally

103 Toynbee, *The Conduct of the British Empire*, p. 44.
104 Ibid. p. 29.
105 Ibid. pp. 30-44.
106 Ibid. pp. 36-40.

favourable conditions'. With the benefits of an English heritage of political aptitude, and the freedom of the 'virgin soil' of the New World, they exhibited 'an unusual plasticity which made them admirable vehicles for the first essay in a new 'variation' or 'mutation' in political structure'. A spiritual as well as a political rebirth, bitter memories that 'might have proved incurable in the mental atmosphere of the Old World' have been easily superseded. Less progress has been made outside of the English settler colonies. Ireland is 'oppressed' by the weight of its afflicted history with Britain, exhibiting an 'almost pathological inability to forget a wrong after it has ceased to be inflicted'. India's 'baleful' memories of European exploitation has been 'a still tougher obstruction to political growth', even though 'the ancient wrongs by which the brooding spirit had been generated had been in the work of conquerors whose bones had turned to dust long before the first Englishman set foot on those shores'. Another obstruction to India's evolution is the sheer 'multiplicity and sharpness' of its racial, linguistic and social differences. Toynbee surmises , in a striking passage, that 'the only common feature in their manifold social heritages was a uniform absence of that kind of political experience and tradition out of which the institution of responsible parliamentary government had originally grown in its native British soil'. Toynbee proposes that the evolution of the Commonwealth principle has always been 'just in time', neither too early nor too late. It has been a 'piecemeal evolution', progressing carefully by experiment and adaptation to changing circumstances, in an 'empirical statesmanship, without proposessions but also without prejudices'. Britain's rule over the dependencies is naturalised, framed as a prudent response to unripe conditions. Failure is heaped singularly upon the heads of recalcitrant colonies. Ireland's focus on Britain's crimes is 'pathological', while India's is a case of mistaken attribution. Toynbee observes that there are 'several parts of the Empire - e.g. India, Kenya, and Southern Rhodesia among others - in which the possibility of disaster, if the pace were forced, was evident'. Toynbee remains hopeful, however. It is 'the success or failure' in these endeavours 'that would decide whether or not the evolution of the British Commonwealth' was to be consummated. He indulges an uncharacteristic moment of utopian speculation on the future of the 'evolved' Commonwealth:

> 'Canada and Australia would probably grow into communities of the same stature and species as the United States, New Zealand into an antipodean counterpart of Great Britain… As for India, her destiny pointed to her becoming the representative, within the British Commonwealth, of an Oriental type of United States which would be represented in the world at large by the USSR and China. At the opposite end of the territorial scale, the embryonic city-states of Hongkong and the Straits Settlements

> were bidding for a commercial hegemony in the Pacific not unlike that which had been exercised in the Mediterranean, in certain past ages, by Venice and Rhodes.'[107]

Creative Destruction

Toynbee believes human societies admit progress. In his mind progress is a creative response to an environmental challenge, an evolutionary metamorphosis. But this is a naturalised theory where progress is rendered as the metabolic growth of a social organism. It is because societies can relapse from growth into decay, and civilizations are members of a common species, that Toynbee conceives of world history as cyclical. Toynbee's vision of the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations do not negate that cyclism. Either they represent an epochal evolution to higher species of human society, or they will fail like all past experiments in voluntary federation and give way to a Universal State erected by violence, conquest and oppression. Toynbee wishes for the success of that experiment, he rhapsodies the Commonwealth and League, but he does not prophesize their success. Creativity is free of all determining conditions, an extra-physical unknown. It is for this reason that Toynbee can map out conflicting futures, trajectories in which Western civilization expires, slowly fading from the spotlight of world history. Perhaps the most critical unknown, for Toynbee, is what the impact of 'Westernisation' is and will be. The Commonwealth and League can only create a lasting world federation if historic differences between civilizations can be overcome or mediated. But is that possible, or probable?

I suggest that Toynbee treats 'Westernisation' as a process of creative destruction. As we saw with Spengler cyclical theories of social growth and decay have a built-in potential for hierarchy. By interpreting the contemporary world as if societies are at different stages of their life-cycle, it is possible to reimagine traditional beliefs about the singular progress of Western civilization by comparing its up-cycle growth, with both the abortive and arrested development, and the down-cycle disintegration, of other civilizations. Societies observe differential development because they languish in various states of growth, disrepair and death. Only non-Western civilizations are not relics of a bygone past, but omens of the West's mortal future. Toynbee shares a version of this view, claiming that Western civilization is one of only five living civilizations, and that the other four civilizations have all broken down. Toynbee, recall, thinks that civilizations die of suicide, of an internal failure of creativity. It is important for his theory, then, that all of these civilizations were decaying before the impact of Western imperialism, trade and technology. Toynbee airs various

107 Ibid. pp. 40-42.

possibilities about how much life is left in these civilizations, and in what direction it pushes. Yet he consistently argues that Westernisation has played the role of a stimulus.

Westernisation has set the world aflame, catalysing growth, movement and revolution in once-moribund civilizations. Take one example, from the 1925 edition of the Survey of International Affairs. Chronicling the nationalist revolutions across the Middle East, and Western ventures to drain the region of its oil reserves, Toynbee writes: 'The Muslim Peoples, gradually stimulated by the activities which, for the last century and a half, the Westerners had been carrying on in the Islamic domain, were abandoning their passive role and beginning to take an active and in some places decisive part in the drama'[108]. Islamic civilization was dormant, it played no active role in world history. It was an object, not a subject. All movement came from Western civilization, the only source of vitality in the world[109]. Infiltrated by Western conquests, institutions and ideas, however, Islamic civilization has suddenly startled awake. Toynbee believes this is true of all 'living' civilizations: they are in motion once more, responding to the challenge of the West. This is why, in Toynbee's estimation, the 'contact of civilizations' is the foremost problem of the age. But the creative response of non-Western civilizations is uncertain. Toynbee scours world politics for possible indications of its future.

Toynbee equivocates when calling Westernisation a 'stimulus', however. Often he reaches for other words, words of organic invasion: it is a virus, a poison, a disease[110]. Westernisation obliterates archaic traditions and institutions, pours violent ideas and technologies into fragile ecosystems, and opens new cleavages, divisions and conflicts. It has stimulated non-Western civilizations to action by the sheer weight of destruction, by the catastrophe and threat of Western civilization. We see both sides of the compound of creative destruction playing out in Toynbee's discussions of nationalism. If we turn back to *The World After the Peace Conference*, it was nationalism that burst through the fetters of empire in the First World War to spawn a new and decentralised landscape of self-governing states. We have seen one version of this story: 'Nationalism had developed creative powers in the countries colonised by the West European nations overseas'[111]. In *A Study of History* Toynbee calls this the 'stimulus of new ground', the challenge that settler colonies face in wresting control of virgin territories, and building civilization afresh[112]. If nationalist growth is

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108 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1927, *Survey of International Affairs 1925 Volume 1: The Islamic World Since the Peace Settlement*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, p. 4.

109 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1922, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*. Constable and Company: London, UK. See chapter 1.

110 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1929, *Survey of International Affairs 1928*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, p. 189; Arnold J. Toynbee, 1935, *Survey of International Affairs 1934*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, p. 99.

111 Toynbee, *The Western Question*, p. 17.

112 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1934, *A Study of History: Volume 2*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 73-100.

concentrated in the Dominions and Latin American Republics, it is not limited to them. In the Middle East societies have broken away from the Ottoman Empire, and are at once learning from and chafing against British and French imperialism[113]. Nationalism 'seemed to be achieving at one stroke the results which had demanded a century of effort in the Balkan peninsula'. Turkey beat back Greece from Anatolia, Afghanistan declared war on the British, Iraqi uprisings forced concessions from London, Syrian insurgencies have shaken French rule. In a matter of years, nine Arab states have become either independent or 'potentially independent'. This last euphemism is telling. Toynbee hopes that the fledgling Middle Eastern nation-states will form nodes in the decentralised framework of the Commonwealth and League. As we know, though, Toynbee believes that self-governance is achieved by an evolutionary process elapsing over time, supervised by the 'empirical statesmanship' of Britain or the Mandates. While Toynbee marvels that Egypt enjoys independence for the first time since 1517, the reality is that the country remained a geostrategic waypost under the diminishing control of Britain until the 1950s. But nationalism's vitality exceeds the control of its creator, and Toynbee concedes that evolution is taking place, within or without the control of Britain and the League. He admonishes the militancy and violence of anti-colonial nationalism in the Middle East, only to swiftly conclude that 'all these apparently reckless appeals to force were eventually more or less justified by their political results'. Toynbee would later contrast two modes of evolution: the revolutionary violence of Chinese nationalism, and the peaceful gradualism of India under the guiding hand of the British Raj[114]. He rejects the first and commends the second, yet both remain instances of evolution, of growth and self-development. In the 1934 Survey of International Affairs, Toynbee is enraptured by the 'tendency for the Middle East peoples to commit themselves, on the economic as well as on the political plane, to an increasingly active and intimate participation in the life of the great society which was being brought into existence in this age by the Westernisation of the World'[115]. Islamic societies are once more animate, but because and in the context of Western civilization. It is the admission of Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan and Persia into the League of Nations that Toynbee invokes as evidence of the creative renewal of the Middle East. But once again the modality of this claim is that of hope, and Toynbee quickly slides into the conditional, asking: 'How would this poison work when it was injected into the body social of Islam?' Nationalism's future cannot be tamed or prophesied.

If this is the creative stimulus of nationalism, what of its destruction? In Toynbee's view nationalism was the underlying cause of the Armenian genocide that he copiously

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113 Toynbee, *The Western Question*, pp. 41-43.

114 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1932, *Survey of International Affairs 1931*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, p. 39.

115 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1934*, pp. 96-99.

documented during the war, as well as the Greek massacres in and around Smyrna that he witnessed first-hand in 1921. Near Eastern and Middle Eastern civilization were decrepit[116]. Greece and Turkey could only survive by drawing from the life and vitality of Western civilization. And this they had to do, to defend themselves from the West by creating modern states, militaries and bureaucracies. But 'this infusion of Western life, which was essential to the peoples that experienced it and was welcomed and brought about by these peoples deliberately because they recognised it was the alternative to going under, has worked havoc with their lives'. Nationalism was born from the idiosyncratic fact that, in Western Europe, linguistic communities overlap with political borders. It was a slow, organic development connected to the history of the region. Transplanted into non-Western civilizations as a revolutionary furore of 'defensive modernisation' and/or anti-colonial defiance, it has had the effect of forcing disparate linguistic groups into the straightjacket of a single juridical territory. The inevitable result was massacre, genocide and war. As Toynbee would later write, 'When the Western conception of nationality penetrated into the Islamic World, Islamic society was theoretically confronted with two alternatives. It might either refuse to try on a shoe which had been shaped for other feet, or it might mutilate itself for the sake of wearing Cinderella's slipper'[117].

Toynbee shares the prevalent liberal internationalist belief that the division of the world into independent nation-states is the fundamental cause of war, and that the imperative solution is the integration of those states in a common federal body. But in Toynbee's case this view is complicated by his philosophy of history. Nationalism is not a simple wrong, for Toynbee, because it is a teleological preliminary to humankind's evolution into a higher 'unity in diversity'. Evolution is creative and synthetic, adapting variations into ever-higher coordinating wholes. Empires have to fragment into atomistic nation-states to create what Smuts called the 'material of progress', the nodes to be wired together into the decentralised framework of the Commonwealth and League. Toynbee's view is, curiously, redolent of Marxism: the destructive social contradiction between nationalism and industrialism, and the parochial sovereign state, is a necessary stage of progress that history will resolve into a higher synthesis. Toynbee is more than cognizant of this. Writing of the 'century of waste and bloodshed' in the Balkans and Turkey that followed the genesis of nationalism in the region, he surmises that while this might not represent a 'political advance', it is a 'necessary evil' in the rejuvenation of these moribund societies[118]. In 1925, he judged that in the West's collision with Islamic civilization, 'destruction was predominant'[119]. But this suffering was a

116 Toynbee, *The Western Question*, pp. 14-20.

117 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, p. 18.

118 Toynbee, *The Western Question*, p. 18.

119 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, pp. 23-24.

medicine, wiping clean the 'old order'. Though 'the ruins cumbered the ground, the beginnings of fresh construction, on the Western plan', including a 'genuine struggle for constitutional government', and 'the emancipation of women and a further determination to master the material technique of Western civilization'. The old has to die, for the new to grow.

Westernisation has reawakened and energised petrified societies. But the effect of this collision is not uniform, cleaving in two directions: imitation and backlash. He treats the Balkans as a paradigm of Western assimilation[120]. Parallel with Peter the Great, in the seventeenth century Greece reoriented Westwards. Throughout the nineteenth century the Balkans dripped away from the Ottoman Empire, giving way to a flood with the collapse of the Empire after the First World War. The Balkan Peninsula stood transformed, a patchwork of shifting nation-states within the aegis of the League of Nations. It adopted the dress, customs, ideas and institutions of Western civilization, to the point that it has 'lost its distinctive civilization'. It has become Western 'with hardly any reserves or inhibitions'. Russia moves in the opposite direction[121]. Westernisation since Peter the Great was a 'veneer'. Marxists puzzle over how the most under-developed country in Europe could be the site of communism's first world-historical breakthrough. For Toynbee the answer is simple: the Bolsheviks succeeded precisely because Russia's Westernisation never cut deep into the country's tissue. Russia's bourgeois, intelligentsia, and bureaucracy were anaemic and easily quashed, 'a house built upon the sands'. Lenin and Trotsky are the unknowing historical agents of the Slavophile cause. Russia's surrender of its imperial territories along its Western frontier - Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland - signal a reorientation towards Asia. Peter the Great's monument to the West, St. Petersburg, has been replaced by a capital deep within the Russian landmass, Moscow. Russia eyes Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, China and Japan greedily. It positions itself as an icon against British imperialism within Asia, and with nineteen million Muslims nestled in its borders, it threatens to merge Islam and Marxism into a potent anti-Western movement.

In arranging societies between these poles of anti-Westernisation and pro-Westernisation, Toynbee replicates this same division within civilizations. Indeed, the opposing movements of the Balkans and Russia take place within the ambit of Byzantine (or Christian Orthodox) civilization. Analogising with the ancient world, Toynbee names these contrasting movements ‘Herodians’ and ‘Zealots’[122]. Within the Islamic world, Turkey is modernising, abolishing the caliphate and declaring itself a republic, removing Islamic strictures on dress,

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120 Toynbee, *The Western Question*, pp. 5-9; Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 69-70.

121 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 70-75.

122 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, p. 6.

disendowing Islamic institutions, and replacing the Arabic alphabet, in an effort to ‘deliberately and effectively cut themselves off from other members of Islamic society[123]. At the same time, fearful of living in an independent state under the sway of a Hindu majority, India’s Muslims imagine re-embedding themselves in a Pan-Islamic caliphate stretching from the subcontinent to the Middle East. Later, Toynbee contrasts the ‘primitive Islam’ of Abdul Wahhabi who calls for the full-throated revival of an Islamic caliphate and Sharia law, drawing support from the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East, and the Herodian Westernisers leading Egypt and Turkey, rooted in the ‘tobbocco and currant plantations of Turkey, and in Levantine ports like Constantinople, Salonica, Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut, through which the stream of international trade’ flows back-and-forth to Western civilization[124]. It is the uneven pattern of development within the region that conditions its psychic antagonism. The upshot, Toynbee observes, is that a fulcrum of Westernisation like Turkey, shares more in common with Western Europe, Russia and China, than their ostensible co-religionists [125]. Civilizations are beginning to fragment and intersect. In Hindu civilization, too, the fundamental issue ‘was not the political conflict between Hindu Swarajists and British officials, but the difference in orientation towards the West that divided Hindus themselves’[126]. One faction of Swarajists are built in the mould of the nationalist movements in Turkey, Egypt and Japan. They oppose the British Empire not from any antipathy towards the West, but because the British Empire is abjectly failing to live up to its own Western standards of responsible self-government. An opposing faction sees the overthrow of the British Raj as a preliminary to the obliteration of all Western influence over Indian life. Gandhi wishes to extricate India from the industry, technology and markets of the West, to return India to a pristine agricultural past.

But to speak in these general terms of 'Westernisation' and 'anti-Westernisation' is to conceal the crux of the issue, the character of Westernisation. Toynbee, remember, conceives of civilizations as fundamentally cultural entities. An enormous amount therefore pivots on whether the material spread of Western civilization, the transport of its technologies, industries and institutions around the world, concatenates into a process of cultural assimilation. Toynbee never spells out exactly what the conditions are for the success of the Commonwealth and League, and the evolution of humankind into a higher synthetic unity. But the possibility of enduring cultural differences between civilizations raises several possible problems for him: (i) it would mean that the antipathy, violence and collision, the 'contact of civilizations' that he regards to be the defining problem of the age, might

123 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 76-80; Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1928*, p. 188.

124 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, pp. 76-80.

125 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1928*, pp. 188-189.

126 Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference*, p. 82.

continue indefinitely; (ii) if civilizations remain an axis of cultural difference, this would at least suggest that civilizations endure as a species, that they have not been united into a higher synthesis, and as such that the cyclical pattern of rise and fall will continue; (iii) and it would indicate that the unification of the world is something fragile and impermanent, that societies might follow the example of Russia, where two centuries of Westernisation was cast off in a single revolutionary rupture. It is therefore wholly unsurprising that the implicit hope expressed in Toynbee's writings throughout the 1920s and 1930s is that Westernisation is advancing on all planes, that societies are converging materially and psychically.

But once more we need to recognise that these hopes sit side-by-side with alternate futures. Discussing the Westernisation of the Islamic world in 1928, Toynbee maps out three possible trajectories. One is that Islam will fall under the lapping waves of Westernisation on every plane, economic, political and cultural[127]. It will become part of the Western whole. Toynbee asks, quizzically, 'Could any non-Western society oppose an effective resistance to the advance of Western civilization without borrowing the invader's weapons? And could that be done without becoming contaminated by the Western spirit...?' Toynbee leaves the question open, and adds that Western civilization may yet relapse into civil war and mutual destruction, rendering the question null. Another is that the kind of Islamic zealotry found among Wahhabism will gain in strength, and force Western civilization into a 'long retreat', resulting in a permanently divided world afflicted by 'stationary warfare'. Islam might return to its seventh-century glory, erecting a civilization-wide caliphate to rival the West. A third alternative is that Islam will be assimilated into Western civilization, but play the role that the Christian Church did to the Roman Empire. It will form the chrysalis of a new religion, that will overtake the decaying corpse of the West, to lay the germ of a new post-Western civilization. Toynbee's conclusion is frustratingly indeterminate: we shall have to wait and see.

It is therefore of great significance that in the first three volumes of *A Study of History* published in 1934, this ambivalence is muted. Toynbee errs decisively toward the belief that Western civilization is becoming coextensive with the world on every plane. One useful index of this change is Toynbee's reassessment of Soviet Russia[128]. Toynbee asks, 'Did Lenin come to fulfil or to destroy the work of Peter the Great?' Bolshevism has the appearance of a spiritual revolt against Western civilization. It rejects the industrial form of life of the modern West, and has the trappings of Orthodox Christianity, 'with Marx for its Moses and Lenin for its Messiah'. And it owes its success to the weakness of the reforms instituted by Peter the

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127 Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1928*, pp. 188-192.

128 In the following discussion I draw on Arnold J. Toynbee, 1934, *A Study of History: Volume 2*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 200-204.

Great, the fact of Russia's under-development. Yet the actions and achievements of the Bolshevik government suggest otherwise. Stalin's 'Five Year Plan' is a project of intensive and systematic industrialisation, whose goal is 'to change a nation of peasants into a nation of mechanics, to transform the old Russia into a new America'. Dwarfing Peter the Great's summoning of St. Petersburg out of the marshes of the Neva River, the Five Year Plan is a monumental act of nation-wide Westernisation. The same is true of the Hindu anti-Western movement led by Gandhi, Toynbee suggests. Gandhi castigates British industry and power-looms for disfiguring India, and cuts the figure of a saint. But his political programme is Western in procedure, involving the whole Western political apparatus of conferences, resolutions, votes, platforms, newspapers, and publicity', while the movement as a whole draws greatest support from Indian industrialists. Neither Lenin nor Gandhi can extricate themselves from the active movement to which they are reacting:

> 'Strive as they will to win a decisive victory for an anti-Western reaction, the Hindu and the Russian zealot of these latter days can only succeed in giving an impetus to the very process of Westernization against which they are up in arms. The life and energy with which they inspire their anti-Western 'holy wars' is actually drawn - and this is the secret of its vigour - from a Western source; and thus, in the crucible of these ardent souls, an anti-Western movement is transmuted into a new manifestation of the spiritual force against which it is directed'.

Toynbee adds two weighty clarifications to this argument. First, this same process is playing out within all societies impacted by Western civilization. Gandhi and Lenin are representatives of a universal phenomenon. Second, this assimilation is proceeding on every plane, economic, political and cultural. Toynbee hints that there is a genuine concatenation between economic Westernisation and spiritual Westernisation, that the one leads ineluctably to the other. He concludes that Hindu, Byzantine, Muslim and Far Eastern civilizations no longer confront the West as alien forces with their own endogenous volition and direction. They have become part of the 'Western-made Great Society', and their life and activity now manifests itself as a conflict 'between different classes and different races' within a single society. Assimilation is universal. Toynbee expresses hope that this movement presages the creation of an ecumenical world society.

In the next instalment of *A Study of History* in 1939, however, Toynbee pulls back from this dramatic conclusion[129]. Reviewing 'the group of living civilizations that are in process of being assimilated by our own Western civilization', Toynbee finds that this 'process is

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129 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1939, *A Study of History: Volume 4*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 79-83.

proceeding at different paces on different planes'. Every one of these civilizations has been caught in the network of economic relations sprawling across the world from Western civilization. Russia, India, Turkey and Japan are all Westernising on the political plane, too, adopting the modern nation-state, entering into the European society of nations, and building bureaucracies, militaries and universities on the model of Western civilization. While there is tension and conflict, the direction of travel is clear. But on the cultural plane, 'there is no uniform corresponding tendency'. Perhaps only Turkey has embraced Western culture, customs, ideas and dress without inhibition. 'The Arabs and Persians and Hindus and Chinese, and even the Japanese, are accepting our Western culture with conscious mental and moral reservations as far as they are accepting it at all; and they are all manifestly on the look-out for some form of social compromise which will allow them to participate in the economic and political systems of the West without ceasing to possess their own non-Western souls'. Russia, meanwhile, is a Slavophile movement staging a frontal 'cultural reaction against the West'.

What explains this reversal? The fundamental reason is the breakdown of the League of Nations when Britain, France and the United States failed to uphold the Covenant and repel Japan's invasion of Manchuria, Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, and Germany's gradual defiance of the Versailles conference. By this time Toynbee's estimation of the British Empire had dwindled. It was a second-rate power, outshone by Russia, Germany and the United States, and perhaps Japan. Toynbee no longer frames the Commonwealth and the League as the 'mutually indispensable' pillars of world order. Revising his original interpretation of events, Toynbee claims that after the First World War the precipitous decline of British power meant that the Pax Britannica had to be put 'into commission'[130]. The League is not the Commonwealth's partner, but its replacement. In this sense, for Toynbee, the breakup of the League of Nations is the end of his dream for the evolution of a decentralised framework of nation-states, a creative synthesis uniting the world without need of violence or oppression. It is the death knell of Western civilization.

Toynbee's immediate response was to charge Britain, France and America with reckless complacency. The British 'governing class' failed to recognise that the fate of the British Empire was bound up with that of the League. By shirking their duties as members of the League to hold Italy, Japan and Germany to account, they were knocking out their feet from underneath themselves. Britain has been inured to danger by the historical security of the English channel. But if Germany were to reclaim its Eastern Empire, 'they will build up within three hours' flying distance of the place in which we are sitting tonight a Great Power of the

130 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1937, *Survey of International Affairs 1937*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 22-23.

calibre of Russia or the United States'[131]. It was this response that Carr famously criticised Toynbee for in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Blaming the breakdown of the League on Britain and France's failure of nerve was, in Carr's view, to substitute moralistic exhortations for a realistic appraisal of the structure of power in the international system[132].

Yet Toynbee did proffer another, more practical response[133]. Any international system must be able to adapt itself to the changing balance of world forces, Toynbee reasons. It fails to do this through a peaceful system of coordinated adaptation, violence is inevitable. The Versailles settlement locked Italy, Japan and Germany into an international status quo in which they are 'have-nots'. At present they are trying to break out of that framework by brute force, forming a 'Counter-Covenant' based on a single common interest: the need to overturn the League of Nations which holds them down. So far, Britain has proceeded on the 'utterly dishonourable' policy of 'throwing the weak to the wolves'[134]. What it ought to do is to present the 'Triangle Powers' with an alternative: adjustment by peace. Toynbee identifies three deprivations that motivate the Triangle Powers: irredentism, a lack of colonial assets, and a sense of disrespect[135]. Irredentism can be satiated by the extension of the principles of the British Commonwealth to the lost territories in question. Sudetenland, for example, would be given the status of a self-governing region within Czechoslovakia, a minority with an autonomous identity and space of action. The Triangle Powers' lack of colonial lands is more difficult, Toynbee thinks. These peoples ought not to be treated as assets to be traded without consent, and so three-way discussions are necessary. At the least, the abandonment of the 'colonial preference' system and the opening of colonies to free trade would extend the principal benefits of the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Yet this solution to the colonial question may violate the third interest of the Triangle Powers: their injured sense of self-respect, of not being treated as equals[136]. Toynbee suggests the solution may not be to transfer the colonies of the 'haves' to the 'have-nots', but to take them out of play by bringing them under the more complete control of the League of Nations[137]. They should be run as dyarchies, fly under the flag of the League, and be supervised from Geneva.

It was not simply that Toynbee thought the superstructures - the Commonwealth and the League - through which humankind might ascend to a higher stage of evolution had failed, but that the very conditions which gave Smuts' vision of creative synthesis plausibility in the

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131 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1936, Peaceful Change or War? The Next Stage in the International Crisis, *International Affairs*, 15(1), pp. 26-56. See page 30.

132 Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 28.

133 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1936, Peaceful Change or War? The Next Stage in the International Crisis, International Affairs, 15(1), pp. 26-56.

134 Ibid., p. 30.

135 Ibid., pp. 38-41.

136 Ibid., p. 46.

137 Ibid., p. 48.

first place had faded. Toynbee recanted on his assessment of the tendency of world politics after the First World War. Great Powers were not dwindling, strangulated by the rigidity of their centralised structure, to be replaced by a field of nation-states, and the empires able to adapt themselves to this diversity. Already in 1936, Toynbee affirms the diametric opposite:

> 'In a previous volume [The World After the Peace Conference] we have noticed that one of the immediate effects of the General War 1914-18 was to diminish the relative influence of the Great Powers as a class, and to increase the relative influence of lesser states, over the conduct of international affairs... By the beginning of the year 1937 it had become manifest that the experiment which had been put in hand seventeen years before had met with a serious reverse, and that the post-war balance of forces was reverting towards something more like the pre-war dispensation under which the Great Powers had ruled the roost.'[138]

Toynbee abandons the solution of evolutionary holism, but he retains the problematic of Europe's *deminutio capitis*. Half-way through *A Study of History*, Toynbee does not give up on his meta-theoretical sketch of the life-cycle of civilizations. For Toynbee, two facts dominate the post-Second World War world.

The first is the rapid concentration of geopolitical power. Toynbee observes that 'within the span of a single life-time, the number of Great Powers of the highest material calibre - if we measure this calibre in terms of sheer war potential - has dwindled from eight to two'[139]. He estimates the real significance of the First World War was not the creation of ‘a few not-very-long-lived small successor states’, but the destruction of several of Europe’s Great Powers[140]. Toynbee had a meta-historical story to explain the 'dwarfing of Europe' from as early as 1931, and in the 1940s it moves into the foreground of his writings[141]. The paradigm is classical: the Hellenes were overshadowed by societies on the periphery of their civilization, and ultimately conquered by Rome. When a civilization shatters into competing nation-states in its 'Time of Troubles', the pressures of the balance-of-power are greatest at the core, and weakest at the periphery. 'The stream of civilisation flowing - in our case, out of Europe - in the form of emigrants, capital, ideas, institutions, transforms the great States that arise in the outer darkness and gradually raises their standard of civilization and power, until the little States in the centre, the mothers of civilisation, are dwarfed by their children'. Europe's vitality has been drained into its American and Asian periphery, into the United States and Soviet Union. Europe is no longer a centre of activity, but a battleground over

138 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1937, *Survey of International Affairs 1936*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 30-31.

139 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1947, The International Outlook, *International Affairs*, 23(4), pp. 463-476. See page 465.

140 36, Arnold J. Toynbee, 1949, *The Prospects of Western Civilization*. Columbia University Press: New York, USA.

141 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1931, Historical Parallels to Current International Problems, *International Affairs*, 10(4), pp. 477-492.

which to be fought[142]. The British Commonwealth is out of step with this centralising tendency. If it were to try and establish itself as a third centre of world power, 'the Commonwealth would have to weld themselves together into a massive military unity as highly centralized as the Soviet Union is at all times and as the United States is in time of war'[143]. But to do so would be to betray the last two-hundred years of the Commonwealth's heritage and achievement, its transformation into a decentralised body of self-governing territories. Extrapolating forward, Toynbee believes that in the future power will be proportionate to the scale and centralisation of a state. It will be Australia, Argentina, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, China and India who follow in the tracks of the United States and the Soviet Union[144]. Toynbee now believes global pluralisation will be total:

> 'In a unified world, the eighteen non-Western civilizations - four of them living, fourteen of them extinct - will assuredly reassert their influence. And as, in the course of generations and centuries, a unified world gradually works its way toward an equilibrium between its diverse component cultures, the Western component will gradually be relegated to the modest place which is all that it can expect to retain in virtue of its intrinsic worth'.[145]

The second dominating fact is what he provocatively calls 'the siege of the West'. But who is it besieged by? In the first instance, by Russia, 'a land-empire on the likewise colossal scale of the ephemeral empire of the Mongols'[146]. But the Soviet Union is only the knife-edge of a larger thrust from the East. Western civilization is besieged by 'the non-Western majority of mankind', who are 'rapidly mastering the "know-how" of the technology which has been the secret of our recent Western power'[147]. It is losing the monopoly of technological knowledge on which its supremacy over the last five-hundred years has depended. History's 'tide is turning' [148]. Toynbee's response hangs between two positions. On the one hand he believes that in its constitutive nature the West is no different than any other civilization. It has no objective superiority. Toynbee assents that it is right and natural that the West release non-Western peoples from the shackles of empire[149]. Britain has 'done right in letting go of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon'. On the other hand Toynbee has a partialist commitment to the doctrines and future of Western civilization. While the West ought not to dominate other

142 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 104-105.

143 Toynbee, The International Outlook, pp. 470-471.

144 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, p. 116.

145 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, p. 158.

146 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1953, The Siege of the West, *Foreign Affairs,* 31(2), pp. 280-286. See page 282.

147 Ibid. p. 285.

148 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1952, Union of the Free Inevitable, *Look*: New York, USA, p. 20.

149 Ibid. pp. 20-21.

societies, it is exigent that as its surplus of power over the rest of the world fades, it acts to defend itself.

For Toynbee the fundamental threat is unchanged: he is unequivocal that the world will be unified, the only question is whether this shall be done by force, or by cooperation[150]. The only other option is annihilation. Curiously, Toynbee's declinism makes a scalar leap. Toynbee reasons that because Western civilization created a techno-economic field coextensive with the world, and because of the destructive potential of atomic war, for the first time humankind is 'faced with a situation in which the whole enterprise of civilization may come to a stop if we cannot solve the problem of war'[151]. History's cyclical pattern of rising and falling civilizations is met by the possibility of a terminus, an existential catastrophe that obliterates the entire project of civilization, Western or otherwise. Yet the conditions are no longer ripe for a voluntary world federation. Societies can only be united in a federation when they share the same culture, beliefs and institutions[152]. Patently, this is not true of the post-Second World War world, least of all with respect to the United States and the Soviet Union.

Toynbee's agenda is a dual one, then: to protect the West from the consequences of its decline, as its technological means of power diffuse across the world, and to mitigate or neutralise the Cold War. His solution is what we might call 'Western unification'. Toynbee airs several versions of this idea: a democratic federation on the model of Clarence Streit's *Union Now*[153], an Anglo-Saxon federation encompassing Britain, America and the Dominions, and simply the federation of all Western civilization[154]. In every case, the rationale is the same. Western civilization must adapt itself to the concentration of politics into ever-lager centralised bodies, and it must erect a common front against its besiegement from the East. In light of the present obstacles to world federation, the West should adopt a strategy of 'playing for time'[155]. It should establish a modus vivendi with the Soviet Union, while gradually working towards closer cooperation through the forum of the United Nations. Toynbee's hopes of global federation were relegated to an indistinct future, and invested with none of the hopeful expectation that shone through Toynbee's writings before 1936-1939. He reasons, in one passage, that if the country in which Westernisation has progressed over the longest period of time is Russia, then the West cannot be hopeful as to

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150 Toynbee, The International Outlook, p. 464.

151 Toynbee, *The Prospects of Western Civilization*, p. 19.

152 Ibid. p. 47.

153 Toynbee, Union of the Free Inevitable. For the original proposal, see Clarence Streit, 1938, *Union Now: A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Leading Democracies*. Harpers: New York, USA. Lionel Curtis was advocating on behalf of Streit's proposal as early as 1939. See Lionel Curtis, 1939, World Order, *International Affairs*, 18(3), pp. 301-320.

154 Toynbee, *The Prospects of Western Civilization*, pp. 49-50.

155 Ibid. pp. 45-46.

the prospects of the Far Eastern, Islamic, Hindu and African societies[156]. It faces centuries of global backlash, or 'besiegement'.

Toynbee assigned these tasks not to the Commonwealth or the United Nations, but the United States. With the European continent dwarfed, the leadership of Western civilization had passed across the Atlantic. America would have to step into the 'political vacuum' left open by the retreat of the British Empire[157]. Toynbee feared that America was ill-prepared for this task, that its technocratic and economic outlook lacked the deep sense of political nous and responsibility necessary for managing the world's affairs. It must, as the British Empire once had, take on 'political responsibilities in politically backward foreign countries'. Truman's pledge of support to Greece and Turkey are only the opening of a worldwide anti-communist campaign. America and the Soviet Union will have to enter into a fragile modus vivendi based on the partition of the world on a 'fifty-fifty' basis, in the spirit of, 'You take Manchuria, and we will take the rest of China'[158]. Elsewhere Toynbee advises America to exceed this fifty-fifty rule, that 'to make the United States or any other part of the world safe for democracy, the whole world under present conditions has to be made safe for democracy'[159]. Indeed, given its preponderant power, 'it is apparently possible today for the United States to assert her own protectorate over any country she chooses in the no-man's land between the Soviet Union and herself'. It is not entirely surprising, then, that Henry Luce saw Toynbee's *A Study of History* as the manifesto of his millenarian vision of 'the American Century', and brought the weight of his media empire behind Toynbee[160]. Splashed on the cover of Time Magazine in 1947 and treated to an in-depth explainer in Life Magazine in 1948, Luce's campaign helped transform the abridgement of *A Study of History* into a best-seller in the United States, and elevated Toynbee into the world's greatest historical celebrity. Toynbee's importance as a historical seer was frequently compared to Marx, and his meta-theory of history proved of such great influence in post-war America because it was an anti-Marxist theory of history, that explained how 'the West' related to 'Russia' in grandiose terms, and why America now stood as the leader of 'the West'. I return to Toynbee's appropriation into America's Cold War in the next section, it is necessary to first give some indication as to how Toynbee tied together *A Study of History* in the final substantive instalments of the book in 1954.

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156 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, p. 106.

157 Toynbee, The International Outlook, p. 466.

158 Toynbee, *The Prospects of Western Civilization*, pp. 44-45.

159 Toynbee, The Siege of the West, p. 286.

160 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life*, pp. 184, 206, 124-126; Donald. W. White, 1996, *The American Century: The Rise and Decline of the United States as a Power*. Yale University Press: New Haven, USA, p. 119.

Toynbee leaves his elaborate theory of the life-cycle of civilizations intact. He also hypothesises a familiar range of possible future trajectories: the destruction of civilization, the eclipse of the West by China, India or Russia, the assimilation of Islam and Hinduism into Western civilization only for these religions to establish the germ of a post-Western civilization. With one crucial exception. Originally 'Churches' had played a subordinate role to civilizations in *A Study of History*. They emerge from the carcass of a dying civilization to lay the seed of a successor civilization, transmitting the torch of civilized life across historical generations. Toynbee now turns this picture on its head. It is religions who are the bearer of progress, while civilizations are merely their vessels[161]. Toynbee's biographer, the world historian William McNeill (originally Toynbee's protege at Chatham House), suggests two reasons for Toynbee's religious turn. One is that the failure of the League of Nations in the late 1930s led him to invest his hopes in the other-worldly realm[162]. The second, exacerbating factor was a series of personal crises, culminating in the suicide of his son Tony in 1939. It might be added that Toynbee's life-long mentor at Chatham House, Lionel Curtis, staged his own Augustinian turn in 1934 with the publication of *Civitas Dei*[163].

It is worth briefly noting three upshots of this theoretical recalibration. First, where before civilizations were coequal members of a single species no different in constitution than one another, Toynbee now arranges the three generations of civilization into a progressive sequence, reaching a crescendo in the twentieth century. The first generation's purpose was to create the basis for the second generation of civilizations, Karl Jasper's 'Axial Age' in which all the 'higher religions' of world history emerged[164], while the (hopeful) role of our third generation of civilization is to synthesise these religions as the foundation stone of a global ecumene[165]. Second, the implication is that the fundamental problem of world order is not political, ideological or institutional, but spiritual. Humans have to overcome the idolatrous self-worship of the nation if they are to escape self-destruction[166]. Western civilization has created the 'scaffolding' of a world society, but this material framework is spiritually barren. Westernisation has not witnessed the assimilation of all societies into a homogenous cultural field, but is merely a preliminary to the emergence of a global syncretic religion[167]. Third, Toynbee inserts religious premises directly into his philosophy of history. 'Challenges' are no longer naturalised as Darwinian factors arising from a shifting environmental landscape[168].

161 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1956, *A Study of History Volumes VII-X*. D.C. Somervell Abridgement. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 87-88.

162 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life*, pp. 170-177.

163 Lionel Curtis, 1938, *The Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God*. MacMillan: London, UK.

164 Karl Jaspers, 2010, *The Origin and Goal of History*. Routledge: Oxon, UK, pp. 51-60.

165 Toynbee, *A Study of History Volumes VII-X*, pp. 92-93.

166 Ibid. p. 104.

167 Ibid. pp. 105, 118, 314; Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, pp. 86-94.

168 Toynbee, *A Study of History Volumes VII-X*, pp. 290-300.

They are placed before civilizations by God. 'Responses' are not the vital creativity of humans in a process continuous with all life. Creativity is the gift of God's love that distinguishes humans from animals who live according to the sway of their subconscious drives. And Toynbee builds an aporia into history: Augustine's theory of original sin. God's gift of creative freedom carries with it an inherent potential for sin[169]. In a very real sense, the first two tranches of *A Study of History* in 1934 and 1939, should be read as a fundamentally separate work than the final tranche in 1954. One is naturalist in its philosophical commitments, the other religious. One prioritises cyclism over progress in the history of civilizations, the other progress. One sees Westernisation as the solution to Europe's *deminutio capitis*, the other syncretic religion.

169 Ibid. pp. 118-120.

Section 3: Struggle

At the opening of the Cold War the priority of the United States' strategy was to stabilise Western Europe and superintend its integration into a common security, economic and political system[1]. It was widely recognised that the Soviet Union, ruined by the Nazi's war of extermination, had neither the physical power or psychic will to enter into another conflict, nor posed any immediate threat to the United States. Russia had no way of traversing sea, air and land to meaningfully impinge on the Western hemisphere. Strengthened by war, the United States boasted three times the GNP of the Soviet Union, a global network of overseas bases and the world's largest navy, and alone possessed atomic weapons. Through Europe, East Asia and the Middle East, it could strike from across the Eurasian landmass at the Soviet Union. Fears lay elsewhere. Russia may not pose any direct threat of conventional war, but the international communist movement, directed from Moscow, threatened to exploit the extreme dislocation, poverty and disorder of Europe to topple the continent by internal revolution. Two world wars had demonstrated, it was claimed, that the security of the United States depended upon that of France and Great Britain. It was often argued, drawing from the geopolitical tracts of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman and others, that any power able to control Eurasia would control the world. It was countered at the time, and has been reiterated since, that this presupposes the need for offensive action in Europe, and that the Western hemisphere contained the raw materials and geographical insularity necessary for America's defensive self-sufficiency.

John Thompson has suggested, for this precise reason, that America's enormous commitment to the reconstruction and defence of post-war Europe requires some further explanation[2]. This was scarcely an inevitable outcome. America had not dispelled the 'isolationist' sentiments that dominated the country's interwar foreign policy. Calls for demobilisation were immediate, and by 1947 the United States' armed forces had shrunk from 12 million to 2. Congress had insisted on the termination of Land-Lease aid upon the cessation of hostilities, explicitly forbidding its use as a vehicle of post-war aid. Yet by 1949 the United States had dispensed 26 billion dollars through Marshall Aid, equivalent to 10% of America's annual GDP, and had pledged to enter into another major war to defend Western Europe. How can we account for this? Thompson suggests that one factor was overriding: the widespread sense that Europe and the United States belonged to a common civilization.

1 Here I draw heavily from Melvyn P. Leffler, 2017, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey, USA, Chapter 4.

2 John A. Thompson, 2015, *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, USA, pp. 247-275.

Of course, the notion of 'Western' civilization was not new. It originated in the late nineteenth century. What had changed was that the United States had risen to a position of global pre-eminence while Europe had reached a nadir. Britain and France could not, as they had after the First World War, hold onto their imperial possessions, and play the role of Great Powers on an equal footing with the United States and Soviet Union. Europe's decline was complete. At the same time, where in the United States popular opinion had been passionately divided about which side of the First World War the country ought to support, the prospect of lending aid to Western Europe as a whole was decidedly less controversial. Thompson's argument is executed with meticulous detail, but three arguments stand at its centre. First, the United States commitment to the reconstruction of Europe antedates what came to be known as the 'Cold War', and thus cannot easily be explained by the strategic imperatives of its rivalry with the Soviet Union. Second, the word and deed of United States' foreign policy in the late 1940s reveals a clear regional discrimination. Contrast America's plenitude of support for Europe to its paltry efforts to 'hold onto' China, amounting to little more than George Marshall's attempt to force Chiang Kai-shek to form a coalition government with the communists. Third, the concept of Western civilization was the crucible of the justification of the early Cold War. Here the examples are sundry, and we can only reproduce the merest sampling.

Speaking to Congress in 1947, Truman explained that 'our deepest concern with European recovery, however, is that it is essential to the maintenance of the civilization in which the American way of life is rooted'[3]. Marshall himself urged that Europe 'is a community of nations which despite racial and religious differences, commercial rivalries, and sporadic internecine wars has developed governmental procedures and an advanced civilization. We are a part of that civilization'[4]. The essential question following the Second World War was whether Europe was 'to be restored to a position of stability', or if it was to be 'kept in a state of permanent dependency and eventual absorption into a system alien to its traditions and civilization?[5]' Either America would step into the breach to save the heartland of Western civilization, or it would fall into the shadow of the Soviet Union to the East.

3 Harry S. Truman, 1963, 'Special Message to the Congress on the Marshall Plan. December 19, 1947.' In *Public papers of the Presidents of the United States.* United States Government Printing Office: Washington, USA, p. 238.

4 George C. Marshall, 1947, The Problems of European Revival and German and Austrian Peace Settlements, The Department of State Bulletin, (17(2), p. 1024.

5 Ibid. p. 1024.

Churchill's peremptory warning of a raising 'iron curtain' from the Baltic to the Adriatic was built upon a simple contrast between the grace and tradition of 'Western democracies', including 'the immortal glories' of Greece which Britain had just fought a bloody counter-revolution to defend, and the 'totalitarian control' of the Soviet Union. 'Christian civilization' can only be saved, Churchill pronounced, if the 'Western Democracies' form a common front with a federated Anglo-American union as its military, cultural and political centre[6]. When Truman stood before the signing of the Treaty of Brussels in 1948, uniting Britain, France and the Benelux countries in a common military framework, he declared the significance of the treaty 'goes far beyond the actual terms of the agreement itself', and represents a leap towards 'unity in Europe for the protection and preservation of its civilization'[7]. The text of the agreement spoke of the 'common civilization' of Europe[8], and when Truman's closest advisor, Clark Clifford, outlined his vision for the North Atlantic Treaty, he suggested that the language of the Brussels Treaty be repeated: we should, he insisted, make 'clear that the main object of the instrument would be to preserve western civilization'[9]. And so the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty affirms the determination of all parties to 'safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law'[10]. Speaking on the tenth anniversary of NATO, Eisenhower reiterated that what was at stake in the treaty was 'not merely the security of our nations from military onslaught; the true issue was our ability to protect the spiritual foundations of Western civilization against every kind of ruthless aggression, whether the attack should be military, economic, or political'[11].

Whether Thompson is right that this is the crux of the explanation for America's early Cold War – and his case is certainly impressive – there can be no doubt that 'the West' was the strategic core of the nation's grand strategy and that it was justified as such. Indeed, it is the meta-geography of 'East' and 'West' which frames the Cold War as a conflict, and which has become so naturalised that we are liable to forget the politics of its creation. Raymond Aron presents a standard accounting of the conflict when he claims that it is dominated by two blocs, one led by the United States and formalised in the North Atlantic Treaty, and the other presided over by the Soviet Union and tied by the Warsaw Pact[12]. Aron emphasises an

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6 Winston Churchill, 1948, The Sinews of Peace. Westminster College, Missouri, USA.

7 Harry S. Truman, 1964, 'Special Message to the Congress on the Threat to the Freedom of Europe. March 14, 1948.' In *Public papers of the Presidents of the United States.* United States Government Printing Office: Washington, USA, p. 184.

8 1948, The Brussels Treaty: Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence. Brussels, Belgium.

9 Clark Clifford, memo to Harry S. Truman, January 14, 1950. Truman Library. Accessed 01/02/2020: <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/memo-clark-clifford-harry-s-truman-1>

10 The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949, Washington, USA.

11 Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1959, Tenth Anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, *The Department of State Bulletin*, 40(1019), p. 544.

12 Raymond Aron, 2003, *Peace & War: A Theory of International* Relations. Routledge: Oxon, UK, pp. 384-386.

important difference in kind between the United States' treaty obligations to Europe and South America, and its treaty obligations to Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, and other Asian nations. In the first case it is categorically bound to come to the aid of the contracting parties in the case of aggression, whereas in the second the parties merely 'recognize that an attack in the region covered by the pact would endanger their own security'. With regard to South America this was simply an extension of the Monroe Doctrine, a claim of regional dominance over a sphere of influence which it frequently launched covert and military interventions to uphold. Its relationship with Western Europe was a partnership, however unequal. Aron's distinction maps onto the conceptual topography of America's early Cold War, between a core of states brought under the North Atlantic Treaty and conceived of as 'Western civilization', and an outer ring of states supported to help contain the Soviet Union and anointed the 'free world'. It is in the name and values of 'the West' that the conflict is fought, whereas the 'free world' is a labile concept that gave coherence to a patchwork of often ignoble alliances, from the Greek junta to the Shah's Iran, and whose ultimate justification was their strategic value to the victory of – the West.

The reorganisation of world order around a meta-geography of East and West required a burst of conceptual work. In 1945 the lineaments of the fiction of 'Western civilization' were already to hand. As a geographic marker 'Western' originally emerged to distinguish Latin Christendom from the Orthodox reaches of Byzantine and Russia[13]. Throughout the Enlightenment European 'civilization' had always tilted Westward. Yet during the long nineteenth century 'civilization' was overwhelmingly favoured over 'Western' as the highest standard of global identity and difference. To speak of 'the West' implies a definite geographical locale, whereas in fact civilization was scattered across the settler colonies, and in theory was a universal process unfolding everywhere. As Jurgen Osterhammel observes, this 'placeless designation' suited Europe's globe-straddling imperialism far more than did 'the West'[14]. The contemporary sense of 'Western civilization' emerged in the late 1890s as the United States emerged as the indisputable equal of the European Great Powers. It became a commonplace with the American entrance into the First World War, as the Allies were cast as the shield of the standard of civilized war and life, but ebbed from the political lexicon - American retreated from the world stage, Europe redoubled its commitment to empire, Weimar Germany returned to the fold of respectability, and internationalists invested their hopes in the League of Nations.

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13 Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, 1997, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Meta-Geography.* University of California Press: Berkley, USA, p. 49.

14 Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century.* PRinceton University Press: New Jersey, USA. pp. 86-87.

Only with the Second World War did 'Western civilization' become an axiomatic category of world order. Its almost total substitution for 'civilization' was freighted with enormous significance. It reflected the pluralisation of the concept of civilization. Adding a qualifying adjective to 'civilization' presupposes that Western civilization is not civilization simpliciter, placing it in a symmetrical relationship to 'Chinese civilization', 'Arabic civilization', and so forth. By this time to speak of 'civilization' without qualification was to invite opprobrium. It particularises civilization, geographically and culturally. Western civilization is something local to Western Europe and North America, to one definite region of the earth. It does not demarcate a universal process of development but reflects the collective heritage and history of the societies within that region. The adjective 'Western' is also a concession to the fact that the pendulum of world power had swung across the Atlantic, away from Europe to the United States. In a dramatic reversal, Europe was now a subordinate in a geopolitical project led from Washington. As the editors of Partisan Review wrote in 1952, the premier anti-communist journal of the early Cold War: 'Europe is no longer regarded as a sanctuary; it no longer assures that rich experience of culture which inspired and justified a criticism of American life. The wheel has come full circle, and now America has become the protector of western civilization'[15].

As Duncan Bell has outlined, in the aftermath of the Second World War a discursive stepchange took place in which liberalism was transformed into the constitutive tradition of Western civilization in mythopoetic histories retrojecting liberalism back centuries before its actual existence[16]. At the same time, in an ideological war of position, liberalism appropriated the conjunct 'democracy', forming a new anti-communist regime type: liberal democracy. As America's Cold War propaganda and espionage machine moved into gear, funding glossy magazines, art exhibitions, and elaborate trans-Atlantic intellectual networks, its over-arching rationale was, in the words of its leading historian, to establish a 'cultural front in the West, for the West'[17]. The obverse of the liberalisation of the West was the representation of Soviet Russia as a totalitarian society, a kind of civilizational anti-matter defined ex negativo. The concept of 'totalitarianism' was born in Italy in the 1920s in debates over the ideal of the fascist state, and it was not until the 1930s that it leaked into English discourse[18]. Originally a polemical tool in battles over central planning that posited totalitarianism as the inevitable end-point of any form of socialism, or even any form of collectivism, in the wake of the Second World War it conjoined the successive enemies of the West, fascist and communist, into a common kind: states committed to total and nihilistic

15 Our Country and our Culture: A Symposium, Partisan Review, XIX(3), May–June 1952, see p. 284.

16 Duncan Bell, 2014, What Is Liberalism?, *Political Theory*, 42(6), pp. 682-715. See pp. 703-705.

17 Francis Stoner Saunders, 2013, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. The New Press: New York, USA. p. 2.

18 On the history of the concept, see Abbott Gleason, 1995, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

control of society, exploiting modern technologies and party apparatuses, and driven by terror, violence, and slave-labour. At the same time totalitarianism was frequently seen as the reassertion of the Oriental despotism built into the historical fibre of Russia. The reductio ad absurdum of this approach was Karl Wittfogel's Oriental Despotism, distinguishing between Oriental societies reliant on irrigation-agriculture that required a centralised state apparatus, and Western societies structured around rain-agriculture that befit decentralisation, and invoking this basic distinction as a genetic explanation for Soviet totalitarianism[19]. But the 'Asianisation' of Russia was pervasive.

In what follows I examine the high Cold War discourse of civilization and world order through a symptomatic reading of Barbara Ward, George Kennan, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and especially Karl Popper and James Burnham. I would like to note two themes, relevant to the mutation of the conception of civilization, before I embark on this history. One is what I have called modernity without progress. Not only had the events of the first half of the twentieth century exploded the faith of even the most diehard Panglossian in the existence of a universal and infinite stream of progress, but new theories of civilization and world order were generally cast in opposition to Marxism, including Marx's dialectical theory of historical progress. Anti-Marxism therefore had a natural affinity with the rejection of progress. In the absence of a pattern and order of progress, the open and accelerating future of modernity becomes a source of uncertainty and danger. In Popper's view, modernity without progress is the defining aporia of civilization. He proposes that, throughout history the flux, disorientation and atomisation of civilization has created an unbearable 'strain' on the individual, catalysing a totalitarian revolt to arrest change and reimpose order, security and hierarchy on society. James Burnham advises the pre-emptive nuclear obliteration of the Soviet Union and the creation of a globe-straddling American empire to achieve an unbreakable nuclear monopoly on the basis of a temporality of frenetic climax, a belief that acceleration has reached a crescendo such that either America take decisive action in a matter of years, or face complete destruction.

The other is the idea of Soviet communism as a form of parasitic dystopia. The Soviet Union possessed neither the might nor the will to enter a direct military confrontation with the North Atlantic alliance. Fears gravitated towards the possibility of communist subversion, espionage and conspiracy. At the same time, communism was not an alien doctrine but a philosophy created by and appealing to Western thought. It was possible, from this perspective, to see the history and fate of the West and its totalitarian Other were intimately entwined. It is against these coordinates that the Soviet threat was depicted as that of a

19 Karl A. Wittfogel, 1957, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. Yale University Press: New Haven, USA.

parasitic dystopia. Soviet totalitarianism had no intrinsic merit - it was a dystopia - or indeed any decisive force of arms. It draws its strength not from its own fecundity, but from Western civilization. Feeding on Western weakness, it grows in proportion to the frailty of the West. Either revitalise civilization qua civilization, or it will be consumed. It is to this theme which I dedicate my first chapter.

Chapter 4: Parasitic Dystopia

Rereading *The Open Society*

What is Popper doing in The Open Society? Ostensibly, the text is a philosophical analysis grounded in an exegetical reading of the works of Plato and Marx, with Hegel forming a bridge between the two. On closer inspection, however, this impression turns out to be false. Despite its garrulous length, Popper does not break new philosophical ground. His argument shadows his critique of the 'anti-naturalistic' fallacies of historicism that he arrived at in 1935, and published in 1944 under the title 'The Poverty of Historicism'[1]. But whereas 'The Poverty of Historicism' is a conventional exercise of philosophy that deals in conceptual analysis, fine distinctions and logical argument, The Open Society is almost mythic in form. Neither is The Open Society a faithful work of historical exegesis. Popper distorts the true beliefs and intentions of Plato, Hegel and Marx, often egregiously. In a convincing demolition of Popper's interpretation of Hegel, Walter Kaufman writes of The Open Society: 'it contains more misconceptions about Hegel than have previously been gathered in so small a space'[2]. Popper relies on a patchwork secondary sources, weaves unconnected Hegel quotes together, attributes to Hegel an impossibly exaggerated influence, vituperatively speculates on Hegel's motives without proof, invents the idea that the fount of Hegel's philosophy is Plato, and depends on a whole tsunami of more particular textual and contextual misreadings. In the founding article of the 'Cambridge School', Quentin Skinner treats Popper as an exemplar of the 'mythology of prolepsis', the retrospective reading of past texts through the lens of present concerns[3]. Skinner quotes one of Popper's more tendentious anachronisms, his description of Plato as a 'totalitarian party politician', but the entire conception of The Open Society is proleptic. Eric Voegelin is less restrained, complaining: 'I feel completely justified in saying without reservation that this book is impudent, dilettantish crap. Every single sentence is a scandal'[4].

I argue that what distinguishes The Open Society is that it takes the form of a meta-theory of civilization. What I mean by this is that Popper assimilates the first-order evidence of Western thought and history - events, ideas and movements - into a second-order theory organised around the concept of civilization. In making this argument I am simply calling attention to one of the most conspicuous features of *The Open Society*. But it has,

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1 Karl Popper, 1944, The Poverty of Historicism I, *Economica*, 11(42), pp. 86-103; Karl Popper, 1944, The Poverty of Historicism II, *Economica*, 11(43), pp. 119-137. A third article followed, Karl Popper, 1945, The Poverty of Historicism III, *Economica*, 12(46), pp. 69-89.

2 Walter Kaufmann, 1951, The Hegel Myth and Its Method, *The Philosophical Review*, 60(4), pp. 459-486. Quote on pp. 459-460.

3 Quentin Skinner, 1969, Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas, 8(1), pp. 3-53. See especially p. 23.

4 Peter Emberly and Barry Cooper (eds.), 1993, Faith and political philosophy: the correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964. Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, USA, p. 67.

nevertheless, gone almost entirely unremarked upon[5]. It is this which explains Popper's double elision, of philosophy and exegesis. He distorts the views of the thinkers he discusses because he subordinates them to this meta-theoretical framework, bending and tearing them to fit his a priori narrative structure. We find out that Plato's philosophy was an elaborate doctrine of reaction whose aim was to arrest the change created by the advent of civilization and restore power to Athens' historical ruling class through a programme of collectivism. In this Plato was not unique. He was one member of a anti-democratic movement propounding these ideas in the ancient world, and this war against civilization has been reawakened in the last two-hundred years in response to the revolution of modernity. One of its confused descendants is Marx. The Open Society is less a work of philosophy than a grand historical narrative reflecting contemporary fears about the crisis of Western civilization, and working to discredit totalitarianism as a species of reactionary tribalism. Writing to a friend, Popper confesses: 'I do not hold this book to be the statement of a great new philosophy. I even do not claim that my general philosophical attitude as expressed in this book, is original'[6]. Popper suggests that the object of his writing is not philosophical but political. But what are its politics?

The political coordinates in which *The Open Society* took shape are threefold. First, Popper's youthful entanglement with socialism is well-known[7]. He left school in 1918 to join the communist uprising breaking across Vienna as Hapsburg rule came to the end of its six-hundred year history. For a brief while Popper tried to become a manual labourer, first as a road-worker, then as an artisan cabinet-maker. The backdrop of his political formation was 'Red Vienna', a period in which social democrats dominated the municipal parliament of Vienna and instituted a wide-ranging programme of welfare reforms, worker rights, and public housing. When Popper fled Austria in 1937 he remained a member of the Socialist Party. By this time, however, his socialism was heterodox and firmly anti-Marxist. After witnessing the massacre of striking workers, Popper blamed communist and social democratic leaders for demanding an intensification of class warfare. In the place of a strategic reckoning with the objective political situation and a coherent programme of policy, Popper thought, Austrian socialists placed a blind hope in Marxist prophecy that was not only repeatedly disproven by events, but led to the violent sacrifice of workers in the hope of

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5 Scholarship has tended to focus on Popper's life work: the philosophy of science. Of the thirteen chapters in the Cambridge Companion to Popper, for instance, eleven tilt in this direction. Jeremy Shearmur's work is the outstanding exception, but Shearmur is silent on Popper's meta-theory of civilization. In his monograph on Popper, Bryan Magee applauds Popper's anti-totalitarianism as 'deeply moving', without ever interrogating this language. See Jeremy Shearmur and Geoffrey Stokes (eds.), 2016, *The Cambridge Companion to Popper*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; Jeremy Shearmur, 1996, *The Political Thought of Karl Popper*. Routledge: London, UK; Bryan Magee, 1974, *Popper*. Frank Cass: Oxon, UK, see especially pp. 74-86.

6 Karl Popper, 2008, *After the Open Society: Selected Social and Political Writings*. Edited by Jeremy Shearmur and Piers Norris Turner. Routledge: London, UK, p. 110.

7 For an excellent overview, see Malachi Hain Hacohen, 2016, 'The Young Popper, 1902-1937', in Jeremy Shearmur and Geoffrey Stokes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Popper*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

accelerating history. He saw the scientific method as an antidote, and working around the edges of the Vienna Circle, attempted to formulate his own fallibilist epistemology, substituting the positivist theory of 'verification' for his theory of 'falsification'. The immediate result was The Logic of Scientific Discovery (1934).

Second, Popper was deeply impressed by debates raging from the late 1930s over the relationship between economic planning, totalitarianism and war[8]. Its protagonists were figures like Frederick Hayek, Lionel Robbins, Sidney Hook, Walter Lippmann, and Frank Knight. But it can be traced back to the economic calculation debate between Ludwig von Mises and socialists like Otto Neurath in Austria in the 1920s, and forwards to the explosion of literature on the 'Garrison State', the 'managerial society', and 'totalitarianism' during and after the Second World War. The basic fear underlying this literature was that fascism, communism and 'New Dealism' were all of a kind as centralising doctrines of economic planning that presupposed that individual preferences could be decided for or controlled by authoritarian bureaucrats, that this programme entailed a more general politics of totalitarianism, and that because war required central planning, war threatened to transform the Atlantic democracies into totalitarian dictatorships.

Popper's debts to Lippmann and Hayek are clear. When Popper makes the case for 'piecemeal social engineering' over 'utopian social engineering', to illustrate what this might amount to, he simply points to Lippmann's The Good Society[9]. In an exchange with Hayek, Popper goes so far as to suggest that that the 'fundamental idea' of The Open Society is 'the same as Lippmann's Good Society'[10]. Popper read Hayek's 'Freedom and the Economic System' (the embryo of The Road to Serfdom) before writing The Open Society[11], presented the first-draft of 'The Poverty of Historicism' at Hayek's seminar at the London School of Economics, and Hayek worked assiduously to help Popper publish The Open Society. Yet I argue that the principal model for The Open Society comes from a less suspecting participant in these debates: Arnold Toynbee.

Third, at the most general level The Open Society is both a reflection of and a contribution to the discourse on the crisis of civilization that opened with Europe's deminutio capitis. Published in 1945, on the cusp of the Cold War, Popper's virulently anti-communist theory of civilization plays a seminal role in reorganising the discourse of civilization. I want to emphasise three of its innovations. First, Popper conceives of this crisis in Manichean terms.

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8 See, for example, David Ciepley, 2006, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*. Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, USA; Ben Jackson, 2012, Freedom, the Common Good, and the Rule of Law: Lippmann and Hayek on Economic Planning, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73(1), pp. 47-68.

9 Popper, The Poverty of Historicism II, p. 123.

10 Popper, *After the Open Society*, p. 115.

11 Ibid. p. 100.

He claims that the constitutive nature of Western civilization since its birth in ancient Greece has been liberal democratic, scientific and cosmopolitanism, and that it is locked in a 'perennial' battle with reactionary totalitarianism. Liberal democracy is civilization, communism is its negation. Second, he treats totalitarianism as a form of parasitic dystopia. Totalitarianism is not a purely exogenous threat. It is a disease that emerges from *within* civilization, that grows in strength proportional to the weakness of civilization, and as such, that can only be met through the revitalisation of civilization *qua* civilization. Third, by identifying civilization with the temporality of modernity while rejecting the idea of progress and all attempts to impose meaning and pattern on history, *modernity without progress* emerges as the central aporia of *The Open Society*. For Popper, the wellspring of totalitarian collectivism is the flux, disorientation and anomie of civilization, the 'strain' of living within a fire of perpetual change burning away all solid ground.

How do these politics inform Toynbee's meta-theory of civilization? He conceives of totalitarianism as the Manichean underside of Western history that emerges from an aporia inherent in civilization: modernity without progress. The totalitarian revolt is characterised theoretically, by the attempt to reimpose order and security on life through historicist prediction, and politically, by a radical programme of utopian social engineering recreating society as an organic whole through authoritarian stratification, the communalisation of property, eugenic breeding, and censorship.The former parallels Popper's rejection of Marxist philosophy of history, the second reveals his debts to Lippmann, Hayek and other opponents of the creeping collectivism of Western society. It is a seminal moment in the remaking of 'civilization' as the sole possession of liberal democracy, set against the depredations of communist totalitarianism, in an existential struggle defined by the collapse of the idea of progress. In the argument that follows, I do three things. First, I show that Popper has a meta-theory of civilization and what it is. Second, I argue that the embryo of Popper's meta-theory is drawn from Toynbee's *A Study of History*. Third, I examine three other prominent contributions to the Cold War discourse that portray the Soviet Union as a 'parasitic dystopia': Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Centre*, George Kennan's doctrine of containment, and Barbara Ward's *Policy for the West*.

The Strain of Civilization

I argue that The Open Society is distinguished by the fact that it takes on the form of a meta-theory of civilization. Popper assimilates the protagonists - Plato, Hegel, Marx - of his

narrative into a second-order theory. It is a theory of civilization in that Popper builds it around three concepts: tribalism, civilization and totalitarianism. 'Civilization' is the anchoring concept. Popper treats tribalism as the primitive historical prelude to civilization, a condition defined by stasis, magic and ignorance. Civilization is defined as the supersession of this atavism, as a society marked by rapid change, rational self-direction, and bustling commerce. In this sense Popper adopts the traditional anthropological schema dividing societies into two classes: tribal and civilized. Toynbee, recall, adopted a similar schema. The emphasis of Popper's analysis is on the relationship of civilization to a third, super-added concept: 'totalitarian revolt'. Totalitarianism is similar in kind to tribalism, and Popper refers to them as two forms of 'closed society', opposed to the 'open society' of civilization[12]. But like all forms of reaction, it is modified by the positive addition that it negates: by the introduction of civilization. For the moment, however, I simply wish to emphasise that in conceiving of the 'totalitarian revolt' as an attempt to return to a tribal form of pre-civilized life, Popper effectively stays within the conceptual boundaries of the concept of civilization. Popper's meta-theory revolves around civilization, and its negative opposite, pre-civilized tribal life, and anti-civilized totalitarian tribalism. It is in this sense that it is a meta-theory of 'civilization'. Let us briefly recapitulate Popper's treatment of these three concepts:

1. *Tribalism*. Popper isolates three defining features of tribal societies[13]. First and most fundamental is their metaphysical belief in what Popper calls 'naive monism'[14]. Consider two kinds of law: natural laws describing regularities in nature, and normative laws describing prohibitions and prescriptions. In reality, they share nothing in common but a name. But tribal life is premised on the conflation of the two, on the belief that the normative laws that hold together society are fixed parts of nature standing beyond the realm of human control. Second, it follows from this metaphysical naturalisation of society that tribal life undergoes little change, and when it does, this change is not rationally reflected upon or purposely directed. Finally, tribal societies are organic wholes. Life is embedded in concrete, face-to-face relationships, and individuals have a fixed place within a hierarchical conception of the social whole.

2. *Civilization*. Popper offers a rough picture of how civilization emerges from three integrally revolutions in tribal life: (i) the explosion of the Greek population disrupts traditional social structures; (ii) the growth of commerce leads to the formation of trade, maritime and colonial networks across the Hellenes, extricating societies from self-enclosure, and creating a new mercantile class to rival to the aristocracy; (iii) philosophy is born, and subjects myth to

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12 Popper, 2011, *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Routledge: Oxon, UK, p. xxxv.

13 Ibid. pp. 11, 55, 58, 163-165, 450.

14 On Popper's distinction between 'naive monism' and 'critical dualism', see Popper, *The Open Society*, pp. 55-59.

critical interrogation, calling into question received opinion[15]. Naive monism collapses, and is replaced by 'critical dualism', the realisation that normative laws are independent of nature and susceptible to change through volitional human action. The conventional anthropological distinction between tribal and civilized life that Popper is drawing upon is premised on the modern regime of historical time, meaning that Popper's attempt to retroject the concept of civilization onto classical Greece has the effect of creating a theory of 'Greek modernity'. Popper treats this 'Greek modernity' as homologous to the 'industrial revolution.

What is the character of the civilization that emerges from this maelstrom? Society's organic collectivism dissolves into free individuals entering into voluntary exchanges. No longer naturalised, hierarchy is subject to 'class struggle' as individuals strive to assert their rights as equal citizens with claim to an equal share in the distribution of goods. Society is subject to perpetual change, and this movement is steered by democratic self-organisation and critical discussion. Tolerant universalism prospers, accepting of foreigners and open to the world in all its diversity and richness.

3. *Totalitarian revolt*. Here we need to address two subjects: the source of the revolt, and its character. Its source is what Popper calls the 'strain of civilization'[16]. Tribal life is stable, organic and responsibility for society is alienated to an independent realm of magic. Civilization explodes this stability. It incinerates all fixed standards and traditions through the realisation that the normative rules which hold society together are not given by nature, but are created of volitional human thought and action and can be changed indefinitely according to the shifting desires immanent in the demos. The organic structure of society dissolves, replaced by deracinated individuals extricated from all solid social relations and dispersed into lonely atoms, entering into relationships in a private capacity as commercial and civic actors. Individuals are thrown back on themselves as existentially responsible for how to live, in a sea of flux, without fixed standards, insecure and disoriented. Popper quotes Plato, 'Seeing that everything swayed and shifted aimlessly, I felt giddy and desperate'[17]. It is this which 'strains' civilization.

What is the character of the reaction? Totalitarianism is an attempt to quell this maelstrom by repealing civilization. It aspires to recapture the solidity of tribalism, curtail the atomisation of life and recreate an organic collective, arrest social change through authoritarian stasis, and restore privilege to the aristocratic elite. Popper attributes to totalitarianism both a theoretical penchant and a political vision. Its theoretical basis is a form of naive monism, 'historicism',

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15 Ibid. pp. 165-169, 173, 178.

16 Ibid. pp. xxxix, 11-13, 16, 23, 38, 70, 163, 166, 189.

17 Ibid. p. 18.

that identifies a natural pattern of order in the flux of change, that can be exploited to help resuscitate tribal life[18]. Its political vision pivots on a programme of utopian social engineering that attempts to remake society as a whole, using a wide arsenal of techniques: repression, censorship, eugenics, dictatorship, the abolition of property[19]. Despite the parity implied by its name, The Open Society and its Enemies is overwhelmingly concerned with the 'enemies' of civilization, the totalitarian proponents of the return to the closed society. In order to put flesh on the bones of the outline of Popper's meta-theory of civilization, so to speak, I want to reconstruct the figure who Popper treats as the paragon of totalitarianism, and on which he spends the most time: Plato. Popper's narrative runs as follows.

Popper situates Plato in two contexts, political and philosophical. Plato was an oligarch of royal blood born amidst the Peloponnesian War[20]. When Athens fell and the 'Thirty Tyrants' restored oligarchic rule in the city with the help of Sparta, two of those tyrants were Plato's uncles. Ultimately the Spartan garrison was driven out of the city, and Plato's uncles were slain. According to Popper, Plato's underlying aims are continuous with his uncles: to liquidate democracy, fasten change and return Athens to the hands of the aristocracy. Plato was not the first philosopher to confront this task, however. In Popper's reading the essential problematic of all Greek philosophy found canonical expression in Heraclitus[21]. Reflecting the revolutionary eruption that accompanied the birth of civilization, Heraclitus saw the world as pure flux: where in the past the world has been seen as an edifice, the sum of all things, Heraclitus reconceived of the world as a process, a ceaseless stream of change. Plato's ambition, then, was to overcome Heraclitus' problematic[22], find order in the flux of change, and reimpose the oligarchy of his uncles. He achieved this through four interrelated philosophical moves: essentialism, historicism, monism, and utopianism.

Plato accepts the manifest reality of the change surrounding him in Greece's tumult, but argues that this change is merely the shadow cast upon the world of space and time by a realm of pure Forms (essentialism)[23]. While the world changes, the Forms are eternal. Plato uses the theory of the Forms to reimpose order on history by inventing the 'first law of decline and fall' (historicism)[24]. At the beginning of time the ideal Forms were impressed on the world to create all things. At this moment of genesis things are perfect primogenitors, corresponding exactly to the dimensions of the forms. But they exist in the imperfect realm of

18 Ibid. pp. 34-53, 293, 365-372.
19 Ibid. pp. 21-23, 147-157, 338.
20 Ibid. pp. 18, 41, 161-163, 182-188.
21 Ibid. pp. 10-16.
22 Ibid. p. 23, 28.
23 Ibid. pp. 24-30.
24 Ibid. pp. 36, 53.

space and time and so are liable to corruption, which manifests itself as change, for every modification of these primogenitors represents a movement away from the original impression of the Forms[25]. Plato thus gives metaphysical license to the view that all change is decay. He overlays this metaphysics with the idea that decay expresses itself as the emergence of successively degenerative political regimes, beginning with a kingship of the wise, before declining into timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and then tyranny[26]. The first of these regimes, the timocratic rule of the aristocratic, is the closest approximation to the ideal of the Form, and Plato finds it realised within the constitution of Athens' anti-democratic antagonist: Sparta[27]. Plato offers this not merely as a description, however, but as a normative argument: for the Forms are normative ideals, not simply historic relics (monism)[28]. Plato's solution to Greek decline is expressed in the mantra, 'Arrest all change!'[29] But how can this be achieved?

Popper distinguishes between two forms of social engineering: piecemeal and utopian. Utopian social engineering is a species of aesthetic radicalism that seeks to wipe the canvas of society clean in order that it can be reconstructed without ugliness, accident or blemish[30]. For Popper, it relies upon an extreme kind of epistemological hubris: there is simply no way that the consequences of the complete reconstruction of society can be predicted ex ante, and any such programme can only be prosecuted by centralised rulers from the top-down, presuming on behalf of individuals what their genuine interests are. Violence is inevitable. Piecemeal social engineering has as its object not a positive blueprint, but the eradication of existing evils whose existence can be agreed upon, tackled through single-measure schemes whose consequences can be measured and adjusted according to trial and error, and whose failure would not issue in bloodletting and catastrophe[31].

Plato's Republic is a utopian ideal of paradisical stability. It is natural then, in Popper's view, that Plato relies on a variety of totalitarian measures to bring about and maintain this ideal, mirroring twentieth century fascism (eugenics, racialism) and communism (abolition of property, communalisation). Plato imagines a rigid 'caste system' split between guardians, warriors and workers[32]. Popper surmises from the fact that the guardians are actually retired warriors that Plato's hierarchy forms a binary: a minority with military and political control over society, ruling over a labouring majority. His aim is to imagine a politics that maximises

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25 Ibid. pp. 36-37.
26 Ibid. p. 39.
27 Ibid. pp. 40, 45.
28 Ibid. pp. 70-71.
29 Ibid. pp. 20, 83.
30 Ibid. pp. 149-151, 154-157, 338.
31 Ibid. pp. 148-149.
32 Ibid. pp. 45-46, 93.

the in-group solidarity of the warriors. Property, children and family are to be held in common to eradicate the possibility of disputes over the distribution of things[33]. Rulers are to be bred through a programme of eugenics to foster racial solidarity, and widen the chasm separating warriors from labourers[34]. Poetry, music and culture should be manipulated to strengthen the cohesion of the ruling class, and hold the labourer's in ignorance and subjection[35].

I now want to pause to draw out three features of Popper's meta-theory of civilization. First, it rebukes historicist theories of progress in several senses. Popper argues against historicism at the propositional level through a series of arguments to the effect that large-scale social and political prediction is impossible. Popper's arguments at this level - e.g. against utopian social engineering - are of a piece with the critiques of economic planning of Hayek, Lippmann and others circulating widely in the late 1930s and early 1940s. At another level he tarrs historicism as the philosophy of totalitarianism, as inextricably linked to centralisation, repression and violence not just logically, but as a historical matter of fact. Finally, Popper hypostatizes civilization, the strain it gives rise to, and the totalitarian revolt to reimpose tribal closure on society, as the dialectical tension around which Western history revolves. In this sense Popper rejects the idea of progress at the level of his meta-theory: for he sees Western history as the struggle between two comparable forces, the progress of civilization and the declension of totalitarianism. Progress is aporetic and embattled.

Second, the fundamental problematic of Western history, for Popper, is what I have called *modernity without progress*. It is precisely the temporality of modernity stripped of any ordered and predictable pattern - the flux, uncertainty and insecurity of civilization - that strains the individual, and results in a cure worse than the disease: totalitarianism. Popper's underlying problematic might be formulated as, 'How can the ailments that find expression in Marxist communism, the class oppression, material inequality, and insecurity of capitalism, be coped with if they cannot be resolved into a historical dialectic of progress?' Popper is left, unconsoled, with the pathology of capitalist modernity without the solution of historical progress. It is a tragic view of history reflecting Popper's gradual disillusionment with the Austrian left.

Third, Popper reorganises the discourse of civilization around the Manichean opposition between civilization and totalitarianism. He does so through a skilful appropriation of the imperial antithesis of 'civilized' and 'tribal' societies, portraying totalitarianism as a form of tribalism: as both a throwback to a realm of stasis, magic and ignorance, and as a

33 Ibid. pp. 46-47.

34 Ibid. pp. 47, 49-52, 67, 77-78, 140-141.

35 Ibid. pp. 51-52.

constitutive negation of civilization. Totalitarianism is a form of what might be called reactionary closure, an attempt to extinguish the open, accelerating and democratic future of modernity by reimposing order on time: at the theoretical level with historicism, and at the political level with total control. But the relationship of totalitarianism to civilization is not incidental. It emerges from an ineradicable aporia within the nature of civilization, from modernity with progress. Totalitarianism, in this sense, is parasitic on the failure of civilization that draws succour from its weakness. It follows that to take the problem of totalitarianism by the root, is not simply to confront it through enmity and force, but to ameliorate the tensions internal to civilization itself. Totalitarian communism emerges as a parasitic dystopia.

Hidden Source

Where does this meta-theory of civilization come from? I suggest that its embryo is drawn from Toynbee's A Study of History. If this is true, we would be forced to reassess the whole architecture The Open Society, to regard it as less a work of political philosophy, than a theory of civilization continuous with Spengler, Toynbee and the debate over Europe's deminutio capitis ensuing after the First World War. But how can so fundamental a fact have been overlooked? I believe there are two reasons. One is that, as I have mentioned, no one has cared to dwell upon Popper's meta-theory of civilization. Scholars have looked elsewhere. If one does not acknowledge that Popper has a meta-theory of civilization, one can scarcely ask what its nature is or from whence it came. But I think there is another, and more fundamental reason. Toynbee is one of the principal targets of Popper's assault on historicism. He is explicitly singled out for criticism in both 'The Poverty of Historicism' and The Open Society, where Popper sets aside eight-pages to deconstruct A Study of History[36]. How can Toynbee's theory of civilization, at one and the same time, be held up by Popper as an exemplar of the kind of historicism that he is attacking, and serve as the framework on which The Open Society is built?

I think there are two answers. First, we need to distinguish what I have been called Popper's 'meta-theory of civilization' from historicism. On Popper's definition, historicism is the attempt to apply the scientific method to history by formulating laws of prophecy that predict the future[37]. A meta-theory is a theoretical model of the structure of history that Popper uses to interpret past events and thinkers. It does not presuppose the scientific method, formulate strict nomothetic laws, or try to predict the future. Second and relatedly, Popper conceives of

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36 Popper, The Poverty of Historicism III, 71; Popper, *The Open Society*, pp. 454-461.

37 Popper, *The Open Society*, p. xxxvii.

all history as selective, constructed and unfalsifiable[38]. For there is no unifying theory of history, as there is of physics, from which to provide an uncontested point of view of the facts, meaning that all history is formally circular. Popper writes, 'there can be no history of 'the past as it actually did happen'; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own'[39]. In this sense Popper is not claiming to offer apodictic knowledge of history, only to use history as foil for the pursuit of some further, contemporary end: the war of civilization against totalitarianism. Popper is able to consistently reject historicism and build his meta-theory of civilization using Toynbee because that meta-theory is not a species of historicism, but an avowedly political construction that disclaims the status of science and prophecy.

I base this interpretation on two sources of evidence: Popper's repeated professions of debt to Toynbee, and the overlap between Toynbee's account of Sparta as an arrested society and Plato as a utopian totalitarian, and Popper's meta-theory of civilization. Let us take these sources in turn. Popper prefaces his polemic against Toynbee's historicism with an uncharacteristically generous caveat: 'as opposed to other contemporary historicist and irrationalist philosophers, he has much to say that is most stimulating and challenging; I at least have found him so, and I owe to him many valuable suggestions'[40]. If we examine Popper's compendious endnotes, we find a similar showering of praise. First: 'I have been much stimulated by Toynbee's brilliant ideas and much encouraged by many of his remarks, which I take as corroborating my interpretations, and which I can value the more highly the more Toynbee's and my fundamental assumptions seem to disagree'[41]. Again: 'Toynbee's work is so superior to Spengler's that I hesitate to mention it in the same context; but the superiority is due mainly to Toynbee's wealth of ideas and to his superior knowledge'[42]. Finally: 'I myself use some of the terms used by Toynbee'[43]. Popper vehemently rejects Toynbee's historicism but praises his 'wealth of ideas' and 'superior knowledge', drawing explicitly and implicitly on *A Study of History*. Popper explains that when he speaks of the ‘breakdown’ of civilization and the ‘arresting’ of societies, he is drawing this language from Toynbee, and points to a 50-page section of the third volume of A Study of History. If we turn to this passage of text - published in 1934 - we find an interpretation of the ancient world of an astonishing likeness to The Open Society.

38 Ibid. pp. 468-474. On Popper's interpretive relativism, see David Weinstein and Avihu Zakai, 2006, Exile and interpretation: Popper's re-invention of the history of political thought, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), pp. 185-209.

39 Popper, *The Open Society*, p. 473.

40 Ibid. p. 454.

41 Ibid. p. 540.

42 Ibid. p. 545.

43 Ibid. p. 546.

The first half of Toynbee's discussion treats Sparta as an exemplar of an 'arrested society'. He compares the response of Sparta and Athens to the strain that rapid population growth placed on the cultivable land in Greece. The dominant response of the Hellenes, which Athens followed, was to colonise new arable lands, either obliterating pre-existing populations or conscripting them to Hellenic methods of life and cultivation. A land-based power on an open plain, Sparta expanded through the Langadha gorge of the surrounding mountain range and conquered the territories of Messenia[44]. But the defence and subjection of Messenia occupied the constant strength and attention of Sparta, inhibiting the ability of the city-state to flexibly evolve in response to further challenges. It was a millstone around its neck, an over-adaptation, leading to the arrest of change and the degeneration of civilization.

Toynbee also makes the case that intrinsic features of Sparta - its rigid structure, caste system, military specialisation - arrested change within the city-state, leading to the extirpation of civilization[45]. The defining character of Sparta, for Toynbee, is that it is a caste system dedicated to the single task of creating skilled warriors. A minority of Spartan 'Peers' rule over a mass of labouring Helots[46]. Spartans pursue a systematic programme of 'breeding human stock', maximising the stock of the greatest among the peers, while inducting children into a collectivised diet of education, training and indoctrination[47]. Toynbee compares 'Hellenic progress under Athenian progress and Sparta's un-Hellenic immobility'[48]. Where the Hellenes at large were awash with maritime exploration, colonisation and trade, Sparta outlawed money-coinage in favour of a simple token-currency of iron, of no intrinsic worth and completely removed from the economic nexus spread across the peninsula. Like Popper, Toynbee interprets Spartan collectivism as a throwback to primitive society. Toynbee suggests that the origin of Sparta's rigid caste society is the 'Greek-speaking barbarians' from the Dorian strata fleeing the disintegrated Minoan civilization[49]. Other Hellenic societies eliminated the primitive customs and institutions of the Dorian tribes. Sparta preserved them.

Toynbee treats Plato's The Republic as a response to the Peloponnesian War and the crisis of Hellenic civilization, that sets out a utopia modelled on the primitive caste system of Sparta to arrest all change. In Toynbee’s view, the aim of *all* utopias is to arrest change[50]. What was the seed of the decay which Plato sought to mollify? His 'negative inspiration is a

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44 Arnold J. Toynbee, 1935, *A Study of History: Volume 3*. Oxford University Press: London, UK, pp. 50-54.

45 Ibid. pp. 55-79.

46 Ibid. pp. 57-58.

47 Ibid. pp. 59-60.

48 Ibid. p. 69.

49 Ibid. pp. 54-55.

50 Ibid. p. 89.

profound hostility to Athenian democracy'[51]. But the only way to arrest change was to establish a completely stable social order predicated upon the techniques of repression found among 'Communist Russia and Nationalist Socialist Germany'[52]. 'Not happiness, and not progress, but stability, is the Alpha and Omega of the Athenian philosopher's creed'[53]. Plato imagined a caste of 'watch-dogs' to take the role of the Spartan 'Peers', bred through a eugenics programme to rule over the labourers of society[54]. In order to preserve the unity of this ruling caste, on Toynbee's reading, Plato advocates the abolition of private property, the communalisation of the family, and the outlaw of all poetry and literature. Individual happiness is subordinated to then needs of the state, conceived of as an organic whole. 'The human cells of the Leviathan are to be subordinated, on theory, to the social pseudo-organism'[55]. But the utopian hope of Plato was forlorn, for as we have already seen, Sparta's rigid collectivism had strangled all innovation, arresting change and leading to the collapse of civilization.

There is a startling overlap between Toynbee's argument, and Popper's meta-theory of civilization. He conceives of Plato's philosophy as a vain response to the crisis of Hellenic civilization that sought to arrest all change and restore power to the aristocracy through a political system modelled on Sparta's primitive caste system. Plato sought to create and maintain this utopia through an arsenal of totalitarian techniques which Toynbee compares with communist Russia and Nazi Germany. Its desideratum was the arrest of all change, the creation of organic collectivism, and the rule of a caste of warriors over the labouring majority. And, for Toynbee as for Popper, the result was doomed: for to arrest change is to kill civilization, to cancel the progress which is constitutive of civilization itself. If we combine this overlap with the Popper's repeated professions of debt to Toynbee, it seems undeniable that the template of Popper's meta-theory of civilization is Toynbee's *A Study of History*.

Successors: Schlesinger, Kennan and Ward

One of the pervasive fears of the Cold War was that communism was parasitic upon the degeneration of Western civilization. In part this was because of the nature of the conflict as a bipolar struggle between antithetical ideological systems that, it was widely thought, would

51 Ibid. p. 90.
52 Ibid. p. 97.
53 Ibid. p. 96.
54 Ibid. pp. 93-95.
55 Ibid. p. 95.

be won or lost on the level of ideas, values and spirit. Communism was not an alien doctrine, the simple expression of cultural difference. It had emerged from within the West and was continuous with its intellectual heritage, as a proletariat movement premised on protracted class struggle within the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, and for which capitalism was a historically degenerative system whose internal contradictions would lead ineluctably to self-destruction. Stalin himself thought the Cold War would not be decided on the military field, and Soviet strategy was predicated on the conviction that the inter-imperialist contradictions of capitalism which had generated two world wars, the first of which catalysed the Bolshevik Revolution, and the second of which brought the Red Army to the streets of Berlin, would provide the opening for ultimate Soviet victory[56]. The Great Depression, the replacement of private enterprise by state planning, and the dismal condition of Western Europe, gave the idea of economic degeneration enough plausibility to motivate the Marshall Plan and the post-war Keynesian consensus on full employment, counter-cyclical investment, and Fordist corporatism. But fears were not limited to the economic realm, to combatting Marxism on its own terrain. Communism became a symptom of a wide range of ailments: a desire to escape from the anxiety of freedom, the 'Godless' instrumentalism of Western life, the abandonment of the Western intellectual tradition – and so on. In this discourse the Soviet Union was represented as a parasitic dystopia, a totalitarian society that draws its life-force from the decaying tissue of the West, and can only be allayed by the revitalisation of civilization itself. We have already seen one such vision of Soviet communism. In *The Open Society*, totalitarianism is parasitic upon a weakness inherent in civilization, the 'strain' of freedom, change and commerce, and grows in strength in proportion to the weakness of civilization. In what follows I examine three other 'parasitic dystopias', in the work of Arthur Schlesinger, George Kennan and Barbara Ward[57].

1. Schlesinger's Vital Centre. Schlesinger more than anyone else helped to define the liberal consensus on foreign policy during the high Cold War - a period stretching from 1947 to the late 1960s[58]. After the failure of the Baruch Plan and US-Soviet negotiations to defer control of nuclear energy to an international agency in a mutual commitment to non-proliferation, the foreign policy discourse on the American left split in two directions. Henry Wallace and a dwindling faction of the left who still held out hope for reconciliation with the Soviet Union formed the Progressive Party to pursue a fateful bid for the 1948 Presidential election. Another group, led by Schlesinger, Reinhold Niebuhr and Eleanor Roosevelt, founded the

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56 Perry Anderson, 2013, American Foreign Policy and its Thinkers, *New Left Review*, 83, Sept/Oct. See p. 25.

57 Many other names could easily be added, notably Eric Voegelin.

58 On Schlesinger's liberal odyssey, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, and the Ideological History of American Liberalism. The University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa, USA. See also John Ehrman's treatment of 'vital center liberalism' in John Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994. Yale University Press: New Haven, USA.

Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Their stance was some version of Kennan's doctrine of containment, combined with a vision of social reconstruction along the lines of the New Deal and the Marshall Plan. Wallace's campaign quickly sank, the ADA won out and liberalism consolidated around the post-war Keynesian settlement and a worldwide policy of anti-communist containment. Schlesinger wrote what effectively became the manifesto of the ADA, one of the founding documents of Cold War liberalism: The Vital Center.

Schlesinger's tract forms a natural complement to Popper's mythic reading of Western thought, threading the same line of argument through the concrete landscape of post-war American politics. Schlesinger too starts with the disillusionment of the communist left, and 'the enterprise of re-examination and self-criticism which liberalism' has since experienced[59]. The Soviet Union's degeneration into Stalinism bears a heavy lesson: progress is an illusion, the world is imperfect, and we must relearn the age-old theological lesson of the evil of man. Schlesinger's diagnosis of the Cold War mimics Popper's: the West is beset by modernism without progress, and communism draws its life-force from this sore. The breakdown of faith in progress is reflected back into the world, and the absence of progress becomes the very source of the West's breakdown.

We live in an 'Age of Anxiety'[60]. Pre-industrial society was static and embedded in face-to-face personal relationships. Industrial society has witnessed a rapid 'speed-up' as capitalism has wrought the individual from social custom and tradition, and dropped them into the acid of commerce. A life of this kind 'cannot but strain to the utmost the emotional and moral resources of the individual'[61]. Stability has given way to flux, and 'the grounds of civilization, of our certitude, are breaking up under our feet'[62]. Totalitarianism draws its strength not from the felicity and logic of its doctrines. Its appeal is solely as a medicine to the overbearing chaos of industrial society. It confronts the 'anxious man' as 'the answer to the incoherence and apparent uncontrollability of industrial society'[63]. But we must have clarity of judgement to recognise that for all its imperfections the free society of the United States is 'the crowning glory of Western history', rising majestically above Stalin's totalitarian pit[64].

Schlesinger' positions his own solution - the platform of the ADA - between two caricatured extremes.The Right is dominated by egoistic plutocrats with no inkling of public service[65]. The Left is split between Roosevelt and the New Deal, the 'pragmatic left' who Schlesinger

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59 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., 1998, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Transaction: New Brunswick, USA, pp. xix-xxii.

60 Ibid. pp. 1-10.

61 Ibid. p. 4.

62 Ibid. p. 1.

63 Ibid. pp. 53-54.

64 Ibid. p. 8.

65 Ibid. pp. 11-34.

commends, and the 'doctrinaire left' of Wallace, The Nation and The New Republic[66], who he denounces as unwitting accomplices of totalitarianism[67]. The doctrinaire left has the credulity to believe, in the face of concentration camps, atomic war and depression, that humans are perfectible beings, and dismiss all wrong-doing as a contingent result of wrong-doing that can be superseded by progress[68]. With their eyes fixed on this dream, they believe themselves superior to the pragmatic task of forming policy and running the country.

Schlesinger offers his manifesto for 'the vital center' as the resolution of this crisis. Liberalism must face up to the realities of the world and conceive of its aim not as the elimination of evil, but its limitation. It must never succumb to the dream of perfection. The political correlate of Schlesinger's theological realism is the 'unconditional rejection of totalitarianism', the sobriety to recognise the Soviet Union for what it is: a cruel and expansionist power[69]. Liberals must support a dual foreign policy aimed at the reconstruction of the North Atlantic democracies and the vigilant containment of the Soviet menace[70]. But if social democratic meliorism is the beginning of an answer to the 'anxious man', it is not the end. Liberals must rekindle their faith in freedom, and take pride in America once more. Schlesinger warns, 'civilizations which cannot man their walls at times of alarm are doomed to destruction by the barbarians'[71].

2. Kennan's Containment. George F. Kennan was, of course, the architect of the policy of 'containment' that guided American foreign policy throughout the course of the Cold War, first articulated in Kennan's 'Long Telegram' from the Moscow in February 1946, and later restated for Foreign Affairs in 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct'. What is immediately striking in both texts is Kennan's implicit meta-geography. Both documents presuppose that what has to be defined is not the United States, but 'the West', without ever pausing to defend this assumption. Kennan interprets Soviet life and policy through the lens of Orientalism. At the heart of Soviet strategy is 'the instinctive Russian sense of insecurity', borne of its history as 'a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plains in [a] neighbourhood of fierce nomadic peoples', and exacerbated by its contact with the 'economically advanced West', stoking its fear of the 'more competent, more powerful, more highly organised societies in that area'[72]. Kennan suggests that the centuries of battles that Russia has fought

66 Ibid. pp. 36-37.

67 Ibid. p. 40.

68 Ibid. pp. 38-46.

69 Ibid. pp. 149-150.

70 Ibid. pp. 157-188, see especially p. 169.

71 Ibid. p. 245.

72 George F. Kennan, 1946, 'George Kennan's Long Telegram', Wilson Center Digital Archive. Accessed 06/01/2020: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>. See especially Part Two.

with ‘nomadic forces over the stretches of vast fortified plains’ have inculcated within its ‘oriental mind’ the skill for careful, circumspect and long-term strategic thinking[73].

Kennan's centrepiece, the strategy of 'containment', is often misconstrued as little more than a cordon sanitaire encircling the Soviet Union. This is certainly Kennan's concrete proposal: ‘that the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy’[74]. But this is simply Kennan’s conclusion, and cannot be understood independent of the assessment on which it is premised. Kennan puts forward two key theses, which we might call Soviet weakness and Soviet parasitism.

Kennan’s estimation of the capabilities of the Soviet Union is extraordinarily low. The Kremlin has a ‘neurotic view of world affairs’, Kennan reports, to the point that Soviet foreign policy has no genuine contact with ‘objective reality’[75]. Russia is ‘physically and spiritually tired’, and ‘will remain economically a vulnerable, and in a certain sense an impotent, nation’[76]. The communist party has ‘ceased to be a source of emotional inspiration’[77]. A structural tension runs down the centre of the communist party, between the age, values and orientation of the vast majority of members, and the ‘little self-perpetuating clique of men at the top’[78]. It is far from proven that the Soviet Union can effectively transfer power to a new leader; the ascent of Stalin, Kennan points out, led to fifteen-years of sclerotic purges.

What then explains the successes of communism? For Kennan the answer is that the Soviet Union is a parasite. In the Soviet worldview the West is seen ‘as bearing within itself germs of creeping disease and destined to be wracked with growing internal convulsions until it is given final Coup de grace by rising power of socialism and yields to new and better world’[79]. Soviet strategy is thus to bide its time and wait for inter-capitalist competition to play itself out, while doing all it can to both ‘disrupt national self-confidence, to hamstring measures of national defense, to increase social and industrial unrest, to stimulate all forms of disunity’, and to ‘set major Western Powers against each other’[80]. But the Soviet Union also depends upon Marxist prophecy for its legitimacy, for justifying the hardship its people endure at the same time as enormous funds are directed into military expansion, police repression, and

73 X [George F. Kennan], 1947, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, *Foreign Affairs*, 25, pp. 566-582. See especially p. 574.

74 Ibid. p. 576.

75 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Two; Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, p. 573.

76 Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, p. 577-578.

77 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Five.

78 Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, p. 579.

79 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Two.

80 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Four.

foreign subversion[81]. The 'palsied decrepitude of the capitalist world is', Kennan surmises, 'the keystone of Communist philosophy'[82].

It follows that the Cold War is less a question of whether the Soviet Union will succeed, than if the West can regenerate itself. If the West can avoid the 'economic depression which the ravens of the Red Square have been predicting with such complacent confidence', a major blow will be struck to the Soviet worldview[83]. In contrast, 'exhibitions of indecision, disunity and internal disintegration within this country [would] have an exhilarating effect on the whole Communist movement', leading 'new groups of foreign supporters' to climb onto the communist 'band wagon'. On the strength of this analysis, Kennan proposes a dual strategy: the containment of Soviet expansion and the superintending of the stability and success of the Western world. If the West can hold the line, the legitimacy of the Soviet Union's regime of totalitarian militarisation will begin to falter, and the country will sooner or later succumb to its inherent weaknesses. 'Gauged against Western World as a whole, Soviets are still by far the weaker force. Thus, 'their success will really depend on [the] degree of cohesion, firmness and vigour which Western World can muster'[84]. It is a question, for Kennan, of 'spiritual vitality'[85].

> 'World communism is like [a] malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue… Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués. If we cannot abandon fatalism and indifference in face of deficiencies of our own society, Moscow will profit.'[86]

It is astonishing that Kennan had struck upon this basic line of thought some sixteen years earlier, writing in 1930:

> 'Has it never occurred to anyone to accept socialism in the economic sense without any of its political connotations? The capitalist countries have a choice. They can let their capitalistic economic structure work itself into such a chaos that it collapses of its own accord, drag the cultural achievements of centuries down with it, and succumb to a new Middle Age of bolshevism, as our abandoned tropical plantation succumbs to the vegetation of the jungle. Or they can separate politics from

81 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Two.

82 Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, p. 581.

83 Ibid. p. 581-582.

84 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Five.

85 Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct, p. 581.

86 Kennan, Long Telegram, Part Five.

economics, and their intelligent classes can put business life on a socialist basis from above, without turning political power over to the proletariat. If the intelligent classes in these countries haven't enough force and stamina to do this, then Western European civilization is already dead and gone and there is no hope.'[87]

Kennan read Spengler's The Decline of the West in the early 1920s[88]. He was deeply impressed. Kennan's personal diaries from the following decades, travelling across Europe as a member of the United States foreign service, are littered with complaints against civilization. A long entry in 1931 is especially revealing. Kennan fumes against Bolshevism for having 'abandoned the ship of Western civilization like a swarm of rats, when they considered it to be sinking, instead of staying on and trying to keep it afloat'[89]. Although this might be a 'necessary' and 'constructive' step in the life-history of Russia, for 'us in the West… it could only be regarded as an Untergangserscheinung, a sign of retrogression'. Contrary to Bolshevik cowardice, however, the only honourable response is to struggle to the utmost to rescue the ship of Western civilization. 'Did a real soldier stand anxiously watching the tide of battle, in order to decide whether or not to fight?' Kennan saw his task as the reversal of the degeneration of the West in order to preserve the spiritual heritage of Western civilization against the fleeing hordes of Bolshevik Russia. That heritage, however, was not the mythic tradition of individual freedom feted by Cold War liberals. In one entry, Kennan suggests that the source of Western troubles is the biological degeneration of its stock, the sorry fact that 'we allow the unfit to breed copiously and to preserve their young'[90]. In another, he recommends something resembling a Caeserist dictatorship[91]. It is astonishing that, as late as 1958, Kennan entertains the Spenglerian thought that 'Russian triumph can have, to Western civilization, only the same significance that the barbarian invasions had to ancient Rome: there might be buried somewhere in it the seeds of another civilization, destined to mature centuries hence, but not necessarily a higher one'[92].

3. Ward's Faith. Neither academic nor politician, Barbara Ward has fallen through the cracks of the history of global political thought. Ward is best understood as a 'public moralist', to borrow Stefan Collini's phrase: she eschews radical critique in favour of extending and refining pre-existing features of the dominant culture; her writings are primarily oriented towards the intellectual and governing elite, not for scholars or the lay public; her style of

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87 George F. Kennan, 2014, *The Kennan Diaries*. Norton: New York, USA, p. 66.

88 John Lukacs, 2007, *George Kennan: A Character Study*. Yale University Press: New Haven, p. 24.

89 Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*, pp. 69-70.

90 Ibid. p. 78.

91 Ibid. p. 79.

92 Ibid. p. 375.

argument is didactic and written to convince and convict; and she conceives of her role as warding off moral degeneration or complacency, of upholding the conscience of society[93]. What little has been written of her is tributary in nature, and overlooks her ambitious synthesis of Cold War liberalism and Toynbee's theory of history in the 1940s and 1950s[94]. Attention has fixed, instead, on her pioneering advocacy of international redistribution and environmental sustainability. But these lines of vision can be traced back to an almost evangelist belief in Western civilization as the guardian of world history. A student of Toynbee at Oxford in the late 1930s, the two bonded over a shared Catholicism, and when Toynbee took charge of the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department during the Second World War, he brought Ward with him[95]. He later used his influence at The Economist - for whom he was star columnist in the 1930s - to help secure Ward a job at the magazine. Ward promptly rose to foreign editor, and in the following decade established herself as one of the most influential commentators on international affairs in the English-speaking world. Close friends with Adlai Stevenson and John Gailbraith, advisor to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, and a key confidant to Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, she moved deftly between the worlds of journalism, academia, politics and advocacy.

Ward's prospectus of Cold War strategy, Policy for the West (1951), begins by tracking the same path as Kennan[96]. ‘Communism has lodged itself in the bosom of the old society by capturing Russia and making it a firm foundation and starting-point for a new world’, at the same time as the ‘decaying capitalist society can be relied upon to produce at regular intervals crises of economic glut and stagnation, leading to violence and imperialist war’. Soviet strategy is ‘that of helping history to help itself’, oscillating between a duplicitous policy of peaceful co-existence at times of weakness, and opportunistic expansion when the weakness of its target permits it. The menace to the West is not a Soviet blitzkrieg steamrolling across Europe, but that it will be devoured piece-by-piece by a strategy of parasitism, ‘just as cancer works inexorably through the human organism’.

> ‘Like a force of nature it will continue, for some time at least, to pour through the world lapping at the free world’s defences and seeking by every tactic of infiltration to trickle through the barriers, to crumble the earth that is soft and suck down the wood

93 Stefan Collini, 1991, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

94 See, for instance, David Satterthwaite, 2006, Barbara Ward and the Origins of Sustainable Development. International Institute for Environment and Development: London, UK; Jean Gartlan, *Barbara Ward: He Life and Letters*. Continuum: London, UK. One exception is Alexander Zevin, 2019, Liberalism at Large: The World According to the Economist. Verso: London, UK, pp. 248-253.

95 Satterthwaite, Barbara Ward and the Origins of Sustainable Development, pp. 35-36.

96 Barbara Ward, 1951, *Policy for the West*. Penguin: Middlesex, UK, pp. 17-25.

> that has grown rotten. But where the dykes are strong and the banks well built, the pressure will be made in vain'.[97]

Nazi Germany was an outgrowth 'of Western history, bound to us by ties of art and music and philosophy', which we must call 'Western if the word is to have any cultural or historical meaning'[98]. Ward follows Toynbee in identifying the creative destruction unleashed by nationalism and industrialism as an ailment 'common to all Western society', but contrary to Toynbee, conceives of these forces as an aporia in civilization generative of its opposite: totalitarian fascism and communism[99]. The solution is a policy of 'dual strength', of rapid militarisation to counteract Soviet expansion[100], and of social reconstruction through a programme of global Keynesianism[101], both anchored in gradual integration of the Atlantic area: politically, militarily, and economically[102]. A 'community of culture and tradition', the Atlantic plays the role to Western civilization that the Mediterranean basin did to Roman civilization[103]. The 'essence of the West way of life' is freedom itself[104]. Ward's focus falls on the Marshall Plan, 'the most momentous act of statesmanship in the modern world', bringing Europe back from the brink of civil war[105]. Ward personally urged Ernest Bevin, then British foreign secretary, to accept Marshall Aid when it was first offered by Dean Acheson[106]. In line with the Labour Party policy for a 'World Plan for Mutual Aid'[107], she now calls for its extension to Asia. Ward envisioned a 'colonial new deal' in the early 1940s, echoing Toynbee's mantra of 'unity in diversity' in an imperial policy of free trade, racial equality and redistribution from the metropole to the periphery[108]. With Britain diminished, Ward now reigns back her ambition to recommend an exclusively Atlantic economic area - committed to free markets, the balancing of trade, and full employment - that would send capital trickling out of its borders to 'backwards areas' in Asia[109]. Civilization is no longer an imperial but a Western project. 'To see Rome under Soviet occupation or Paris taken over by the

97 Ibid. p. 25.

98 Ibid. pp. 36-37.

99 Ibid. pp. 34-37, 69, 227.

100 Ibid. pp. 26-31, 70-83.

101 Ibid. pp. 83-93, 121-136.

102 Ibid. pp. 137-153, 216-241.

103 Ibid. p. 226.

104 Ibid. p. 141.

105 Ibid. p. 48.

106 Satterthwaite, Barbara Ward and the Origins of Sustainable Development, p. 37.

107 Talbot C. Imlay, 2017, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960.* Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, p. 416.

108 Zevin, *Liberalism at Large*, pp. 248-253.

109 Ward, *Policy for the West*, pp. 89-93.

communists would mean the extinction of some of the most vital centres of the Western civilization which we are attempting to preserve'[110].

But the sources of the decay on which communism feeds go deeper than technical questions of social and economic organisation[111]. In the concluding chapter of Policy of the West, Ward contends that of supreme importance to the health of the West is the recrudescence of its 'faith in freedom'. Ward produces a bracing philosophical capstone to her geostrategic vision, synthesising Popper and Toynbee. In the past civilizations conceived of society as a fixed part of nature unyielding to human control, grounding the belief that social behaviour, institutions and hierarchies are unchangeable projections of the eternal. Unlike Popper, however, she associates metaphysical monism with a particular experience of historical time: a closed cycle 'of rise and fall, exhaustion and renewal'. An incipit in world history, ancient Greece and biblical Israel gave rise to a qualitatively new mode of existence. Ward's construction, at this point, rests on a subtle distinction between the static idea of divine order found in traditional civilizations, in which the social world was seen as the determinate effect of given circumstances, and the free idea of divine order that emerged with the Greeks and Jews, that distinguished between the 'divine order as it existed in the mind of God' and the 'human order as it existed on earth'. For humans no longer saw themselves as the play-things of an underlying metaphysical order but as beings created imago dei that could transform themselves, extirpate sin and improve society in the light of God's word. The static gave way to the revolutionary, 'the idea of a possible perfect society which could be achieved provided men overcome the irrational and immoral aspects of their own lives and their own institutions'. Antique hierarchies and injustices were suddenly thrown into question, while humans came to embrace 'the doctrine of personal responsibility', to recognise themselves as agents in their own fate. Western civilization burst through humanity's shackles of fatalism, to become 'the most restlessly dynamic and explosive social order the world had ever seen'.

Communism is a doctrine of reactionary closure, that aspires to repeal free civilization. Marx's materialist theory of history conceives of humans as nothing but economic epiphenomenon, transforming vital self-creating subjects into docile objects. Communism is a counter-revolution against the radical freedom of the West. But its draws its strength from 'the weakening of the Western way of life', from the 'godless and scientific discourse' of modern thought, that reduces human beings to mechanics caught within a field of physical

110 Ibid. p. 26.
111 Ibid. pp. 245-253.

forces. Either the West restores its faith or freedom, or it will fall back into the rhythm of growth and decay, and the asphyxiating rigidities of all past civilizations.

Several years later, Ward expanded this concluding chapter into *Faith and Freedom* (1954). We now get a more elaborate – though not necessarily more convincing – philosophical architecture, but what is more interesting is the accent Ward places on the Christian nature of Western civilization. Soviet communism continues to figure as a parasitic dystopia, whose 'great strength… lies not in what it offers but in what it attacks'[112]. We discover, however, that Marxism is not the first parasitic dystopia: 'like Communism, the Moslem faith in its relationships with Europe has tended to follow the pattern of relentless pressure on all weak points and undefended frontiers and to advance its banners wherever there were found to be no defenders at the gate'[113]. The Soviet Union's march into Eastern Europe, pushing up against Vienna, finds its precedent in the Ottoman siege of Vienna. And here we find a parable, too: the Habsburgs were only able to repulse the Islamic heretics by uniting the powers of Central Europe and a sage strategy of 'containment'. Lest we draw comfort from this 'success', Ward cautions that communism is a more potent Christian heresy than Islam. Where Islam owed its achievement to 'the use it made of ideas deeply congenial to the oriental mind', the Soviet Union appeals to Western ideas of humanism, democracy and equality. Ward draws to a close by suggesting that, whatever the material power of the Soviet Union, it can never become anything more than a 'closed order of deadened monotony', heir to 'the mummified survival of the great planned experiment of Egyptian society'[114].

112 Barbara Ward, 1954, *Faith and Freedom: A Study of Western Society*. Hamish Hamilton: London, UK, pp. 172, 191.

113 Ibid. pp. 168-169.

114 Ibid. p. 269.

Chapter 5: Trotsky's Frankenstein

Agitation

Born in the suburbs of north Chicago to a railroad executive in 1905, educated at a Catholic boarding school in Connecticut, and graduating with degrees in literature from Princeton and Oxford, Burnham had no distinctive politics for the first twenty years of his life[1]. Burnham's conversion to Marxism took place against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the febrile atmosphere of the American left in the early 1930s. Two individual influences were decisive. The first of those was his talented colleague on the philosophy faculty of New York University, Sidney Hook, who had just completed his doctorate under Dewey at Columbia, and was attempting to formulate a grand synthesis of pragmatism and Marxism[2]. Burnham founded a small literary journal in 1930, *Symposium*, but the following year the journal broke from its conventions of style and length to publish an extended essay by Hook, laying out his philosophy of Marx: 'Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx'[3]. Burnham was deeply impressed. Hook encouraged him to follow through, and in 1932 Burnham used the pages of *Symposium* to publish an admiring review of Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution* and its 'integrating philosophy'. When Hook joined the newly-formed American Workers Party in 1933 – an anti-Stalinist grouping opposed to the American communist party – Burnham joined him, and was soon helping to negotiate the party's merger with the Communist League of America, the chief Trotskyist party in the United States. Burnham suddenly found himself working side-by-side with Hook and Trotsky, and tasked with the job of defining the party's foreign policy[4].

Burnham became one of the leading Trotskyists in America over the next seven years, before repudiating not just the party – renamed the 'Socialist Workers Party' (SWP) – but Marxism as a whole. What explains this abrupt reversal? It began as a split over the 'Russian question', of how the Soviet Union ought to be conceived and what stance the SWP ought to take towards it. Trotsky believed the fundamental gains of the Bolshevik revolution had not been entirely annulled by Stalin and that the country was therefore redeemable[5]. He separated the *Soviet state*, which he considered to be the most advanced instrument of the proletariat in the world given that it had nationalised the country's entire

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1 On Burnham biography, see Daniel Kelly, 2002, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World: A Life*. ISI Books: Delaware, USA; Daniel Oppenheimer, 2016, *Exit Right: The People Who Left the Left and Reshaped the American Century*. Simon & Schuster: New York, USA, pp. 69-145.

2 Christopher Phelps, 2005, *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbour, USA.

3 Oppenheimer, *Exit Right*, pp. 81-91.

4 Ibid., p. 100.

5 The classical statement of this position is Leon Trotsky, 2004, *The Revolution Betrayed*. Dover Publications: New York: USA. A briefer version is found in Leon Trotsky, 1935, 'The Worker's State, Thermidor and Bonapartism', *New International*, 2(4), July, pp. 116-122.

culture and means of production, and *Soviet society*, which had degenerated into a bureaucratic monstrosity. Stalin was a Bonapartist dictator, playing an analogous role to that of Napoleon I, ruling over a society whose 'social base' reflected the class rule of the proletariat established by the foregoing revolution. It was a 'degenerated worker's state', but it remained a *worker's state*. Trotsky thought that for this reason the Soviet Union deserved the 'unconditional' support of communists worldwide against the counter-revolutionary forces of capitalist imperialism, who should at one and the same time work to reclaim the country from Stalin.

Burnham abandoned this position as early as 1937, convinced by the argument of Joseph Friedman, another senior party member, that the Soviet Union was not a worker's state but a pathological form of what Friedman called 'bureaucratic collectivism'[6]. Burnham's proposal to reformulate the SWP's position in 1937 was voted down 89 to 4, but two years later when the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany and the two states invaded Poland to divide the country between themselves, Burnham called an emergency meeting of the SWP's national committee[7]. He insisted that any vestige of revolution in the Soviet Union had long since been extinguished, and demanded that the SWP denounce the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland as an act of 'imperial conquest'. A rift opened in the party, spilling into the public.

Burnham was accosted by Trotsky in December 1939, and the two entered into a bitter war of words. The Soviet Union's invasion of Finland in November only deepened the chasm between them. But Trotsky's intervention introduced a second front to their battle: he charged Burnham with having taken a position of 'skepticism and eclecticism' towards dialectical materialism, in favour of America's 'national philosophy' – pragmatism[8]. Burnham had, in fact, never thought much of dialectical materialism and shared Hook's dual stance of adopting Marxist *politics* while rejecting its *philosophy*. By this time, however, Hook had already jettisoned Marxism, politics and philosophy together. He had been traumatised by Moscow Show Trials, brought to international attention by the 'Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials', more commonly associated with the name of its chairman and Hook's mentor, as the 'Dewey Commission'[9]. By late 1938 Hook was denouncing Russia, Italy, Germany and Spain as common members of a species

6 Kelly, *James Burnham*, pp. 62-63.

7 Oppenheimer, *Exit Right*, pp. 120-121, 133

8 Leon Trotsky, 1942, *In Defense of Marxism*. New Park: London, UK, pp. 56-80.

9 Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, pp.148-180

of 'totalitarianism', and helping to found the 'League Against Totalitarianism' with Dewey, the forerunner of the Congress of Cultural Freedom[10].

Burnham's response to Trotsky was threefold[11]. First, he dismissed dialectical materialism as pre-scientific nonsense that no one in the party actually understood, and that had only been introduced into the debate for partisan reasons to depict him as a heretic, given that he had never accepted dialectical materialism and no one had ever raised any objection to his politics on these grounds before. It was a form of philosophical 'totalitarianism'. In the following years he would spell out what this meant: 'the law of dialectical logic is simply whatever serves the interests of communist power'[12]. At the centre of Burnham's reply is a realist impulse: the demand that politics be treated on its own concrete terms. Metaphysics is both analytically irrelevant to the empirical and strategic substance of the 'Russian question', and in his polemic Trotsky *himself* draws no connection between his discussion of dialectical materialism, and his defence of the Soviet Union's aggression. Second, Burnham reiterates his attack on Trotsky's conception of the Soviet Union. The nationalisation of the economy is not a sufficient condition of a society being a 'worker's state'. As Marx recognised, Burnham protests, this also requires *worker's democracy*. But this is non-existent in the Soviet Union. Burnham pulls apart Trotsky's claim that the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland is justified because the advancing Red Army will catalyse proletariat mobilisation in Scandinavia. For Burnham, this is a mere wish, with no basis in fact. Third, Burnham lays out his own 'third camp' strategy. Burnham reasons that any politics must comprise both an aim, which in this case is socialist revolution, and a means to best accomplish this aim, of which the defence of the Soviet Union is but *one* candidate. Indeed, next to this, there are a whole raft of necessary means to the party's strategic aim: 'the overthrow of Stalinism; colonial revolts; the lifting of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses; the deepening of the class struggle throughout the world, in at least several major nations to the point of successful proletarian revolution'. In itself, the defence of the Soviet Union has only negative value, for its immediate consequence would be to consolidate Stalin's rule. It therefore cannot be of greater priority in socialist strategy than any of the other means, and must be discarded in favour of a consistent anti-imperialism.

Soon after his exchange with Trotsky, in May 1940, Burnham circulated a letter of resignation to the party. The next decade of Burnham's life was dedicated to working through the implications of the 'Russian question' and his rejection of Marxism. His next

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10 Ibid., p.202

11 James Burnham, 1940, The Politics of Desperation: Some Notes on the Article A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party, *New International,* Vol. 6 No. 3, April 1940, pp. 75–80; James Burnham, 'Science and Style A Reply to Comrade Trotsky', in Leon Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, London 1966, pp.232-256.

12 James Burnham, 1947, *The Struggle for the World*. The John Day Company: New York, USA, p. 129.

three works *all* have to be read in this light: *The Managerial Society* (1941), *The Machiavellians* (1943), and *The Struggle for the World* (1947). It is the last of these on which our focus will fall, which would convert Burnham to the defence of 'the West' against the totalitarian spectre of communism. This conversion was scarcely unique to Burnham. By 1940 the American left had been evacuated of much of the intellectual energy that had animated it over the last decade. The principal explanation is simple: the actions of the Soviet Union. Moscow used its material leverage in the Spanish Civil War to destroy every other faction in the Republican cause and quash the revolution in Catalonia. Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and George Orwell's *1984*, easily the most influential anti-totalitarian novels of the mid-twentieth century, were both the product of their author's disillusion in Spain[13]. The Moscow Show Trials, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the invasion of Poland and Finland – not to mention the fact that the worst of the depression was neutralised by Roosevelt's New Deal – led most of the leading American communists of the period to turn against the Soviet Union: Max Eastman, John Dos Passos, Dwight MacDonald, Sidney Hook, Arthur Koestler, Max Schachtman, Philip Rahv, Edmund Wilson.

For Trotskyists like Hook and Burnham this was not an entirely illogical step; it was simply a radicalisation of the anti-Stalinism to which they had already been committed. What was crucial was the growing sense that, because communism as it actually existed had devolved into a dystopian form of totalitarianism, opposition to communism was now far more important than any remaining antipathy for capitalism. Anti-Stalinism proved to be the hinge of a transmutation of socialists into defenders of 'the West', via the principle of *lesser evil*. There is no better example of this alchemy than Dwight MacDonald's 1952 debate with Norman Mailer, in which he affirmed, resolutely, 'I Choose the West'[14]. MacDonald recalls that he had previously been led to reject any need to choose between East and West, first by Trotskyism, then by pacifism. But the objective political situation is a bipolar world in which all attempts to create a 'third camp' have come to nil, rendering Trotskyism all but impotent. Pacifism might have worked in India, MacDonald allows, but this was because the oppressor against which Gandhi fought abided by the 'moral code' of 'Western civilization'. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, has no ethical scruples, and can admit no pluralism within or without itself. Indeed, it stands beyond the pale of Western civilization as a hideous 'throwback not merely to the relatively humble middle ages but to the great slave societies of Egypt and the Orient'.

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13 George Orwell, 2004, *Why I Write*. Penguin: London, UK, p. 8; Michael Scammell, 2009, *Koestler: The Indisputable Intellectual*. Faber and Faber: London, UK, p.140-141.

14 Dwight MacDonald, 'I Choose the West', in Neil Jumonville (eds.), *New York Intellectuals Reader*. Routledge: New York, USA, pp. 65-57.

MacDonald was editor of the *Partisan Review* – once an outlet for the American communist party – when it was refounded as an anti-Stalinist journal in 1937. The American left soon coalesced around the journal. Burnham, Hannah Arendt, George Orwell, Stephen Spender, Reinhold Niebuhr, Andre Malraux, Raymond Aron, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, Arthur Koestler, Paul Goodman, Arthur Schlesinger, Melvin Lasky: all would publish in its pages in the following years, where we find, again and again, a fervent anti-communism justified by the principle of lesser evil. A widely celebrated symposium was published by the journal in 1952 to examine just how the oppositional culture of the 1930s was transformed into the most zealous organ of America's Cold War. The calculus was lucid: 'the democratic values which America either embodies or promises… are necessary conditions for civilization and represent the only immediate alternative as long as Russian totalitarianism threatens world domination'[15].

Wilderness

The Managerial Revolution catapulted Burnham to fame. It sold more than 100,000 copies in the early 1940s, was chosen by Time as one of the best six books of 1941, and George Orwell even wrote the book into *1984* as 'The Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism'[16]. What few readers realised was that *The Managerial Revolution* was constructed to answer the 'Russian question', the crux of Burnham's debate with Trotsky. Burnham assigns himself the question, 'What form of social question is on the immediate horizon?' There are, he suggests, only two established answers[17]. One is that capitalism will continue indefinitely. But capitalism is not a fixed feature of human society but a contingent historical system with a beginning, one that is already displaying the symptoms - mass unemployment, collapsing empires, bourgeois despair - of death. The other answer is that socialism will emerge from the breakdown of capitalism. Burnham accepts the Marxist analysis of capitalist degeneration, but suggests that there is no evidence in favour of the entirely independent thesis that socialism must be the outcome of this degeneration[18]. He dismisses Hegelian arguments about 'thesis' and 'antithesis' as meaningless speculation. Marxists implicitly assume that socialism is the only possible successor to capitalism, and more specifically, that the socialisation of the means of production is sufficient for the creation of socialism. But one could imagine an infinite variety of possible alternatives, and there have been many societies throughout history which have not been premised on private ownership of production but which were, nevertheless, not socialist. With these options

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15 Our Country and our Culture: A Symposium, Partisan Review, XIX(3), May–June 1952, see p. 285.

16 Orwell also wrote a well-known essay charging Burnham with 'power worship', and betraying admiration for Nazism and Stalinism. See George Orwell, 1946, Second Thoughts on James Burnham, *Polemic*, No. 3, May.

17 James Burnham, 1942, *The Managerial Revolution*. Putnam and Company: London, UK, pp. 28-35.

18 Ibid., pp. 36-54.

rejected, Burnham introduces a third possible answer to his question, that he calls the 'managerial society'.

Burnham's theory of the 'managerial society' is built on an analogy with the process by which capitalism supplanted feudalism, and in this sense he employs Marx's backward-looking analysis of the nature and history of capitalism to argue against his forward-looking thesis of the historical inevitability of socialism. Burnham's argument boils down to two propositions. The first is the Marxist assumption that society is dominated by that ruling group which controls the instruments of production, and that any group capable of assuming this position will - consciously or unconsciously - struggle to claim it[19]. The second is that ownership and control are now separate under capitalism[20]. Ownership is held by finance-capitalists and stockholders who have little to do with the operational control of production. Control has fallen, instead, to a new class of skilled technicians. Burnham leans heavily on Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means' classic *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932) for empirical ballast[21], but deviates from Berle and Means on one crucial point. Burnham posits that control over the instruments of production is for all intents and purposes equivalent to ownership, and that ownership without control is a mere fiction. The managers have placed themselves in the cockpit of society without they or the capitalists having been fully cognizant of it.

Managerialism is not a hypothetical future, but a living reality. Sweeping across the advanced capitalist world, three societies have already fallen to the managers: fascist Germany and Italy, and communist Russia. Burnham can finally answer the 'Russian question'. When he asserts that 'Russia has without doubt been the chief political enigma of the past generation'[22], Burnham is speaking autobiographically. Authoritarian collectivism has not been imposed on a proletarian social base; the social base of the Soviet Union is authoritarian collectivism. Socialists may try to excuse this outcome as the result of accident, betrayal or inopportune circumstances, but the cold fact remains that Russia was the world's first experiment in socialism, and that 'the results of this experiment are evidence for the view that socialism is not possible of achievement or even of approximation in the present period of history'[23]. Burnham suggests that the manager's struggle for power comprises three tasks: (i) to break the capitalists; (ii) to assimilate the masses; (iii) to battle for the world[24]. The history of Soviet Russia should, he claims, be read as a sequential fulfilment of

19 Ibid., pp. 56-57.
20 Ibid., pp. 73-90.
21 Ibid., pp. 83.
22 Ibid., pp. 206.
23 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
24 Ibid., pp. 197-213.

each of these tasks. In the first phase Lenin and Trotsky recruited the masses under false slogans of equality to break the capitalist class, and in the second phase Stalin took the reins of power to extinguish the independent power of the masses and subordinate them to the material control and ideological pretensions of the managerial class. Burnham's conclusion reveals his surreptitious motive: the Russian revolution was the first managerial revolution. It will be the third phase of Soviet strategy, however, that will ultimately come to occupy Burnham.

If *The Managerial Society* settled the 'Russian question' in Burnham's mind, he now turned to the second front of his conflict with Trotsky: the deficiencies of dialectical materialism and the corollary question of how political theory should really be done. This is Burnham's self-assigned task in *The Machiavellians* (1943), a meditation on the thought of Machiavelli and his modern heirs: Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosco, and Georges Sorel. Burnham first read 'the Machiavellians' on the suggestion of Hook in the early 1930s, to subject his Marxism to the rigours of self-criticism[25]. But it was only after his defection from the SWP, when Burnham committed himself to a diet of 're-education', that he began to find in the Machiavellians a new way of doing political theory – one that offered both an alternative and a diagnosis of Marxism. In Burnham's view, it was his most important book, the analytic pivot of his turn from Marxism to Cold Warrior.

Burnham takes Dante Alighieri's *De Monarchia* to be an exemplar of how *not* to do political theory, and in this sense Dante serves as a surrogate for the pathologies that Burnham had first criticised in Trotsky[26]. Burnham's argument revolves around a distinction between the *formal* meaning and the *real* meaning of Dante's treatise. In Burnham's presentation, the formal meaning of *De Monarchia* is to argue for a universal monarchy over all humans in the temporal realm, ruled by the Holy Roman Empire and entirely independent of the religious authority of the papacy. Among Dante's arguments, on this reading, are: (i) that it is the goal of all humans to fully realise their potentialities through universal salvation, and this can only be achieved under conditions of universal peace brought about by empire; (ii) humans ought to aspire to the ideal of God and He is a Supreme Unity, and so the most perfect political form is the highest possible earthly unity: universal empire. Burnham judges that Dante's ultimate goal (heaven) does not exist and thus is strictly impossible, that his intermediate goals (a world empire reigning over universal peace) are utopian in the sense that while they are conceivable they are materially impossible, and that Dante's arguments have nothing to do with the 'political conditions in the actual world of space and time and history'. Burnham laments that, reading *De* Monarchia, we learn nothing of the facts of political life, the

25 Kelly, *James Burnham*, pp. 107-111.

26 James Burnham, 1943, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*. John Day Company: New York, USA, pp. 3-10.

historical or future behaviour of humans, or those steps by which we might practically achieve our political goals: ‘it is worthless, totally worthless’.

If this is the formal meaning of the text, Burnham contends that its ‘real’ meaning is only apparent once we understand Machiavelli’s convoluted role in the factional disputes of Florentine politics[27]. Finding himself on the losing side of a power struggle within the city and threatened with being burnt alive by the ‘Guelphs’ (a faction aligned with the papacy), Machiavelli was forced into exile, and sought sanctuary with the natural opponents of the Guelphs, the ‘Ghibellines’ (a faction supporting the Holy Roman Empire). It was from this position of weakness that Machiavelli penned a series of bombastic letters to the emperor, calling on him to bring his forces south to reclaim the Italian city-states from the papacy. Burnham’s essential claim is that the exoteric features of *De Monarchia* – metaphysical, utopian and theological – are meaningless in themselves and used only as a propagandistic ploy to advance Dante’s esoteric political aims. What Burnham objects to is not simply that this is propaganda, but that Dante does not openly declare his aims and argue for them on their own terms through a genuine reckoning with the political situation. In the absence of this kind of analysis to keep them in check, Dante’s politics are nothing more than ‘emotion, prejudice and confusion’. Burnham’s argument is redolent of his description of the philosophical totalitarianism of Marxism: ‘the law of dialectical logic is simply whatever serves the interests of communist power’. It is also notable that the example which Burnham places alongside Dante to bolster his case is the Council of Nicaea – a conference of bishops that Burnham takes to have obviously been nothing more than a front for the interests of the Roman Emperor, who convened the meeting – given that it was exactly this which Burnham put to Trotsky three years earlier, complaining: ‘I do not take dialectics seriously as a scientific doctrine, but I take very seriously indeed the uses to which dialectics is put in some political disputes’[28].

Burnham proposes Niccolo Machiavelli as an exemplar of how to do political theory, or what he calls the ‘science of power’. By ‘science’ Burnham means the inductive study of historical, social and political facts and the search within that information for generalisations[29]. It is a science of ‘power’ because Burnham believes that politics as a field of activity is essentially a struggle for power among that minority of humans who seek dominance over others, who he names the ‘ruler-types’[30]. Burnham has no interest in an abstract science of politics, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. For him the appropriate paradigm of political thought

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27 Ibid., 11-22

28 Ibid., p. 24; Burnham, The Politics of Desperation.

29 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, p.29, 42-47

30 Ibid., p.49-61

is a form of means-end strategic reasoning: the clear and explicit specification of goals, and the scientific study of history to establish how those goals are best achieved in political action. Science is but the servant of politics.

Burnham borrows the distinction between 'logical' and 'non-logical' conduct from Vilfredo Pareto[31]. A political actor's actions are logical only when they clearly and explicitly profess a goal, when that goal is practicably attainable, and when the steps by which that goal is to be reached are carefully enumerated. If political thought has to abide this logic it cannot deal in metaphysics, superstition or subterfuge, but must state its case in concrete terms with reference to the world of space and time[32]. For Burnham the method of science by which to ascertain the most effective means of action is not psychology, economics or biology, but history[33]. We must carefully study a wide range of historical facts and assemble them into heuristic generalisations that can be extrapolated forward. The operative method of the science of politics is, then, *the search for historical patterns* that can be exploited in the struggle for power. If we understand the means-end logic of Machiavelli's thought we will, Burnham thinks, recognise that the common depiction of him as a cynical amoralist is a caricature[34]. Machiavelli is relentless in his search for the truth of the objective state of historical and political affairs, however unpalatable those facts may be, but this courageous ideal of soberly looking truth in the face is a necessary preliminary to any effective pursuit of ethical goals. Indeed, the scientific ideal of the truth, uncorrupted by desire, emotion and superstition, is itself a moral ideal[35]. Burnham takes the perennial misreading of Machiavelli to be symptomatic of a deeper truth: *men do not want to know themselves*, 'the full disclosure of what we really are and how we act is too violent a medicine'[36].

For our purposes it will be instructive to piece together two other features of Burnham's argument in *The Machiavellians*: his conception of history, and his theory of myth and democracy. In the first case Burnham stays close to the word of Machiavelli. Burnham characterises his own time as one of profound revolutionary change. On the one hand this is because of the 'crisis of capitalist society… made plain by the First World War', the jolting transition from a capitalist mode of production to the managerial society[37]. In this sense Europe's freefall is actually a revolutionary *leap forwards*, analogous to the epochal transition from feudalism to capitalism that was taking place in Machiavelli's own day. On the

31 Ibid., pp. 172-174.

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Ibid., pp. 42-47.

34 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

35 Ibid., p. 47.

36 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

37 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, p. 81.

other hand, 'continual change' is the permanent condition of politics[38]. All stability is transient, a fleeting achievement that will be overtaken by the pressures of history. Following Machiavelli's classical theory of regimes, Burnham characterises the quality of this change over the long-term as *cyclical*. 'A good, flourishing, prosperous state becomes corrupt, evil, degenerate'. For Burnham the underlying explanation for the ceaseless change and repeated decline of human society is the 'limitless human appetite for power'. While we cannot avoid decline, however, we can delay it. But to do this, we must first recognise the historical limits to action. The greater part of political affairs is governed by what Machiavelli described as 'Fortune', and stand beyond the reach of deliberate or rational manipulation. History is as a river, an immense onrush that tears through the earth, dragging trees and houses into its stream. While we cannot master the river, we can ride it for our own advantage (opportunism), or fortify its embankments to redirect its overflow, and bend the river to our favour (*virtu*). An astute political actor must know 'how to accommodate the times', to exploit Fortune for their own pursuits. To act from *virtu* is to surmount timidity, indecision and cowardice, and swiftly seize events with courage and boldness, turning them to our advantage.

In the second case we find a defence of Sorel's theory of myth and its application to democracy. Burnham commends Machiavelli's qualified defence of democracy and liberty, the value of the freedom of the individual from dependence through a system of laws designed to safeguard liberty from the rapacious desire for power[39]. But one must, at the same time, concede the defects as well as the virtues of these ideals, and be able to recognise that all moral values – liberty, democracy, peace, justice, etc. – cannot be upheld in every regard and at all moments[40]. They must be subordinated to the hard logic of means-end strategy. A question arises: What then does Burnham think the limits of democracy are? There are, I think, two clues. One is his belief that humans invariably organise themselves into a ruling minority, and ruled majority, and that even democracy cannot escape this fate: it is but the periodic selection of one's rulers[41]. The other clue is found in Burnham's distinction, again drawn from Pareto, between the utility *of* a community, the strength and power of a state in its ability to survive the exigencies of competition with other states, and the utility *for* a community, the subjective desires and values of a state's populous[42]. Burnham emphasises that these two indexes of utility 'seldom coincide', that the factors of greatest importance for the continuing survival *of* the community – discipline, sacrifice,

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38 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, pp. 62-66.

39 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, pp. 67-73.

40 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, p. 135.

41 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, p. 102.

42 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, pp. 199-200.

prudence – cut against the subjective desires *for* a community, its wishes, desires and pleasures. In the first instance the purified ideal of democracy is an illusion that can never be realised in fact because of the rule of all societies by a ruling class, in the second the happiness of the democratic masses is antithetical to the geopolitical viability of the state. One can see that, in both instances, the limiting factor is the struggle for power, within and between societies.

It is because of this unbridgeable gap between the ideal and reality of democracy that Burnham must appeal to Sorel's idea of *myth*[43]. On this view a myth is an all-encompassing and utopian vision that can bring a group together and energise it, not for its professed purposes, but for the real tasks of strategic politics. It is not a scientific hypothesis with any hope of realisation, but neither is it arbitrary. It has to be judged by its practical effects, its ability to mobilise the masses behind the struggle for power. Burnham is clear that democracy is a myth of this kind, that it 'does not respond to any actual or possible social reality', but that it does not follow from this that democracy 'is without any influence on the social structure'[44]. The idea of self-government is pure fantasy, *but* Machiavelli's argument holds: periodic elections may not remove the ruling classes' monopoly of power, but they do chasten it.

Knock-Out Blow

By the Spring of 1943 the momentum of the Second World War had shifted against Germany. The Soviet Union had emerged from Stalingrad, and was rolling westwards. In the United States foreign policy analysts began to turn their attention to the post-war world. The Office for Strategic Services, the wartime forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, approached Burnham to ask if he would write a comprehensive report on Soviet foreign policy aims. Burnham agreed, and in 1944 he submitted a classified memo that he would, several years later, develop into *The Struggle for the World* (1947). Published just a week after Truman had spoken before Congress to announce his administration's commitment to the worldwide containment of Soviet expansion, Burnham came to be seen as a counterweight to the Truman Doctrine and the advice of Kennan, Paul Nitze and the other 'wise men' who dominated the upper echelons of American foreign policy. He became an icon for the view that the United States ought not simply to wait upon the Soviet Union to act and respond *ad hoc* in a shifting defensive ring, but seize the initiative and roll back the communist empire to liberate the peoples of Eastern Europe and Russia. Before the Soviet Union acquired atomic weapons in 1949, this meant – for Burnham, as for many others – an

43 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, pp. 121-125.

44 Burnham, *The Machiavellians*, p. 236-237.

almighty nuclear first-strike to wipe out the Soviet Union. The idea of *liberation* as an alternative to *containment* became a fixation of conservatives for the duration of the Cold War.

Burnham completed the book in 1946, however, so it would be a mistake to read its reception as a response to containment back into the text. At the time of writing the Truman Doctrine did not exist, and the very existence of the 'Cold War' was in question. What then is Burnham's aim? First, *The Struggle of the World* is the culmination of the path that Burnham had travelled since his repudiation of communism in 1941, morally and analytically. Burnham had joined the editorial board of *Partisan Review* in 1942, and his trajectory shadowed the journal. His opposition to the Soviet Union as a totalitarian form of managerial society transmuted into a defence of Western civilization via the principle of lesser evil. Where *The Managerial Revolution* frequently comes across as the work of a cynical amoralist revelling in the chaos, violence and flux of the world, Burnham now unequivocally identifies with 'the West'. But it also completes his 're-education', Burnham's attempt to analyse the failings of Trotsky and Marxism. *The Managerial Revolution* answered the 'Russian question' but stopped short of analysing the Soviet quest for world domination that Burnham prognosed, and *The Machiavellians* set out a model of political theory as a form of means-end strategy within an endless struggle for power, but stood as an abstract exercise with no direct application to the contemporary world. Burnham, now, sets out a 'Machiavellian' thesis for how to counteract the Soviet Union's drive for totalitarian world domination.

There is another aim, however, subsidiary to the first. Burnham is concerned to disabuse the United States of the youthful illusions it harbours about the struggle for power in order that it can wrest the mantle of world domination from the Soviet Union. He trains his ire on the untrained, piecemeal and vacillating policy of the Truman administration. But it is the guileless belief that conciliation between America and the Soviet Union is possible, a view that Burnham associates with The New Republic, Henry Wallace and Claude Popper, that Burnham is most at pains to destroy. Wallace and Popper's politics of rapprochement is generally remembered for its acute failure, an index of the rising hegemony of Schlesinger's 'vital center'. Dismissed as Secretary of State for Commerce after delivering a speech at Madison Square Garden urging conciliation with the Soviet Union, Wallace went on to found the Progressive Party to launch a third-party bid for President in 1948. Pepper, a senator and close friend of Wallace, who he considered running alongside in 1948, took a similarly fateful path: urging the need for conciliation, being tarred as a 'Red', and losing his seat in 1951. But we must resist the temptation to read this conclusion back into 1946 - a time at which liberal opinion was far from settled, and when many were intent upon avoiding war rather than strategizing for it.

Wallace and Pepper applied a sympathetic standard of symmetry to the Soviet Union. It is a country, they pleaded, that has for thousands of years been subject to recurrent invasion 'by the Mongols, the Turks, the Swedes, the Germans and the Poles', while in 1917 a coalition of international powers tried to extinguish Bolshevism at birth, and in 1941 it was betrayed by Germany in an unforgiving war of examination[45]. America's monopoly of nuclear weapons and worldwide network of air bases from which to strike cannot but confront the Soviet Union as a threat to its survival. In this context the United States should be willing to satiate Russia's 'reasonable' demands for a regional buffer[46], draw back from its self-fulfilling belief that the Soviet Union is a hostile power, and renounce its monopoly over atomic knowledge, technology and weapons. At the heart of the debate of 1946 was the 'Baruch Plan', a proposal for the creation of an 'Atomic Development Authority' under the United Nations that would bring the earth's deposits of uranium and thorium under international control, to both license and manage the development of peaceful atomic technology around the world, and prevent the clandestine construction of atomic weapons. For Wallace and Pepper, it was the ongoing US-Soviet negotiations over the Baruch Plan which made conciliation a live possibility. But they feared that the Truman administration's insistence that America would only abolish its atomic weapons *after* the world's atomic materials and technologies had already been brought under a regime of international control were scuppering any chance of an agreement. What they called for, instead, was a single deal in which *all* elements of the proposal would be agreed to at once, including America's immediate surrender of atomic weapons.

Burnham's starting point is similar to that of Wallace and Pepper. He rejects the possibility of a bipolar *modus vivendi* based upon mutual deterrence. In a scenario of this kind, Burnham thinks, each power would be entirely ignorant of the nature and rate of improvement of the other's atomic weapons and delivery systems, creating a condition of acute and spiralling insecurity where, sooner or later, one side will launch a preventive first-strike 'to stamp out the fear of what the other side might do'. Like Wallace and Pepper, then, Burnham thinks that proliferation must be prevented at all costs through the centralised control of atomic weapons.

> 'A recognition of the fact that the survival of Western Civilization, and perhaps of mankind, depends upon the early establishment of a monopoly control over atomic weapons usually leads, we have noted, to the conclusion that a "World Government"

45 Henry Wallace, 1946, The Path to Peace With Russia, *The New Republic*, September 30th, pp.401-406. See especially pp. 401-402, 404.

46 Wallace, The Path to Peace With Russia, 402; Claude Pepper, 1946, A Program for Peace, *The New Republic*, April 8th, pp. 470-473.

> must be formed. The World Government would exercise supreme world sovereignty. In it the atomic monopoly would be vested.'[47]

Burnham sets up this position to knock it down. He draws exactly the opposite political conclusion from Wallace and Pepper: that centralised control of atomic power can only be achieved if America erects a globe-straddling world empire and crushes the Soviet Union. Far from renouncing its monopoly, the United States should do everything within its power to augment it. Burnham substitutes a brutal and imperial *realpolitik* for the 'utopian' fantasy of the Baruch Plan. How does Burnham arrive at this bracing conclusion? Through a 'scientific' assessment of how the centralised control of atomic power can be achieved.

In *The Machiavellians* we saw that, for Burnham, the appropriate method of the science of politics is the assembly of historical facts, and the search within them for heuristic generalisations that can be exploited in the struggle for power. Burnham believes that he has now discovered such a science: Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*. Toynbee gives Burnham a macrocosmic vision of the flow of events in which the United States is caught. Humans must navigate circumstances that are not of their own making[48]. Any strategy must therefore begin with an assessment of the historical givens that define the limits of action. If we disregard those limits, if we see the world as putty in our hands that can be freely made and remade, we violate the requirement of logical conduct that our means must be appropriate to our ends, lapsing into 'a fantasy of the imagination'[49]. The appropriate response to those limits is, remember, a combination of opportunism and *virtu*. For Burnham, history is a 'river the main course of which we cannot hope to divert, which, when it is in violent flood, we cannot least resist'[50]. At most, 'we can propose to ourselves' to alter the river's course 'by a degree or two'. Toynbee's cyclical theory of history, in which civilizations follow a regular - if not deterministic - pattern of growth and decay, dovetails with this Machiavellian metaphor of the unyielding river. It also resonates with the spirit of Machiavelli's own theory of political cycles, inherited from the ancients. If we add to this that Toynbee provides a sweeping philosophy of history set in stark opposition to Marxism that maps neatly onto the meta-geography of the emerging Cold War, the reason for Burnham's attraction to *A Study of History* is, if anything, over-determined. But we cannot understand the attraction simply at this theoretical level; it is also a question of what Toynbee allows

47 Burnham, *Struggle for the World*, p. 42.

48 Ibid., p. 145.

49 Ibid., p. 232.

50 Ibid., pp. 144-145.

Burnham to *do*, the kind of political intervention that he can act out upon the stage of Toynbee's drama of world history.

One thing that Toynbee allows Burnham to do, is to emphasise the world-shattering gravity of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Atomic weapons threaten the destruction of Western civilization *in toto*. This includes not just America, Europe and Russia, but the entire techno-industrial nexus that binds all the developed regions of the world to the fate of Western civilization. 'This conclusion', Burnham acknowledges, may strike the reader as 'so drastic that it will doubtless be thought by many to be mere rhetoric'[51]. But this dismissal would rest on the illusion that the death of Western civilization is equivalent to the end of civilization *writ* large, and that Western civilization is an invincible creation that can withstand any and all events. If Western civilization falls, some other civilization will emerge to take its place. Here Burnham simply reiterates the lesson of Europe's *deminutio capitis*.

Of still greater significance is that Toynbee gives Burnham the resources to reject the possibility of a world government, and argue that a *world empire* is the only feasible means by which the United States can save Western civilization. This argument has three main parts: cultural division; historical prophecy; and frenetic climax. I take each of these in turn.

To bring atomic weapons, materials and facilities under international control requires a world government. But what is a world government? For Burnham it is nothing less than a government with sovereign legislative, executive and juridical powers over the entire world[52]. By this standard the United States has nothing close to the qualities of a world government, and the idealist claim that a world government can *merely* be spoken into existence – without a belaboured process of cultural, political and institution creation – is vacuous. The question, then, is not whether any approximation of a world government already exists, but whether and how fast a world government can be brought into existence. It is here that Burnham relies on Toynbee's assumption that the fundamental cleavage of world politics is between civilizations as independent cultural wholes, a hard axis of difference ingrained over millennia[53]. Wendell Wilkie and other proponents of 'One World' argue from the fact of the unification of the world into a single system by technology, industry and commerce, to the possibility of creating a world government. But this rests on the mistaken belief that the *material* dimension of world politics is of determinate importance. It belies the 'egocentric' assumption that all societies are fundamentally the same as Western civilization[54]. It is

51 Ibid., pp. 30-34.

52 Ibid., p. 43.

53 Ibid., pp. 19-21, 45.

54 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

notable that Burnham presents this as, not simply the view of Wilkie, but a characteristically 'Marxian error'. In reality, Burnham replies, the West coexists with four other civilizations – Far Eastern, Islamic, Hindu, Orthodox Christian – along with 'the remains of several earlier civilizations'. Underneath the material net that the West has cast across the world, there is a deeply ingrained axis of *cultural* division among civilizations. If we survey history, Burnham advises, we find little precedent for the voluntary unification of culturally disparate societies. Proponents of world government often cite the example of the United States. But in this case of federating states all shared a common Western culture, the English language, had fought side-by-side in a revolutionary war, and in any case, the Philadelphia convention 'contained a blatant threat of coercion through the provision that the new government would come into being after the adherence of only nine of the States'[55]. States have only united into a common polity through some combination of *cultural diffusion* and *political conquest*. We have no time to wait for the cultivation of a world culture, leaving just one option: conquest.

Burnham turns to Toynbee's historical prophecy to defend the feasibility of a world empire. *A Study of History* does not only show that Universal Empires have repeatedly emerged from the bosom of civilization, but that this has occurred at exactly that point in its historical life-cycle which Western civilization presently stands at[56]. It is not a merely conditional possibility; it is the determinate structure of the historical moment. *This* is the metaphorical river which Burnham proposes to strategically navigate, the torrent of history that defines the direction and contours of what is possible. If the United States is to ride this wave, it has to acknowledge the true nature of its struggle with the Soviet Union as a battle of fledgling world empires, attempting to wrest control of Western civilization. But in this case, because 'Western civilization' has created a global techno-industrial network, the breadth of the battle is worldwide. At stake is not a mere 'Universal Empire', but for the first time in history, a *World Empire*[57].

One of the implicit premises of Burnham's argument is the temporality of what might be called *frenetic climax*. World history is racing forward to converge at a single point: the immediate post-war years. The reasons are three-fold. First, to a far greater extent that Toynbee allows, Burnham treats the 'Time of Troubles' and the conflict among states for ultimate control of civilization, as the culmination of the entire history of a civilization. It is a period of civil war and upheaval, sweeping violence and cataclysms, a moment in which

55 Ibid., pp. 45-47.

56 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

57 Ibid., pp. 50-51.

history itself *accelerates*. Analogising with the foundation of the Roman Empire, Burnham gives vivid expression to this ferocious, swirling movement:

> 'War took on a new meaning, vastly enlarged in scope and fierceness, with limited specific aims transformed into the objective of annihilation - Carthago delenda est. These wars merged into gigantic class and social struggles, revolutions and civil wars. Spartacus, the Gracchi, Sulla, Marius, Pompey, Julius, Antony, Octavius fought in cross-tides over the entire area of the civilization, purged their own followers, overthrew the old social forms, proscribed and slaughtered the ranks of the defeated, until the definitive victory of Octavius established the Empire as a functioning and universal fact.'[58]

Second, this cyclical theory converges with Burnham's other great prognoses: that the world is undergoing a revolutionary transformation from one mode of production to the next, from capitalism to managerialism. Finally, 'the discovery of atomic weapons... exacerbates the whole process, like oxygen under pressure added to an already flaming fire'[59]. America and the Soviet Union are compelled by the insecurity of the situation to knock out the other before they can be annihilated by an atomic first-strike. Either they seize the initiative or face individual or collective destruction. Burnham's vision is an extreme version of *modernism without progress*. Burnham explicitly identifies 'a rapid speedup in the rate of historical change' at the convergence of these three historical forces. But he locks this modernist energy within the constraints of the closed horizon of Toynbee's cyclical world freedom, in which the only space for action is achieved by political *virtu*. This combination of speed and determinism allows him to impose a strict time-horizon upon any feasible grand strategy for the United States, to dismiss any possibility of constructing a world government *in time*, and license his own strategy of unforgiving imperial world domination: 'no political program today has any concrete meaning unless it can provide, within a very few years, some sort of at least temporarily workable answer to the problem for atomic weapons'[60]. This is simply to accept the river of history, the train of wreckage piling ever higher since the First World War:

> 'Crisis succeeds crisis; there is no lengthened, restful interlude. We have already examined a major example of this speedup: the prelude to the Third World War has opened before the close of the Second. It is plain in every field: laws, regimes, boundaries, monarchs, property relations, constitutions, the value of money, change overnight. The nationalization of whole industries, in France or Czechoslovakia or England, is carried through with less fuss than used to accompany a minor

58 Ibid., p. 50.

59 Ibid., p. 30-31.

60 Ibid., p. 33.

> parliamentary investigation. Diplomatic showdowns, on Argentina, Iran, Manchuria, Germany, Spain, Palestine . . . trip each other's heels. A world bank starts one week, a civil war the next; evening headlines of a mass strike replace the morning's news of the revolt of great colonies. The United States seizes billions of dollars' worth of property more quickly than it once condemned a few acres for a new bridge or highway. Governments are rearranged like players in a progressive bridge tournament.'[61]

Burnham began with the imperative need for the centralised control of atomic power to prevent the annihilation of Western civilization, and through a 'scientific' analysis of historical patterns that he extrapolates forward to delineate the direction and contours of the situation in which America finds itself, argues that the only possible vehicle for the centralised control of atomic power is a world empire established in the next few years. These are the terms on which Burnham sets out his strategic vision for American foreign policy. It limits the scope, timing and quality of what the United States can do. Burnham's self-assigned goal is singular: to save Western civilization. His strategy aims 'to permit civilization to continue at least through the next historical period. It is very far from enough to solve society's more enduring problems, or to guarantee a world at all in accord with our wishes'[62]. For Burnham that our organising ambition must be sheer survival is a courageous form of *knowing oneself*, of courageously facing up to the stark reality of the struggle for power and drawing the necessary 'logical' conclusions.

America's strategy, of course, also depends upon the Soviet Union. Burnham upbraids American politicians for treating communism as if it were a democratic party, qualitatively no different than the Democrats, British Conservatives or French Radical-Socialists.[63] Communism operates in a different mode. It consists of a dedicated cadre of vanguardists whose entire life and energy is spent on building the communist movement. 'Everything he does, everything he has, family, job, money, belief, friends, talents, life, everything is subordinated to his communism. He is not a communist just on election day or at Party headquarters'[64]. It is a worldwide conspiracy whose methods are illegal, insurrectionary and violent, working ceaselessly to subvert and topple legitimate governments. It does not only seek a monopoly of control over economic life through the collectivisation of all property, but the totalitarian control of all spheres of life.

As Burnham has set up the structure of the historical situation there are three mutually exclusive short-term possibilities: mutual annihilation; Soviet empire; American empire. To

61 Ibid., p. 32.

62 Ibid., p. 182.

63 Ibid., p. 58.

64 Ibid., pp. 59-64

complete the syllogism of his argument Burnham has to reject the second of these options, to leave only the third[65]. Communism would eviscerate the value of the individual, the ideas of responsibility, free initiative, moral guilt, and democracy, that form the backbone of Western civilization, first in Christianity and then in the secular doctrine of liberalism[66]. It would also obliterate one of the other great Machiavellian virtues of Western culture: the search for objective truth and the willingness to organise action on this basis. Communism would bend and contort all truth and knowledge to fit the needs of power, the dialectical formula: 'whatever serves the interests of communist power is true'. In this sense, for Burnham, 'the world victory of communism would mean the destruction of all those values which have been most distinctively cherished in the tradition of Western Civilization'. It follows that of the world's three possible futures, *only one of them would save Western civilization*. The alternatives are its obliteration by atomic warfare, or asphyxiation by a society that 'is alien to the West in origin and fundamental nature', whose 'victory would… signify the reduction of all Western society to the status of a subject colony'[67].

Burnham positions himself as a historical oracle, someone with political courage and nous, with a deep understanding of the communist mind. The foil of this self-aggrandisement is his depiction of the United States as a politically *immature* society[68]. America 'began only three centuries ago, as a colonial offshoot of Western civilization'. For most of its history it was concerned with a banausic programme of expansion along the frontier, and economic development. But while it boasts a talent for large-scale organisation, from the panoramic production lines of car manufacturers, to the complex genius of the Manhattan Project, it has little understanding *of politics.* It has started upright, found itself a colossus bestriding the world, facing the Soviet Union in a Third World War. Coddled by splendid isolation, eyes trained inwards, America has 'no art of its own, no music, no literature, no great philosophy or religion, none of those signs of an inner and deeper wisdom'. It fails to see the responsibility, sacrifice and verve that the moment requires. America has yet to produce a large class of trained political strategists, who 'know something about world geography and economics… and even religions and morals, and about the history and behaviour of civilizations', that can staff the State Department to help the United States prosecute its world-historical tasks – of intelligence, research, propaganda, and subversion.

It is no surprise, then, that Burnham accosts American foreign policy as recklessly incompetent. Indeed, on his view, the United States 'has not really had a foreign policy'[69]. It

65 Ibid., pp. 122-29.

66 Ibid., p. 127

67 Ibid., p. 135.

68 Ibid., pp. 1-13.

69 Ibid., pp. 150-160.

does not follow Pareto's standard of logical conduct: it lacks an overarching vision of means-end strategy. State Department planning is fragmented into separate desks, members of Congress believe policy can be arrived at by the simple assessment of facts by sub-committees, and the Truman administration has done nothing but vacillate and appease. Burnham repeatedly returns to the example of the Chinese Civil War[70]. American policy has been to try and compel the Kuomintang regime to enter a democratic coalition with the Chinese communist party, for the sake of the abstract ideal of 'democracy', and the country's 'general policy of getting along with Russia'. But there can be no accommodation with a totalitarian movement predicated upon the seizure of absolute power by terror. America should bring its weight to bear on China, 'destroying the sovereignty of the rebel government and liquidating its attributes of independent power', to consolidate the Kuomintang's grip on the country.

In contrast the communist movement is regimented, disciplined and led by a skilful political leadership. Burnham's assessment of the strength of the Soviet Union is mixed[71]. It has abundant manpower and resources, but its economic productivity, military technology and skilled technicians are all well below the standard of the United States. Its signal strength is its disciplined political leadership, who unlike Washington, are masters of power politics:

> 'Perhaps the greatest single element of the strength of communism is the quality of its political leadership. World communism is headed by a large stratum of men whose entire lives are trained and dedicated to the pursuit of power. They study the problems of power with a concentration in which the objectivity of a research scientist is combined with the passion of a fanatic. Never before has an entire group of men been so conscious and deliberate about power.'[72]

It is the Soviet Union who has the initiative. By 1944 they had already ignited the Greek Civil War, in 1945 the Red Army swept into Manchuria and Northern China, and in 1946 they helped instigate an uprising in Northern Iran among communist-aligned Azerbaijani and Kurdish forces[73]. Despite the decisive superiority of American, Canadian, British and French forces in Western Europe, they stood idle in 1945 while the Soviet Union swept through Eastern Europe and into Berlin[74]. Moscow is now working actively to take Germany as a whole. Stalin's newfound doctrine of 'multi-national Bolshevism' harnesses nationalist

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70 Ibid., pp. 169-171.

71 Ibid., pp. 114-121.

72 Ibid., p. 121.

73 Ibid., pp. 1-3.

74 Ibid., p. 172.

energies worldwide while subsuming them within the higher unity of international class warfare[75]. It also provides the political rationale for the assimilation of European and Asian states into a federal polity with Russia as 'Soviet Republics'. The 'USSR' is nothing other than the embryo of a Soviet world empire.

Burnham delineates three avenues of American response: defensive, offensive, internal. Defensive strategy has as its aim the frustration of one's opponent's offense. America should act to prevent the Soviet Union from overtaking the 'coastlands' of Eurasia: the European peninsula, Greece, the Middle East, and India[76]. In the case of Turkey, for instance, the United States should arrange to export first-class military fighters on credit, stage military manoeuvres across the country, place warships across the Turkish strait, and volunteer aircraft with the capacity for delivering atomic warheads[77]. To take this kind of action, however, America has to discard the doctrine of non-intervention, ignore the Soviet Union's veto in the United Nations, and let it be known that any state to aligned with the Soviet Union is *ipso facto* its enemy, while any state to admit communists into government is heading towards war. America must renounce the fictitious language of peace and make an open bid for world leadership.

America's offensive strategy should be a counter-programme of world-empire. Burnham uses the word 'empire' loosely to mean any unequal international relationship where America is able to exercise decisive control, especially for the purpose of steering that polity away from communism, organising its foreign policy and economic resources into a common anti-communist bloc, and imposing a strict regime of control on the development of atomic technology[78]. America's empire *as it currently exists*, according to Burnham, encompasses Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Japan, the Philippines, Canada, all of the Americas, and its dependencies in Europe and Africa. One of the implicit suppositions of Burnham's argument is that different modes of control are appropriate to different regions of the world. He proposes that the United States enter into a political union with the British Empire, to form an 'imperial federation'[79]. At the same time, however, India would be retained as an Anglo-American colony to serve as a buffer on the coastlands of Eurasia[80]. It 'does not… have the social conditions which would enable her to operate as a fully independent, sovereign nation', which is to say, it cannot be trusted to stay within the Anglo-American orbit once granted independence. In fact, in Burnham's view, 'no nation which is either small or

75 Ibid., pp. 87-89.
76 Ibid., pp. 161-162.
77 Ibid., p. 174.
78 Ibid., pp. 53, 184, 212.
79 Ibid., pp. 190-192.
80 Ibid., p. 195.

industrially underdeveloped, can be altogether independent and free'. Yet the bottom-line of Burnham's strategy is relatively simple. It should develop the means to launch an overwhelming atomic first-strike as soon as possible to knock the Soviet Union out: 'to strike an immediate, paralyzing blow with atomic weapons at the Caucasian oil fields, Moscow, and a dozen or more of the chief Soviet and Soviet-controlled cities and industrial concentrations'[81].

Yet for Burnham there is also another, domestic context of American strategy. The fundamental problem as he conceives it, is that democracy is incompatible with his proposals[82]. He predicts that a dedicated American policy of world empire will not, for the entire course of its undertaking, enjoy public support. In Burnham's eyes, public opinion is fickle, and few Americans are ready to endure the sacrifices and responsibilities of world leadership. At the same time, he thinks any viable version of his strategy would require the active suppression of communism in the United States, violating the constitution. What is essential to understanding these two claims is that, elsewhere in the text, Burnham asserts that 'the key' to the historical situation is the overwhelming precedence of foreign over domestic policy. It is a recapitulation of Mosca's argument in *The Machiavellians*, the fact that the internal and external utility of a community rarely coincide. Peace, justice, democracy - all are conditional values that often have to be qualified by the political logic of the objective situation. Yet Burnham offers one more solution, again informed by *The Machiavellians*. Of course the United States would not announce itself as a world empire. It would cover itself in myth and dissimulation, as a 'democratic world order'. For Burnham, recall, democracy as a whole is a mythological fiction which, while it has some intrinsic value in holding the ruling class in check, also has the functional value of rousing the masses to the demands of the struggle for power. America would sustain the pretence of democracy insofar as it is valuable as a myth, while acting in effect as an imperial government and suppressing domestic dissent.

81 Ibid., pp. 243-244.

82 Ibid., pp. 201-208.

Section 4: Redemption

Chapter 6: New Vantage

In 1989 a small neoconservative magazine based in Washington, The National Interest, published a bravura 15-page essay by Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History'. It immediately became an international cause celebre. Debate raged, and the editors of *The National Interest* went on to dedicate two entire editions to the short essay. In 1992 Fukuyama published a book-length treatment of the subject, The End of History and the Last Man. Fukuyama's thesis has since been turned into an emblem of the period stretching from, roughly, the end of the Cold War to the 'War on Terror'. It is often used as a shorthand to mark out a dominant current within the thought-world of the West in the 1990s. In the same breath, it has become a foil to reflect on both the complacent myopia of the decade, and a high watermark against which to measure the gradual dissipation of the hopes which it is taken to represent - 9/11, the 2008-9 financial crisis, the rise of populism, etc., have all precipitated reflections on 'the end of the end of history'. A search of the New York Times archives coupling together "Fukuyama" and "The End of History" returns 159 results. Fukuyama's thesis, then, is both one of the most commanding statements of liberal hope in the immediate post-Cold War era, and a palimpsest on which the disappointments and fears of the years since have been written.

It is necessary at the outset to clear up a common misconception about what Fukuyama means by heralding ‘the end of history’. He is not arguing that ‘history’ in the everyday sense of the word – a chronological succession of events – has come to an end. What he claimed was threefold. First, that world history has an immanent rationality, and thus, the triumph of liberal democratic capitalism over fascism and communism - not to speak of absolutism, Christianity, etc. - represents its rational vindication. Second, not only is liberal democracy relatively more rational than its historical rivals, but 'the ideal of liberal democracy cannot be improved on'[1]. This is because, where its alternatives contained fatal internal contradictions that, in the longue durée, tend inevitably to their dissolution, liberal democracy is free of any such flaws. This does not mean that liberal democracy is perfect - Fukuyama insists that important problems, like poverty, persist - but none of these problems rise to the level of a fatal contradiction. On the plane of world history, they are superficial and not fundamental. Third, while this ideal cannot be improved upon, and most of the world now regards liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of government, this ideal remains unrealised in large

1 Francis Fukuyama, 2012, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Penguin: London, UK, p. xi.

parts of the world. Many societies are stuck within the corrosive dynamics of archaic systems, whose failures might take years - decades - to play out. Here, events will unfold much as they always have. What has ended, however, is the ideological evolution of humankind. Liberal democracy resolves the political contradictions that have driven the maelstrom of world history, that have led to the successive destruction and creation of different regimes. It is 'the final form of human government'[2]. We know, then, the political ideal towards which the world is moving, and at which it will eventually rest in perpetuity. But that process is still unfolding, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Fukuyama accepts as his problematic Strauss' analysis of the aporia of 'modern Western civilization'. Formed in the heat of Weimar Germany, Strauss saw modern political philosophy as a declension into nihilism. The liberal refounding of society as a system for the mutual pursuit of commercial self-interest lowered the standards of morality to petty avarice, while progress obliterated the classical attempt to found of 'good' and 'evil' in nature, in favour of the idea that morality is an immanent feature of the historical process itself, making and remaking humans through stages of socio-economic development. Strauss was sympathetic to the protest of German nihilists - Spengler, Heidegger, Schmitt - against 'modern civilization', but refused to follow them into the repudiation of 'civilization' writ large. Strauss himself, a 'zetetic' philosopher who favoured the esoteric reading of past texts rather than programmatic thought, never offered a definitive solution to the aporia of 'modern Western civilization'. Fukuyama takes Strauss' peculiar confrontation with Europe's deminutio capitis as his own problematic. The End of History and the Last Man is nothing less than an attempt to vindicate Western modernity in the face of Nietzsche, Spengler and Heidegger.

The Crisis of Modern Western Civilization

Fukuyama originally wrote ‘The End of History’ as a paper for a lecture series at the University of Chicago organised by Nathan Tarcov and Allan Bloom. The theme of the series was ‘The Decline of the West?’ It is this provocation which frames Fukuyama’s thesis. He treated Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* as symptomatic of a problematic to which he conceived of his lecture as a solution. After the lecture was published in *The National Interest* the editors invited a pageant of intellectuals to reply to Fukuyama. In his response to these critics, Fukuyama suggests that his starting point is historicism - the belief that thought and society is relative to the historical conditions in which they exist[3]. From this position

2 Ibid.

3 Francis Fukuyama, 1989/90, A Reply to My Critics, *The National Interest*, 18, pp. 21-28. See p. 23.

there are one of three options, Fukuyama explains. First, we can follow Nietzsche and Heidegger's radical historicism and accept the degeneration of historicism into 'simple relativism'. On this view the historical process admits neither any pattern of progress nor any objective standard of evaluation. The consequences of the nihilistic embrace of unvarnished historicism are unpalatable: 'fascism and glorification of war'. It is this aporia which Spengler represents, and which Fukuyama sets himself against. Second, we can turn back to Hegel and accept the relativity of thought but establish an immanent normative standard within the historical process itself, an apotheosis in which all historical contradictions are resolved and humankind reaches 'the end of history'. Fukuyama also hints at a third option, however, when he notes: 'Of course, one need not be a historicist; one can simply believe in a doctrine of natural right'.

I want to suggest that when Fukuyama went on to extend his thesis into the 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* his self-assigned task was to reject the first of these options, the aporia of Western civilization culminating in the historical relativism and fascistic consequences of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Spengler, by synthesising the second and third of these options - constructing a Hegelian dialectic of history grounded in a trans-historical theory of nature. I analyse the relativistic aporia that Fukuyama is concerned to reject in this section, before turning to his solution in the next section.

The problematic described by Fukuyama is not his own, but Leo Strauss'. When Fukuyama went to Cornell in 1970 to take his undergraduate in classics he was drawn into the orbit of Strauss' protege, Allan Bloom. Fukuyama's training in political philosophy is, effectively, the classes he took under Bloom at Cornell. He soon moved sideways into political science, taking his doctorate under Samuel Huntington at Harvard. But Fukuyama remained connected to Bloom and the wider galaxy of Straussianism, in part because he was absorbed into an overlapping milieu: neoconservatism. Fukuyama's career was guided by and followed the pattern of Paul Wolfowitz, one of the leading intellectual lodestars of the neoconservative movement[4]. Like Fukuyama, Wolfowitz had started his education with Bloom at Cornell before shifting into international relations. Appointed by Reagan as Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, Wolfowitz brought Fukuyama with him[5]. In this sense when Fukuyama was invited by Bloom to the University of Chicago in 1989, Fukuyama well understood what Bloom took to be the significance of the Splengerian provocation. They were part of a common tradition of thought laid down by Strauss.

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4 On Wolfowitz's trajectory, see James Mann, 2004, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*. Penguin: London, UK; Paul Wolfowitz, 2003, 'Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Sam Tannenhaus', U.S. Department of Defence Press Release. May 9th.

5 Francis Fukuyama, 2006, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*. Profile Books: London, UK. See especially pp.vii-xi; Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 113.

Strauss takes the distinguishing feature of modern political philosophy to be historicism, and the concomitant rejection of the assumption of the classics that political philosophy is the quest for knowledge of the nature of things as they take part in the political whole in order to grasp what the best regime is *simpliciter*. He breaks the development of modern political philosophy down into three 'waves'. Let us inspect them.

Wave 1: Liberalism. Machiavelli founded modern political philosophy by revising three classical assumptions. First, he thought the classical quest for the best regime was a utopian project with scarcely any chance of being realised, and so lowered the horizon of philosophy from an ideal of the eternally good to something significantly less: a realistic picture of how commonly recognised political objectives - stability, empire, glory, freedom from foreign domination - can be realised with a high chance of probability[6]. Second, he replaced the classical view that morality is something inhering in the nature of the 'soul of man' with an understanding of humans as originally selfish but infinitely malleable[7]. In light of the fact that humans are originally selfish, exhibiting neither virtue nor patriotism, Machiavelli thinks that the good is something that has to be inculcated into individuals through law, institutions and compulsion. This is possible because Machiavelli assumes that 'there is no natural end of man', and so 'man can set for himself almost any end he desires: man is almost infinitely malleable'. If humans are originally bad and only become good through their socialisation into political institutions, how can those moral institutions be brought about in the first place? Who is to play the role of the educator? This brings us to the third feature of Machiavelli's thought. Contrary to the classics, he argues that morality has its foundation in immorality[8]. It is the prince's lust for the glory that will move them to fashion a society which is stable, secure and successful in order to cement their rule. In overview, then, Machiavelli effected three changes: he lowered the standards of morality, conceived of humans as plastic, and founded morality in immorality.

Strauss tells us that Hobbes and Locke adopted Machiavelli's framework while excising its gross depravities. By making Machiavelli respectable, they succeeded in bringing about the 'Machiavellianization of Western thought'[9]. Hobbes accepts that classical political philosophy aimed too high and joins Machiavelli in grounding morality in that which is base: the desire for self-preservation, the fear of violent death[10]. It is this which stands at the foundation of

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6 Leo Strauss, 1959, *What Is Political Philosophy: And Other Studies*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 41.

7 Ibid. pp. 41-42.

8 Ibid. pp. 42-44.

9 Ibid. p. 43.

10 Ibid. pp. 47-49.

society as individuals in the state of nature enter the contract of government to secure their self-preservation at the expense of wild freedom. One implication is that justice is founded in a free contract on the basis of mere self-preservation, and so has no foundation in any objective normative standard outside of the human will. For Hobbes, as for Machiavelli, justice is not natural but generated through the social process itself. Humans are plastic and self-creating. Another implication is that the desideratum of society is the satisfaction of the individual desire for self-preservation. It is not, as it was for Machiavelli, coloured by the princely quest for glory. On the contrary, peaceableness becomes the cardinal virtue of cooperation whereas the quest for glory is thought to disrupt the harmonisation of mutual self-preservation, and becomes the cardinal vice[11]. Once a civil condition is established the desire for mere self-preservation expands into the longing for 'comfortable self-preservation'. Against the Epicureans, however, this is not a hedonism qualified by the ascetic virtue of self-restraint. It is an unqualified hedonism that finds its culmination in cornucopian desire[12]. Ultimately, for Hobbes, humans enter into civil society not to achieve excellence but for the sake of 'commodious living', for the rewards of work and the accumulation of pleasant things. Lockes went on to extend this feature of Hobbes' framework by displacing self-preservation in favour of the right of unlimited acquisition[13]. But it was Hobbes who made the innovation foundational to liberalism by recasting the role of society as that of creating the conditions for the mutual satisfaction of self-interested desire, and the attenuation of the traditional virtues of glory, courage and self-restraint. Strauss writes of Hobbes' concern with the satisfaction of human desires:

> 'As soon as "humanity" becomes the subject or object of planning, these principles have to lead to the ideal of civilization, that is, to the demand for rational social relations of humanity as one "partnership in consumption and production". Hobbes, to a much higher degree than Bacon, for example, is the author of the ideal of civilization. By this very fact he is the founder of liberalism.'[14]

Wave 2: Progress. Rousseau inaugurated the second wave of modernity. Hobbes and Locke used the state of nature to ground a natural right to self-preservation to which they believed all positive law ought to defer. In reality positive law consistently deviated from natural law. Rousseau attempted to dissolve this possibility by collapsing morality into positive law

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11 Leo Strauss, 1953, *Natural Right and History*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, pp. 186-188.

12 Ibid. pp. 188-189.

13 Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy*, p. 49.

14 Leo Strauss, 2006, 'Notes on Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political', in Heinrich Meir (eds.), *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 100.

through the device of the 'general will'[15]. Insofar as the law reflects the general will in which all citizens participate it cannot err. Eternal natural rights are replaced by a constantly shifting process of moral self-definition immanent on society. But if there are no moral standards independent of the social process then 'cannibalism is as just as its opposite' if the general will considers it so. Rousseau's ideas were taken forward by the philosophy of history of the German idealists, who sought to show that morality is inherent within the immanent development of society[16]. The second wave follows Machiavelli's three innovations: by collapsing the rational into the real they lower the standards of morality, they regard morality as something created by humans as plastic beings capable of perfection, and the driving force of this development is immorality. Hegel thought the crucible of history was war, struggle and slavery, that morality was 'established in the Machiavellian way, not in the Platonic way'[17].

It is at this juncture that the idea of progress was consummated. On Strauss' assessment the idea of progress has three outstanding features. First, it assumes that there is a parallelism between techno-scientific and moral progress[18]. In contrast the classics thought of intellectual progress as the preserve of a philosophical elite with little bearing on the development of society as a whole. It was only with the invention of the scientific method in the seventeenth century and the democratisation of knowledge that it came to be believed that every advance in intellectual progress would yield a corresponding advance in social and moral progress. Second, whereas the classics thought all progress was a temporary process that would ultimately be obliterated by telluric catastrophe in a cyclical process of growth and decay, for the moderns progress became something infinite[19]. Third, morality witnessed 'the substitution of the temporal for the eternal'[20]. Following Rousseau, morality came to be thought of as something immanent within history. It is always relative to a particular stage of development liable to be superseded. Morality is not a question of individual virtue but of the gradual development of institutions that progressively perfect human beings, socialising them into higher and higher forms of thought and behaviour.

Wave 3: Nihilism. At this point Strauss' analysis breaks from the disembodied analysis of past thinkers, blurring into an engagement with the contemporaries who shaped his own life and thought[21]. Strauss, born in Prussia into Orthodox Judaism, spent his formative years in

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15 Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy*, p. 51.

16 Ibid. pp. 53-54.

17 Ibid. p. 54.

18 Leo Strauss, 1981, Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization, *Modern Judaism*, 1(1), pp. 17-45. See especially pp. 25. Strauss first gave the paper as a lecture in 1952.

19 Ibid. pp. 25-26.

20 Ibid. pp. 28, 30.

21 Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy*, pp. 54-55.

Weimar Germany[22]. Between his release from the German Army in December 1918 and his exile in 1932, he imbibed the crosscurrents of Weimar pessimism. He took his doctorate under Ernst Cassirer at Hamburg, and mixed with German Jewish intellectuals including Leo Lowenthal, Hannah Arendt, Norbert Elias and Franz Rosenzweig. Of his contacts during this period it was Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt who made the deepest impression on his thought, the most talented philosophers of Weimar reaction. Attending the lectures of Heidegger in the early 1920s, Strauss immediately came to regard Heidegger as the most important philosopher of the twentieth century[23]. By Schmitt's own lights, it was Strauss who penned the deepest response to his most famous work, The Concept of the Political, and the two maintained an important epistolary exchange[24]. Crudely put, Strauss shared Heidegger and Schmitt's diagnosis of the aporia of modern civilization, but scorned their embrace of violent counter-revolution. For Strauss, they were symptomatic of the collapse of historicism under the weight of its own internal contradictions into a species of nihilistic chaos. Nihilism was proof of the failure of the whole project of modern political philosophy, not its overcoming.

Strauss' clearest diagnosis of this problematic is his 1941 lecture 'German Nihilism'. Strauss distinguishes civilization, that 'has a natural basis which it finds, which it does not create', from modern civilization, that as we have seen, claims that society and morality is something created through the historical process itself[25]. Nihilism is the desire for the destruction of everything without remainder. German nihilism does not will the destruction of everything, but one thing: modern civilization[26]. Strauss implicitly follows German nihilism up to this point. But German nihilism fails to complement this No with a Yes, and for this reason lapses into total nihilism, rejecting all civilization[27]. For Strauss, the nature of the nihilist revolt against modern civilization is, effectively, the repudiation of the liberal economism and historical progressivism that constitute the first two waves of modernity. Let us take these two arguments in turn.

For Strauss nihilism is a product of the breakdown of the idea of progress. As we have seen, modern political philosophy attacked the classical ideal of morality as a trans-historical standard predicated on the unchanging nature of humans. It treats morality as an immanent feature of history where the emergence of progressively higher institutions gradually works

22 On Strauss' formation, see Eugene Shepphard, 2007, Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher. University of Chicago Press: Illinois, USA. See especially pp. 27-53.

23 Richard L. Velkley, 2011, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 5-7.

24 Heinrich Meier, 2006, Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 8.

25 Leo Strauss, 1999, German Nihilism, *Interpretation*, 26(3), pp. 353-378. See especially p. 366. Strauss originally delivered the lecture in 1941.

26 Ibid. p. 357.

27 Ibid. pp. 357, 359.

to perfect human thought, behaviour and society. Nietzsche was the first to recognise that if one accepts the historical relativity of thought while rejecting Hegel's naive optimism that one is compelled to accept nihilism, that there can be no rational basis for human morality because all thought will be superseded with the passage of time[28]. Historicism replaced the distinction between 'good' and 'evil with that between 'progressive' and 'reactionary'[29]. When history itself failed to show the pattern that philosophers have laid out for it, and the development of techno-science led not to the perfection of human justice but to 'incredible barbarisation', it became clear that history was no plausible index of morality[30]. But with traditional, natural standards of morality obliterated, the only space left was down - into the nihilistic abyss. In this sense the problem of nihilism is a result of the catastrophes beginning with the First World War. Yet this catastrophe simply revealed the pre-existing aporia of modern thought, that was already diagnosed by Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century.

German nihilism is a moral protest against the modern civilization of 'the West', a civilization of English origin[31]. It arises not from a love of war but a commitment to the dying morality of the 'closed society', against the threat of the 'open society'[32]. What Strauss means by the 'open society' of English origin is the economistic liberalism first imagined by Hobbes and Locke. Lowering the standards of morality to the satisfaction of the enlightened self-interest of commercial actors, it stripped human life of its excellence, courage and grandeur[33]. The whole thrust of German philosophy is against the idea of morality as the simple maximisation of happiness and utility through the economisation of life, and for the principles of 'self-sacrifice' and 'self-denial', of spiritual and military greatness[34]. Strauss lists the leading Weimar nihilists as: 'Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Junger, Heidegger'[35]. His analysis closely tracks Spengler's The Decline of the West. Strauss proposes that what distinguishes German nihilism from German militarism, is that where the latter accords genuine value to Kultur and peace, the former considers Kultur to have expired and so rejects the value of peace, embracing violent counter-revolution to rebuild a mythical vision of the pre-modern world[36]. Revolt becomes 'the only virtue left: the implication is that we live in an age of decline, of the decline of the West, in an age of

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28 Leo Strauss, 'Relativism', in Thomas L. Pangle (eds.), *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism.* University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 25.

29 Strauss, Progress or Return?, p. 27.

30 Ibid. p. 29.

31 Strauss, German Nihilism, pp. 358, 372.

32 Ibid. pp. 358-359.

33 Ibid. pp. 358, 369-375.

34 Strauss here reveals his sympathy for the nihilist reaction against modern civilization. 'Against that debasement of morality, and against the concomitant decline of a truly philosophic spirit, the thought of Germany stood up, to the lasting honour of Germany'. Strauss earlier writes of the nihilist's 'moral protest' against modern civilization as 'perhaps even not entirely unsound'. His evident intention is to condone their critique of modern civilization while rejecting their collapse into the rejection of civilization *tout court*. Quotes from Strauss, German Nihilism, p. 371, 359.

35 Strauss, German Nihilism, p. 362.

36 Ibid. pp. 369-370.

civilisation as distinguished from, and opposed to culture'. The very movement described as 'progress' by Western proponents of the open society is, in fact, a declension[37]. Recall that Hobbes systematically attacked the traditional virtues of self-restraint and glory, that Machiavelli had founded society on the princely quest for glory through rule over others, but that for Hobbes this was inimical to commodious living. It is this virtue, the virtue of glory, courage and domination, which the German nihilists long for.

> 'What they hated, was the very prospect of a world in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, in which everyone would have his little pleasure by day and his little pleasure by night, a world in which no great heart could beat and no great soul could breathe, a world without real, unmetaphoric, sacrifice, i.e. a world without blood, sweat, and tears'.[38]

We are now in a position to return to Fukuyama. It is the 'crisis of modern Western civilization' described by Strauss that Fukuyama intended to respond to in delivering his lecture in Chicago in 1989. He saw this as the underlying significance of Bloom's provocation, 'The Decline of the West?' Fukuyama frames The End of History and the Last Man as a response to two intersecting crises, the collapse of the idea of progress and pervasive spirit of pessimism of the twentieth century, and the destruction of 'the philosophical props holding up Western liberal democracy' by the total relativism of Nietzsche, Heidegger and their followers. Fukuyama titles his first chapter, simply, 'Our Pessimism'[39]. He forewarns that the 'most thoughtful minds of this century have seen no reason to think that the world is moving toward what we in the West consider decent and humane political institutions - that is, liberal democracy', having 'concluded that there is no such thing as History'. The First World War was 'the critical event'. Its greatest impact was not its material destruction, but 'psychological'. It led to a collapse in the belief that history betrayed a pattern. As world war gave way to the Holocaust in the heart of Europe, and the rise of totalitarian states committed to the absolute control of all aspects of life and 'world domination', the idea that technology yielded a 'parallel moral progress in man' dissipated. What follows is a lucid statement of Europe's *deminutio capitis*:

> 'People in the West themselves came to question whether liberal democracy was in fact a general aspiration of all mankind, and whether their earlier confidence did not reflect a narrow ethnocentrism. As Europeans were forced to confront the non-

37 Ibid. p. 358.

38 Ibid. p. 360.

39 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, pp. 3-7.

> European world, first as colonial masters, then as patrons during the Cold War and theoretical equals in a world of sovereign nation states, they came to question the universality of their own ideals. The suicidal self-destructiveness of the European state system in the two world wars gave lie to the notion of superior Western rationality, while the distinction between civilized and barbarian that was instinctive to Europeans in the nineteenth century was much harder to make after the Nazi death camps. Instead of human history leading in a single direction, there seemed to be as many goals as there were peoples or civilizations, with liberal democracy having no privileged position among them.'[40]

It is no surprise, Fukuyama advises, that the only philosophies of history to gain any traction in the twentieth century were 'those like Spengler and Toynbee who described the decline and decay of Western values and institutions'[41]. All the while, the effect of these successive political crises on the self-confidence of the West was exacerbated by a parallel 'crisis of Western rationalism'[42]. For this 'left liberal democracy without the intellectual resources with which to defend itself'. German relativism was born 'as a revolt against the materialism of the commercial world created by France and that archetype of bourgeois societies, Britain', replacing the Western doctrine of liberal democracy with that of 'strength and domination', 'courage and heroism'[43]. Fukuyama here reveals his driving goal. He wants to draw upon the hopeful trends towards liberal democracy to rehabilitate 'the idea of a universal and directional history', and so overcome 'the relativist impasse of modern thought'.

A Universal History of Bourgeois Isothymia

I propose that Fukuyama's solution to the crisis of Western civilization has two essential components. The first is to repeal the culmination of modernity in Strauss' third wave of nihilism by rehabilitating the second and first waves of modernity. Which is to say that Fukuyama wants to redeem the idea of progress and Hobbesian liberalism. He attempts to show that history observes the parallel progress of economics and society in a process immune to telluric catastrophe, and to reaffirm Hobbes' bourgeois ethos by marrying it with a Hegelian conception of mutual recognition. The second is to refound morality on a Hegelian theory of history, inspired by Kojeve, combined with a trans-historical standard grounded in a Platonic theory of human nature, inspired by Strauss. I begin with Fukuyama's defence of the second wave of modernity, of the idea of universal progress, for this is the crux of *The End of History and the Last Man*.

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40 Ibid. p. 7.

41 Ibid. pp. 68-70.

42 Ibid. p. 11.

43 Ibid. pp. 332-335.

The Hegelian construction of *The End of History* is complicated by the fact that it operates at two levels. Fukuyama's substantive argument for a universal history has 'two pillars', the homogenising logic of scientific rationality, and the Hegelian struggle for recognition. Only the second of these is explicitly Hegelian. But *both* of these arguments are offered in defence of the existence of a universal and directional history, and Fukuyama conceives this kind of history along Hegelian lines. He contends that all history is dialectical in character, that it proceeds on the basis of the principle of non-contradiction, where incoherence in ideas and practices are gradually eliminated in the staged progression to higher levels of rational synthesis, culminating in a plateau free of all internal contradictions, the 'end of history'[44]. Indeed he offers the first pillar of his argument as to the homogenising logic of scientific rationality as a replacement for Marx's philosophy of history, namely, it follows the same dialectical structure but leads not to communism but capitalism[45]. The second pillar of his argument, Hegel's struggle for recognition, naturally shares this dialectical form. Fukuyama's intention, then, is to offer a duet of arguments in defence of a dialectical conception of history as universal and progressive - in defence of the defining ideas of the second wave of modernity. I want to take each of these arguments in turn.

Fukuyama dubs the first pillar of his argument 'the mechanism of desire'. Science is a cumulative and directional enterprise in that it works to expand the frontiers of inherited knowledge through an apodictic method accessible to everyone[46]. Unlike poetry, theatre or literature, there is a linear accumulation of accepted knowledge over time, and that knowledge is mastered not just by a small group of virtuosos, but anyone with a baseline of education. Fukuyama treats scientific rationality as a form of means-end instrumental rationality that pertains not just to techno-scientific knowledge, but bureaucratic organisation. It is found not just in the bounding progress of physics or the improvement of transport, for instance, but in the logic of the organisation of production through the division of labour, supply chains and labour mobility. It is for this reason that scientific rationality brings about the reformation of the whole structure of pre-modern society, creating new forms of urbanisation, networks and bureaucracies[47]. But if scientific rationality has a direction, what slides societies along this pathway? One mechanism for the spread of scientific rationality is 'defensive modernisation', that the rational organisation of society confers decisive military benefits, and so any society that wishes to maintain its autonomy must imitate the manufacturing and organisational forms of its most developed rivals[48]. But the primary

44 Ibid. pp. 57-61.

45 Ibid. pp. 131-135.

46 Ibid. pp. 72-73.

47 Ibid. p. 77.

48 Ibid. p. 73.

mechanism for the spread of scientific rationality is that which gives Fukuyama's argument its name, the 'mechanism of desire'. Economic development is driven, above all, by the unquenchable desire for commodities. As we shall see this is of crucial importance, for Fukuyama argues that it rests on the emergence of Hobbes' bourgeois ethos.

In order to connect the dots of these abstract propositions about the homogenising power of scientific rationality to the specific configuration of free market capitalism, Fukuyama appeals to history. In the developed world the demands of post-industrial society favour a price system communicating information among decentralised units able to pursue innovation and integrated into a global division of labour[49]. Stalin may have been able to launch communism into the age of coal and steel, but the complexities of post-industrial society are beyond the possible knowledge of centralised planners. Hayek revealed the epistemological impotence of central planning fifty years before economic stagnation finally brought the Soviet Union's into disrepair[50]. Deng Xiaoping at least had the courage face up to the demands of scientific rationality and adjust China's course[51]. In the developing world dependency theory and the idea that the world economic system is locked into a hierarchical division of labour between an industrial core and underdeveloped periphery has been exploded by the 'Asian miracle'. Within the space of a generation, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have boot-strapped themselves into high value-added global supply chains through aggressive programmes of export-led growth[52].

It is notable that the stress of Fukuyama's mirrors Strauss' critique of progress. Fukuyama is at pains to argue that techno-scientific progress is irreversible, that there are no longer 'barbarians at the gates'[53]. He asks, candidly, 'Is it possible for mankind as a whole to reverse the directionality of history through the rejection or loss of the scientific method'. He rejects the notion that environmentalism can premise the arrest of scientific development given the bourgeois ethos of developed countries, the ingrained expectation of comfort, hedonism and security, and the fact that the best solution to environmental problems may be the creation of new forms of technologies and energy sources. At the same time a cataclysmic exchange of nuclear weapons might obliterate the material achievements of techno-science, but they could not destroy the 'memory and method' of science. One of the critical objectives of Fukuyama's argument is to vindicate the parallelism of economic and societal progress, to show that he first brings about the conditions for the second through a process of concatenation. Namely, economic development creates educated and middle-

49 Ibid. pp. 92-94.

50 Francis Fukuyama, 1999, Second Thoughts: Last Man in a Bottle, *The National Interest*, 56, pp. 16-33. See especially p. 27.

51 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 96.

52 Ibid. pp. 99-101.

53 Ibid. pp. 82-88.

class citizens who desire to be recognised in the political process, who are able to raise their heads above water to ask not only of basic material necessities, but their right to an equal status to others qua humans[54]. Fukuyama is emphatic, however, that while techno-scientific development creates propitious conditions for the birth of liberal democracy, it is not in itself the *cause* of liberal democracy. Indeed, the first pillar of his argument - scientific rationality - has profound limitations: it cannot explain pre-modern history, the discontinuities and conflicts of history, the conditions for its own emergence, or the rise of liberal democracy[55]. Fukuyama's construction rests on the primacy of his second pillar, the 'struggle for recognition'.

It is necessary at this point to break from *The End of History and the Last Man*. Reflecting upon his thesis in 1995, Fukuyama writes that the moral grounding of liberal democracy has 'been put in jeopardy by the philosophical "crisis of modernity" inaugurated by Nietzsche and Heidegger', and that 'this aporia, discussed most seriously by the Strauss-Kojeve debate, is the central intellectual issue of our age'[56]. He goes on to explain that 'the Strauss-Kojeve debate was one of the most important of twentieth-century discussions, because these two thinkers tried to address this problem from diametrically opposite positions, those of history and of nature'. Alexandre Kojeve was born in Russia, before moving to Weimar Germany to take his doctorate under Karl Jaspers, and then to Paris to deliver a series of highly influential lectures on Hegel, and finally joining the French bureaucracy of the emerging European Economic Community after the Second World War. Strauss and Kojeve were close friends. Strauss tried to arrange a visiting lectureship at Chicago for Kojeve, and though the arrangement fell through, he sent Bloom to Paris to study under Kojeve. Bloom would later edit the English translation of Kojeve's famous lectures on Hegel's Phenomenology. When Strauss published his monograph On Tyranny, he asked Kojeve to write a review. These were later published together in a single volume, along with Strauss' reply to Kojeve's review, and their correspondence. This is the 'Strauss-Kojeve' debate to which Fukuyama alludes. I am proposing that the debate is of special importance for Fukuyama because he synthesises Kojeve and Strauss' solution to the aporia of modern Western civilization: respectively, a Hegelian theory of dialectics and a trans-historical standard of nature. But for the present moment I am concerned only with the first of these, Fukuyama's use of Kojeve's Hegel. Fukuyama speaks of his own Hegelianism as 'Hegel-as-interpreted-by-Kojeve'[57].

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54 Ibid. pp. 115-116, 205-206.

55 Ibid. pp. 134-135.

56 Ibid. pp. 27, 37.

57 Ibid. p. 144.

What then is Kojeve's solution to the crisis of modernity as it is found in his debate with Strauss, On Tyranny? The ostensible subject of the debate is a minor work by Xenophon, Hiero, a dialogue between the tyrant Hiero, and the wise poet Simonides. Invited to court, Simonides asks Hiero of the grandeur and pleasures of being a tyrant, unknown to the private man. Hiero subverts the expectations of the reader by quashing Simonides' assumption. What appear to be benefits from the outside are, in truth, burdens. 'I tell you that the tyrant has the least share of the greatest goods, and possesses the greatest share of the greatest evils'[58]. Finally, Simonides offers his advice for how Hiero might acquire 'the love' of his subjects. In reality, the dialogue is a foil for Strauss and Kojeve to reflect on their own philosophical beliefs. For our purposes, we need to isolate two features of Kojeve's interpretation.

First, Kojeve interprets Xenophon's dialogue through Hegel's theory of recognition. His reading runs as follows[59]. As Hiero fulminates against the hollow splendour of the tyrant, Simonides objects that all these complaints are worthless because the supreme objective of all human striving is glory, and in this the tyrant is better off than anyone. Simonides, Kojeve tells us, is an aristocrat playing the role of Hegel's 'master'. Simonides recognises that the quest for glory is not innate in all humans, but only in born masters. For the master there is no joy apart from honour. It is missing in those of servile nature, in 'slaves'. Kojeve interjects that Simonides is surely wrong that the only pleasure is glory. For humans also exhibit pleasure in the pursuit of work, in the intrinsic achievement and creation of modifying nature to one's needs. In this sense the aristocratic virtue of glory needs to be complemented by the bourgeois value of work.

Hiero readily accepts Simonides' judgement that glory is the objective of all human striving, but laments that in this, too, the tyrant is lacking. Hiero's subjects pay him honour not from love, respect and devotion, but from the pangs of terror he inspires in them. This, Kojeve tells us, encapsulates Hegel's tragedy of the master. Humans are distinguished from the creaturely existence of animals by their ability to pursue higher desires than self-preservation, by their desire to seek the recognition of others qua human. And the highest form of this recognition is the willingness to sacrifice one's life, to give over one's biological existence as an animal, for the sake of the peculiarly human value of recognition. Only masters are willing to enter the struggle for life and death, to risk their lives for the sake of the emulation, respect and honour of other humans. Slaves cower from the struggle, and

58 Leo Strauss, 2000, *On Tyranny: Including the Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence*. Edited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, p. 8.

59 Alexandre Kojeve, 2000, 'Tyranny and Wisdom', in Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (eds.), *On Tyranny*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, pp. 139-146.

willingly submit to the chains of the masters rather than face death. Working for their own and their master's self-preservation, they reduce themselves to an animal existence, unable to affirm themselves as humans qua humans. But the masters, victorious in their struggle for recognition, confront a tragedy. For in their domination of the slaves, they enjoy only the admiration of humans unworthy of humanity, of humans living a servile animal existence. Kojeve adds, however, that Hiero is wrong to suggest that his authority depends on fear alone, that none of his subjects willingly honour and obey his word. Rule through pure terror is impossible, for terror involves the threat or use of physical force, and no one is able to control a large group of able-bodied humans through physical force alone. In the last instance all rule depends on some degree of authority. What Hiero truly complains of is the fact that his authority is not universal, and that for this reason his desire for recognition is not fully 'satisfied'. The logical culmination of the desire for recognition is, Kojeve finds, a condition of universal recognition.

Second, against Strauss' zetetic style of philosophy Kojeve contraposes 'the method of historical verification'[60]. He recapitulates the dialectical theory that philosophical contradictions are worked out by the immanent logic of the historical process, as successive socio-political regimes collapse in upon their internal contradictions, which are then synthesised into higher forms of existence, until humankind reaches a terminal crescendo: the end of history. This is the *historical* grounding that Fukuyama offers for 'modern Western civilization'. He frames the two pillars of his universal history with this Hegelian dialectic. We have already seen the first pillar, the homogenising power of scientific rationality. The second pillar is Hegel's struggle for recognition, as interpreted by Kojeve in On Tyranny.

Fukuyama adopts Kojeve's account of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as the basis for the 'second pillar' of his universal history. He draws on Kojeve's 1947 lectures on Hegel's Phenomenology to complete the narrative we found in On Tyranny[61]. After the battle for 'pure prestige' and the victory of the master over the slave, this dialectical compound belies a contradiction on both sides, for neither are fully 'satisfied'. The master's 'tragedy' is that he has won the emulation of a creaturely being unworthy of recognising him. His glory rings hollow. The slave is stripped of all recognition as a human, and is treated as a mere thing. But it is this social death that catalyses the slave to recover their humanity through work. In labouring for the self-preservation of the master, they begin to learn of duty and self-discipline, and to apply themselves to the creative transformation of nature. Eventually the slave comes to realise that they can modify not just the external world of nature, but their

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60 Kojeve, 2000, 'Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence', in Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (eds.), *On Tyranny*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, pp. 167-169.

61 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, pp. 192-199.

own nature. Conceiving of the idea of freedom, the slave tries to bridge the discrepancy between their submission and the ideal of liberation through a 'long and painful' course of self-education. The slave constructs a succession of 'slave ideologies' bridging this gap, culminating in Christianity. Christianity posits the universal equality of humans under God, but this is an equality of spirit consummated in the imaginary Hereafter. It was a projection of the slave's aporia, the disjuncture between their subjective desire for liberation and their objective animal existence. For Hegel, it was the French Revolution when this chain of slave moralities finally resolved itself in an eruption when the slaves put their life on the line for liberation, affirmed their status as humans worthy of valuation, and overthrew the aristocracy to create a liberal regime founded on the equal recognition of all humans.

Fukuyama uses this framework to read the history of the twentieth century as a battle of competing frameworks of legitimacy. The master's quest for glory and slave's ideologies of liberation have led to myriad concepts of legitimacy that regimes have called upon to license their rule[62]. 'Each of these forms of legitimacy prior to modern liberalism was based on some form of lordship and bondage', however[63]. Fukuyama draws on Kojeve to define legitimacy as the extent of a ruler's willing support[64]. Rule through terror is impossible. Paraphrasing Kojeve, 'A tyrant can rule his children, old men, or perhaps his wife by force, if he is physically stronger than they are, but he is not likely to be able to rule more than two or three people in this fashion'. It is this conception of legitimacy that underlies Fukuyama's analysis of the rise and fall of communist 'totalitarianism'. Soviet rule depended upon the total control of every aspect of human life, the complete extirpation of independent private and civic activity, through the remaking of humans as instruments of the collective[65]. But the desire to be recognised as a human worthy of valuation could not be killed. Purges, famines, show trials: throughout them all, the Soviet people did not fail to grasp the criminal injustice and degradation of Stalinism[66]. Neither was totalitarianism sustainable. When Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 and introduced the 'thaw', power within Soviet society rebalanced from the state to civil society. As the bloodletting stopped, free thought, civic association, black market trade, and dissent became possible at the edges of Soviet life. The illegitimacy of communism became an accepted fact of Soviet life, at every reach of society. The Soviet Union's rapid collapse 'could not have occurred overnight, suggesting that totalitarianism as

62 Ibid. pp. 257-259, 279.

63 Ibid. p. 279.

64 Ibid. p. 15.

65 Ibid. pp. 23-24.

66 Ibid. pp. 29-30, 166-169.

a system had failed well before the 1980s'[67]. It was a hollow society, without any legitimate basis of support.

As for the Right, fascism was never a universal doctrine capable of commanding wide recognition[68]. It was a doctrine of German supremacy aspiring to the domination and enslavement of what it considered to be its racial and national inferiors. Fascism's particularistic militarism belied a fatal contradiction, for it inevitably broke down on contact with the rest of the world. All that was left in its wake on the Right were a series of unsystematic dictatorships without any coherent concept of legitimacy, that more often than not conceded the principle of liberal democracy but argued that their particular society was not yet ready for this gift[69]. When crises inevitably hit, they crumpled one-by-one. Starting with the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, military dictatorships have been swept away in South Europe, Latin America and South Asia in a contagion of liberation.

Fukuyama follows Kojeve in bringing this dialectic to a conclusion in 'the universal and homogenous' state[70]. Universal in that it extends recognition to all humans qua humans independent of their membership of any particular racial, national or civic group. Classless in that it dissolves the aristocratic distinction between masters and slaves to hold all persons equal. Kojeve associated this ideal with Soviet communism; Fukuyama identifies it with liberal democratic capitalism. Fukuyama inserts the caveat that this mode of recognition is universal within the confines of the liberal state, without any justification besides - presumably - the objective fact of history that liberal societies are divided into independent sovereign states. At this point Fukuyama switches back to the Hegelian construction of his universal history as a whole: it is the culmination of both his pillars, economic rationality and liberal recognition, that results in the universal and homogenous state. What is the internal relationship of these two strands? Recall that scientific rationality is a linear space of possible knowledge, but the mere fact of its existence does not cause the human pursuit of techno-science. Rather, humans are driven along this pathway by 'defensive modernisation' and, most importantly, by what he called 'the mechanism of desire'. Fukuyama's first pillar, then, falls back upon a revolution in human consciousness, the unleashing of human hedonism, labour and acquisitiveness.

In describing this revolution Fukuyama offers an almost exact replication of Strauss' description of Hobbes' and Locke's bourgeois ethos. Hobbes conceives of freedom negatively as the absence of physical interference by an external agent: that is, the

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67 Ibid. p. 31.

68 Ibid. pp. 16-17.

69 Ibid. pp. 13-22.

70 Ibid. pp. 200-203.

conditions of mere animal self-preservation[71]. It is this miserly virtue that gives sovereign government its foundation and rationale[72]. In 'the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition', then, it is not the specifically human virtue of Hegelian recognition that animates political life, but the desire for self-preservation[73]. With the establishment of stable government, this interest expands into 'a right not simply to a bare physical existence, but to a comfortable and potentially wealthy one as well'[74]. Hobbes and Locke invent 'the bourgeois: the human being narrowly consumed with his own immediate self-preservation and material well-being'. As Kojeve hints in On Tyranny, this bourgeois ethos and aristocratic honour complement one another. Fukuyama skilfully weaves these two psychologies together in such a way that they negate each other's limitations. Hegelian recognition offsets what Strauss had sympathetically described as the nihilist's 'moral protest' against modern civilization: a life committed to easy comfort, directionless hedonism and petty labours. Fukuyama concedes that there is 'something deeply contemptible about a man who cannot raise his sights higher than his own narrow self-interests and physical needs'[75]. Fukuyama concedes the force of Nietzsche's complaints against 'a society of bourgeois who aspired to nothing more than their own comfortable self-preservation'[76]. Yet the desire to be recognised, to protest that one is a human, to be worthy of admiration and respect - as understood by Hegel - recovers the 'moral dimension of human life that is entirely missing in the society conceived by Hobbes and Locke'[77]. What liberal democracies have witnessed is not the recession of the desire for recognition but its transmutation. Fukuyama distinguishes between the desire to be recognised through establishing one's superiority over others (megalothymia), and the desire to be recognised through the assignment of equal rights to all (isothymia). Modernity has witnessed the death of the princely glory of megalothymia, but this has been replaced by a liberal regime of mutual recognition: isothymia. It is this which allows Fukuyama to vindicate Strauss' first wave of modernity, to accept the substance of Strauss' complaints - that Hobbes' bourgeois ethos amounts to a lowering of human horizons, a miserly existence without courage or honour - but to offset them with Kojeve's theory of recognition.

How did isothymia replace megalothymia? It is here that we need to turn to the obverse of Fukuyama's argument, that Hobbes' bourgeois ethos off-sets the imperial quest for glory inherent in the human struggle for recognition. First, the transformation of humans into bourgeois hedonists represents a rebalancing of the human psyche away from the desire for

71 Ibid. p. 148.
72 Ibid. pp. 154-157.
73 Ibid. pp. 153, 203.
74 Ibid. pp. 158-160.
75 Ibid. p. 161.
76 Ibid. p. 188.
77 Ibid. p. 161.

recognition, and towards the pursuit of the material conditions of life. History ends 'with the modern bourgeois inhabitant of contemporary liberal democracies, who pursues material gain rather than glory'[78]. The desire for glory and honour has been tamed by a double process, the widespread 'economization of life', and the advent of liberal rights founded in 'isothymia'[79]. But in Fukuyama's telling the first of these factors helped bring about the conditions in which the second was possible. Economic development consolidates the human psyche around desire, impregnates the idea of freedom in the slave, and breaks down class barriers through education[80]. Without this prior transformation humans would be languished in the master's battle for 'pure prestige'. Just as recognition lifts humans above a mere animal existence committed to self-preservation, so the bourgeois ethos of self-preservation creates the conditions for the taming of recognition.

So far, we have shown how Fukuyama redeems the second wave of modernity in a dialectical theory of history, and the first wave of modernity through a synthesis of Hegelian isothymia and Hobbesian self-preservation, in an argument whose two pillars - economic development, the struggle for recognition - are justified through Kojeve's 'method of historical verification'. The latter is one half of the standard for the vindication of 'modern Western civilization' that Fukuyama finds in On Tyranny. We have yet to see the other half, Strauss' attempt to reground morality in a standard of 'nature'. In their correspondence over Xenophon's dialogue, Strauss objects to Kojeve's historicism:

> 'It is evident that the philosophy of nature is indispensable. How else can the uniqueness of the historical process be accounted for?... Besides, why should one, temporal, finite earth not be subject to cataclysms (every 100,000,000 years), with total or partial repetitions of the historical process? Only a teleological concept of nature can help out here.'[81]

Although it is buried in *The End of History*'s endnotes, Fukuyama quotes this passage in defence of his adoption of a 'trans-historical standard' of history grounded in nature. Elsewhere, he writes of Strauss' critique of Kojeve: 'Strauss shows quite convincingly that history does not in the end provide a way out'[82]. The problem with pure historicism is that, if all thought is relative to one's time, how can one possibly know whether one has reached

78 Ibid. p. 189.

79 Ibid. p. 190.

80 Ibid. pp. 189-190, 205-206.

81 Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, p. 237.

82 Francis Fukuyama, Reflections on the End of History: Five Years Later, *History and Theory*, 34(2), pp. 27-43. See especially p. 37.

'the end of history' or not[83]? Some further, extra-historical standard is the only escape. In this sense Fukuyama accepts the thrust of Strauss' critique of modern philosophy, and returns to a pre-modern philosophy grounded in human nature: Plato's tripartite division of the soul into desire, reason and thymos[84]. He embeds his universal history in this over-arching psychology. This allows Fukuyama to resolve the two pillars of his universal history into a unity, as the expression of different parts of a single psychology. Liberal capitalism represents the highest satisfaction of the desiring part of humans' soul as filtered by means-end reason. Liberal democracy is the highest expression of 'thymos' as regulated by rational universal homogeneity, a concept that Fukuyama takes to overlap with Kojeve's struggle for recognition: the human need for respect, dignity and valuation[85]. Fukuyama suggests that Kojeve's reading of Hegel was naturalised all along, that Kojeve's Hegel is 'anthropologised'[86].

Fukuyama accepts an attenuated version of another of Strauss' objections to Kojeve: that the Hegelian vision of the 'end of history' resembles Nietzsche's depiction of the 'last man', the lowly, self-interested representative of Zivilisation that so agitated the Conservative Revolution[87]. Read carefully, however, Fukuyama gives this view little credence. He offers that we 'might' come to the conclusion that no regime 'is able to satisfy all men in all places', and that our dissatisfaction is not the result of the incomplete realisation of liberal democracy, but a 'dissatisfaction with liberty and equality'[88]. He soon concludes, however, that 'liberal democracy gives fullest scope to all three parts' of our psychology, that 'liberal democracy is the political system that best satisfies' rational desire and rational thymos in balance[89]. Our fear should not be that liberal democracy will falter, but that we shall fail to recognise its blessings, lose hold of the objective foundations of our morality, and collapse once more into relativism.

83 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 137.

84 Ibid. pp. 163-164.

85 Ibid. pp. 164-165.

86 Ibid. p. 207.

87 Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, pp. 208, 291; Fukuyama, *The End of History*, pp. 328-339.

88 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 334.

89 Ibid. p. 337.

Chapter 7: A Modern Theodicy

In The Law of Peoples ('LP') John Rawls sets out a theory of 'moral learning' to show that societies that enter into cooperation with 'liberal and decent civilization' will gradually come to affirm 'the ideals and principles their civilization specifies'[1] . In a curious remark, Rawls then adds that the law of peoples as he envisions it, sets out the 'principles of the Law of all civilized peoples'. Reflecting on a hypothetical scenario in which the Society of Peoples confronts an Aztec-like society that practices human sacrifice, Rawls protests that the prohibition on human sacrifice 'is not a principle of our civilization. Rather, it is a principle of civilization'[2] .

What do these comments signify? A preliminary answer is this. Rawls has long held the view that political philosophy ought to start from a conception of practices as they actually exist[3]. 'We must always start from where we now are', Rawls advises[4]. Rawls conceives of the subject of international justice as the practice of international society, the laws and norms of 'civilization' observed in the interaction of states. Rawls informs us at the outset of LP that he conceives of the 'Society of Peoples' as a body of 'principles and norms of international law and practice', while pointing to the affinity of his ideal with R.J. Vincent's idea of the ius gentium intra s[5]. Vincent, an English School theorist, meant by this phrase that human rights have been integrated into the norms and laws of international society, but they have done so through the actions and behaviour of states, and are no sign of the emergence of a 'cosmopolitan society'[6]. States are converging into like units internally, but they are not disappearing. Vincent's thesis tracks Rawls' ideal of a society of peoples converging on the principles of 'liberal and decent civilization'. Later on, Rawls endorses Terry Nardin's - another affiliate of the English School - view that human rights define the limits of reasonable pluralism among peoples[7]. These are the principles of civilization that the hypothetical Aztec-society betray.

Rawls may start with international society as it presently exists, but he does not stop there. Rawls injects the status quo with a utopian potential by using his theory of moral learning to ground the possibility of the eradication of 'great evil' from the world through the assimilation

1 John Rawls, 1999a, The Law of Peoples. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 112-113.

2 John Rawls, 1998, 'Doyle, Michael', Box 39, Folder 19, Rawls Papers, (HUM 48), Harvard University Archives ('Rawls Papers').

3 Aaron James, 2005, Constructing Justice for Existing Practice: Rawls and the Status Quo, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 33(3), pp.281-316.

4 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 121.

5 Ibid., p. 3.

6 R.J. Vincent, 1981, *Human Rights and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, see especially pp. 151-152.

7 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 80.

of all societies into the law of peoples. At its culmination liberal civilization and the world are coextensive. This vision lies far beyond anything imagined by the English School. I argue that Rawls' ambition matches that of Fukuyama. The two of them share three broad aims: (i) they want to vindicate liberal civilization by demonstrating that it is the seat of objective morality; (ii) in support of this argument they draw upon history to construct a theory of progress (or 'moral learning') that redeems the possibility of the assimilation of all societies into liberal civilization; (iii) this vision is a response to Spengler's The Decline of the West and the threat of nihilism.

These are weighty claims that cut against the grain of how Rawls is usually read. LP has been overwhelmingly treated as an intervention in the field of 'global justice' since its publication in 1999[8]. Its defence of a form of ethical partialism that licenses only limited global redistribution was widely received as a response to those 'Rawlsians' who had tried to globalise the difference principle. In this chapter, I offer a different and widely overlooked interpretation. I argue that LP is a secular theodicy.

Rawls wants to construct a realistic utopia to show that the world contains the possibility of perfect justice, and that it is, for this reason, fundamentally good. Rawls uses a modified version of Kant's doctrine of practical faith to adopt the conditions of the possibility of this realistic utopia. This argument has two steps. First, that evil is a contingent artefact of our corruption by unjust institutions, and that our underlying capacities are naturally good. Second, that there are forces in history that can liberate us from evil, activate our moral nature, and help build a just society. There are, I suggest, striking homologies between this argument and the Christian theodicy that Rawls submitted for his senior thesis.

One catalyst for this interpretation was my discovery of an unpublished draft in which Rawls himself speaks of LP as a 'theodicy'[9]. This should not come entirely as a surprise. Many of those closest to Rawls report that his life and work were animated by a deeply 'religious attitude'[10], while a recent wave of scholars have brought to light the lasting importance of theology to Rawls' thought[11].

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8 For a representative selection of responses, see Rex Martin and David A. Reidy, eds., 2006, *Rawls's Law of Peoples: A Realistic Utopia*. Blackwell: Malden, USA.

9 John Rawls, 1995a, 'Law of Peoples, P.U. Seminar', Box 15, Folder 10, Rawls Papers, p. 10.
('Rawls papers').

10 John Rawls, 2009, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With 'On My Religion'*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, p. 5.

11 David A. Reidy, 2010, Rawls's Religion and Justice as Fairness. *History of Political Thought,* 31(2), pp. 309-343; Paul J. Weithman, 2016, *Rawls, Political Liberalism and Reasonable Faith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; P. Mackenzie Bok, 2017, To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Post-war America. *Modern Intellectual History,* 14(1), pp. 153-185; Eric Nelson, 2019, *The Theology of Liberalism: Political Philosophy and the Justice of God*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA.

LP begins with the declaration that the ‘great evils of human history’ have been caused by political injustice. Rawls’ intention is to envision those social institutions that would eliminate these injustices, and so, the source of all ‘great evil’. Rawls even lists these evils: ‘unjust war and oppression, religious persecution and the denial of liberty of conscience, starvation and poverty, not to mention genocide and mass murder’. Few readers have taken these words seriously. One exception in Christopher Wellman[12]. He cogently reconstructs how the various features of the law of peoples are intended to eliminate each of these evils. I believe this is broadly right, but that Wellman commits two errors of interpretation. Wellman assumes that any plausible interpretation of LP must be able to account for the inconsistencies identified by Rawls’ cosmopolitan detractors. The problem is this: what some cosmopolitans deem inconsistent tells us little about what Rawls *himself* thought consistency demanded. Hyunseop Kim has made the same mistake. Wellman also fails to recognise why Rawls is preoccupied with evil, that this is one part of a far larger philosophical project – a theodicy.

Kim[13], and in a different way, David Reidy[14], offer another revisionist interpretation: that the law of peoples is designed to protect liberal societies from external sources of instability. In Section 4 I argue, similarly, that Rawls considers a just and stable international community to be a condition of the full development of the internal justice of societies. But Rawls also thinks the converse is true: the internal justice of societies is a condition of the maturation of international justice. These are two interlocking parts of an argument for the possibility of the redemption of humankind.

Sin and Faith

In a private essay written in 1997, ‘On My Religion’, Rawls describes how he experienced a dramatic religious awakening as a sophomore at Princeton, becoming ‘deeply concerned by theology and its doctrines’[15]. Rawls planned to join the Priesthood, and it was only the Second World War that delayed these plans. Rawls does not say what caused this awakening, but we might cite one piece of evidence – a despairing jeremiad, written on the eve of his conversion in summer 1941. Rawls, remarkably, argued that Nazism’s sweeping victory across continental Europe had vindicated Oswald Spengler’s prophecy that Western

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12 Christopher Wellman, 2012, Reinterpreting Rawls’s The Law of Peoples. *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 29(1), pp. 213-232.

13 Hyunseop Kim, 2015, A Stability Interpretation of Rawls’s The Law of Peoples. *Political Theory*, 43(4), pp. 473-499.

14 David A. Reidy, 2017, Moral Psychology, Stability, and The Law of Peoples. *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 30(2), pp. 363-397.

15 Rawls, 2009, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With ‘On My Religion’,* pp. 261-269.

civilization was degenerating, and that its final age would be one of Caeserist war[16]. He took a course with Norman Malcolm on the problem of evil in Spring 1942, before submitting his senior thesis in December: *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* ('SF'). It gives us some reason to take his jeremiad seriously: 'Nazism is profound', Rawls warns, 'but profound in the sense that the Devil is profound'[17]. Rawls searched for an explanation and a salve for its evil.

Rawls begins SF by asserting the truth of the Christian God and the division of all things into two realms[18]. Personality is the spiritual dimension of human beings. Nature is everything extended in space. Persons relate to one another in a qualitatively different way than they relate to nature: they recognise they are interacting with a *person*, not a piece of inert matter. This is the potential basis of community. Indeed, personality is 'made for community' in the 'likeness of God', for humans are capable of faith, responsibility, and love[19]. These relations of givingness and fellowship form *true* community. Pride and jealousy *pervert* community[20]. This is sin, for it repudiates the communal end for which God made humans, and leads to the death of personality itself[21].

Rawls analyses these three categories – nature, personality and community – to formulate a solution to the problem of evil: of 'how personality and community can be achieved in the face of the pervasive sin of the world'[22]. This is the 'chief problem of politics'. Rawls begins by refuting the 'Manichean heresy'[23], the attempt to blame evil on forces outside of the human personality. If evil is intrinsic to nature, we are condemned to sin. But if it is *we* who are responsible for evil, then perhaps it is a contingent part of the world that can be overcome by the reordering of our personality. To defeat Manicheanism Rawls has to tackle the age-old belief that our natural appetites corrupt our motivations and debase humanity. Rawls turns to St. Augustine to argue that we are not corrupted by our flesh, and that the human personality is the locus of sin[24]. Augustine 'knows full well that the order of nature is good'. Rawls draws on a distinction made by Philip Leon to elaborate this conception of the person[25]. 'Egoism' is our natural self-centred drive for definite objects like food, sex, and

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16 John Rawls, 1941, Spengler's Prophecy Realized. *Nassau Literary Magazine*, 99, pp. 46-54.

17 Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With 'On My Religion',* p. 218.

18 Ibid. pp. 110-128.

19 Ibid. pp. 121-122.

20 Ibid. p. 211.

21 Ibid. pp. 203-209.

22 Ibid. p. 127.

23 Ibid. pp. 190-192.

24 Ibid. pp. 141-142, 147-148, 190-192, 200.

25 Ibid. pp. 150-151.

water. ‘Egotism’ is our personal drive for social superiority, that ‘craves honor, distinction, glory and praise’. All sin originates in egotism, in our free choices *qua* personal beings.

Evil is not intrinsic to nature. But to solve the ‘chief problem of politics’, Rawls must also show how we can *escape* the ‘pervasive’ sin of human life. The psychological ‘barriers’ erected by original sin mean that ‘man alone cannot save himself’[26]. Humans can only find salvation through a process of ‘conversion’, a dialectical reckoning with God in which one reveals one’s sin and God manifests his love. The crux of this process is the eventual realisation that everything which one has, is given to one by friends, parents and community – and ultimately, by God himself[27]. This reveals the ‘lie of independence’, shattering the illusions of individual pride and merit. Personality then re-joins community. This renewed *faith* has two effects. Humans obey the Word of God to help restore true community, and love ‘binds community together under God’.

Rawls explains in ‘On My Religion’ that he lost his Christian faith in 1945[28]. He describes several vertiginous episodes. In one case, his friend replaced him at the last minute on a reconnaissance mission with his Colonel. They were quickly spotted by the Japanese, and fatally struck by a mortar. Rawls was most distressed, however, by news of the Holocaust. How could he pray to a God who ‘would not save millions of Jews from Hitler?’ Rawls became incredulous towards divine providence, even disgusted with it. ‘To interpret history as expressing God’s will, God’s will must accord with the most basic ideas of justice’, yet ‘the Holocaust can’t be interpreted in that way, and all attempts to do so that I have read are hideous and evil’. His Christian theodicy faltered.

Redemptive Hope

In the draft in which Rawls calls LP a ‘theodicy’, he disavows Christian theodicy, and turns instead to ‘Rousseau’s answer’[29]. Where theologians try to say that the world ‘is good in the eyes of God’, Rawls wants to ask ‘whether the world is good in our eyes, politically speaking?’ The world is good politically when it contains within itself the possibility of a ‘perfectly just society’.

Rawls’ theodicy revolves around his ‘stability argument’, for it is here that he engages with the empirical possibility of perfect justice. Rawls wants to show that a just society would be

26 Ibid. pp. 222-233.

27 Ibid. pp. 238-251.

28 Ibid. pp. 261-266.

29 Rawls, ‘Law of Peoples, P.U. Seminar’, p. 10.

stable, and that it would be stable not because of the coercion of a Hobbesian sovereign, but the moral fidelity of its citizens. To show that this form of moral community is possible, Rawls has to make the naturalistic equivalent of the two steps of his Christian theodicy: (i) to show that evil is a contingent reflection of human volition, and that there is nothing in our nature that corrupts us; (ii) and that there are forces that can extricate us from evil, and restore us to community. These are Rawls' theories of *natural goodness* and *transition*, which I reconstruct in section 3 and 4. In this section I address how Rawls adopts these theories on 'reasonable faith', and their purpose as a solution to the problem of evil.

In the conclusion of his stability argument in *Political Liberalism* ('PL'), Rawls claims that in trying to show that political liberalism is possible, he is adopting one of the roles that 'Kant gave to philosophy… the defence of reasonable faith'[30]. The same idea appears in LP with a different wording, 'reasonable hope'. Rawls explains that his vision of a 'realistic utopia shows us, in the tradition of the late writings of Kant, the social conditions under which we can reasonably hope' for a just society of peoples[31]. Showing that the world is good cannot be a case of simply describing human behaviour as it currently presents itself, for this is the problem: we live in a world scarred by 'great injustices and widespread social evils'[32]. It is an essential assumption of LP that 'the limits of the possible are not give by the actual', and that we must therefore 'rely on conjecture and speculation, arguing as best we can that the social world we envision is feasible and might actually exist'[33]. This is necessarily an exercise in *hope*.

Kant thinks we can only have motivation to act towards an end when we consider it possible. Yet Kant's description of the *a priori* end of morality is highly quixotic: the 'Highest Good', where happiness is strictly proportional to virtue. Kant tries to resolve this tension by arguing that, although we have no *theoretical* reason to believe this ideal is possible, we should adopt the idea of God as a holy dispenser of happiness for the *practical* purpose of sustaining our devotion to the moral law. In his lectures on Kant, Rawls argues that there is nothing in the categorical imperative to suggest that our acting from morality would actually bring about the Highest Good[34]. It contradicts the logic of Kant's own philosophy. Rawls dismisses the idea as a holdover from Leibniz's apologetics, that assumes happiness must be in strict proportion to virtue because, if this were not so, God would have acted unjustly.

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30 Rawls, John Rawls, 2005, *Political Liberalism*. Columbia University Press: New York, USA, see p. 172.

31 John Rawls, 1999a, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 126.

32 Ibid. p. 89.

33 Ibid. p. 12

34 John Rawls, 2000. In: Barbara Herman (ed.) *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA. See pp. 313-317.

Rawls develops a secular interpretation of Kant's doctrine of practical faith. On this view the end of morality is given by the principles constructed by the categorical imperative, 'the realm of ends'. It can therefore be achieved by our acting from morality, without the need for the intercession of God. But this does require a very powerful practical assumption, namely, that 'the order of nature and social necessities are not unfriendly' to perfect justice, and that they 'contain forces and tendencies that in the longer run tend to bring out, or at least to support, such a realm and to educate mankind so as to further this end'[35]. We must look within the 'endless wars and conquests' for a 'plan of nature to force mankind... to form a confederation of... democratic states, which will then ensure perpetual peace'.

Can we read Rawls' stability argument in the light of Kant's doctrine of reasonable faith? In 1980 Rawls began to set out *A Theory of Justice's* ('TJ') roots in Kantian constructivism – later rearticulated as a form of 'political constructivism'. Constructivism is an exercise of practical reason that constructs objects according to a conception of them[36]. It is not an exercise in theoretical reason that tries to apprehend an independent order of moral facts. Rawls begins his theory by setting out a procedure of construction, the 'original position', modelled on principles of practical reason in union with conceptions of the person and society drawn from liberal political culture. It is essential for Rawls that his conception of the person is modelled on what a person must be like to engage in practical reason: they must be 'reasonable' and 'rational', to have the capacity for a sense of justice and a conception of the good[37]. Rawls then uses this procedure to generate principles of justice.

Stability only enters the picture at this point. Principles of justice are selected in the original position, and then in a second step, we check whether those principles are stable[38]. If they are not, they must be revised. But it is the principles chosen in the first step which guide the selection and interpretation of facts in the second. Rawls explains: 'a constructivist procedure is framed to yield the principles and criteria that specify which facts about actions, institutions, persons, and the social world generally, are relevant in political deliberation'[39]. What is significant about this is that Rawls *starts* with the ideal of the person as reasonable, constructs the principles of justice with a procedure modelled on this assumption, and then uses those principles to select and interpret facts. Rawls writes that 'we must start with the

35 Ibid. See pp. 319-322.

36 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* pp. 89-129.

37 Ibid. p. 108.

38 Ibid. pp. 140-141.

39 Ibid. p. 122.

assumption that a reasonably just political society is possible, and for it to be possible, human beings must have a moral nature'[40].

We see this clearly in Rawls' discussion of moral psychology in PL[41]. Rawls draws this psychology from the ideal of the person as reasonable that he starts with. It 'is not a moral psychology originating in the science of human nature'. Rawls is clear that this psychology has to be consonant with natural psychology. But his declared aim is to identify the 'most reasonable' moral psychology that the 'scope of the world allows'. Rawls admits that, in trying to gauge that scope, we are groping in the dark: 'the difficulty is that beyond the lessons of historical experience and such bits of wisdom as not relying too much on scarce motives and abilities (say, altruism and high intelligence) there is not much to go on. History is full of surprises.' He is forced to go beyond what he can strictly confirm, into the realm of hope. Similarly, when Rawls draws from history to help confirm his stability argument[42], this is a highly stylised form of conjectural history, written to vindicate the principles already chosen in the original position.

Kant believed that when adopting the conditions of the possibility of *a priori* morality our only limit is that we cannot adopt assumptions known by science to be impossible. Rawls employs a more demanding standard in that he thinks that the principles selected within the original position can only be accepted if we can show that a society governed on their basis could emerge and sustain itself as a moral community. Rawls offers 'conjecture and speculation' to give us a reasonable basis of hope in this possibility, but he never spells out how much we have to accept on hope. I return to this point in my discussion of 'democratic peace' in section 4.

LP 'focuses strictly on certain questions connected to whether a realistic utopia is possible'[43]. A realistic utopia extends the boundaries of the possible to show that the social world contains the possibility of perfect justice[44]. We have just seen how Rawls does this: reasonable hope. But what does it achieve? It 'reconciles us to our social world'[45]. In a private paper, 'Political Philosophy as Reconciliation', Rawls writes that one source of our 'need' for reconciliation:

40 Ibid. p. lx.
41 Ibid. pp. 86-88.
42 Ibid. 158-168.
43 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples,* pp. 5-7.
44 John Rawls, 2008. In: Samuel Freeman (ed.) *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, USA. See pp. 10-11.
45 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 11, 127.

> 'is the evident pervasiveness of grave injustice in our social world, and indeed throughout history, arising in part from the will to dominate and to lord it over others, the great enjoyments to which the exercise of a successful will to dominate gives rise, all this abetted by vanity and greed, and other petty vices. But it is not from these propensities alone that injustice arises, but from the collective fears and rivalries of peoples and nations, as these become collective hatreds and anxiety, heightened by the fanaticism and delusions of religion and philosophy.'[46]

The passage is profitably read alongside the section of LP dedicated to the Holocaust. Rawls asks whether a realistic utopia 'is a fantasy… after Auschwitz'[47]. Knowing that humans are capable of Hitler's 'demonic madness', Rawls fears, may 'undermine our hope for the future of our society'. We must 'follow Kant's lead' and envision a 'realistic utopia', so that 'no longer simply longing, our hope becomes reasonable hope'. If we fail, the 'great evils' of others 'destroys us too and seals their victory'. Rawls uses this same phrase – 'great evil' – to describe the atomic bombing of Hiroshima[48], whose results he witnessed first-hand in 1945. Recall, the goal of LP is to eradicate the source of 'the great evils of human history'. When queried by a correspondent about the relevance of the Holocaust, Rawls responds plaintively: 'It's an important topic for me personally and I have spent (wasted) an inordinate amount of time wondering and reading about it'[49].

A realistic utopia establishes a reasonable basis of hope that our social world contains the possibility of perfect justice, reconciling us to the evils of human life by showing that we are, nevertheless, fundamentally moral beings capable of redemption. Its fundamental aim is not the achievement of justice, but to show that because the world *allows* for justice, evil does not condemn humankind. While the realisation of the law of peoples is 'not unimportant', the 'very possibility of such a social order can itself reconcile us to the social world'[50]. But to show that the world *allows* for justice does not, in itself, commit Rawls to any claim about the likelihood or practicality of justice. As we shall see, Rawls' theory of moral learning delineates a progressive moral sequence which he claims, historically, we have travelled a certain way along, and prospectively, we must complete to achieve perfect justice. But nowhere does he claim that progress has to happen or that it is teleologically immanent within history. It is enough for his purposes to show that there is a possible path to redemption.

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46 Rawls J (1993) 'Law of Peoples, Section 61, Political Philosophy as Reconciliation', Box 51, Folder 11, Rawls Papers.

47 Ibid. pp. 19-23.

48John Rawls, 1995b, 50 Years After Hiroshima. *Dissent Magazine*, Summer, pp. 323-327.

49 John Rawls, 1998, 'Doyle, Michael', Box 39, Folder 19, Rawls Papers.

50 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 127-128.

If we lose hope in the end of morality – perfect justice – then morality itself will collapse. Whether we think that justice is possible 'affects us before we come to actual politics, and limits or inspires how we take part in it'[51]. It can 'banish the dangers of resignation and cynicism', and give 'meaning to what we can do today'. Rawls contends that one of the causes behind the rise of Nazism was the cynical political culture of Weimar Germany, where neither Left nor Right believed that 'a decent liberal parliamentary regime was possible'[52]. Hope inoculates us from nihilistic despair.

Rawls laments that if a Society of Peoples is 'not possible, and human beings are largely amoral, if not incurably cynical and self-centred, one might ask, with Kant, whether it is worthwhile for human beings to live on the earth'[53]. Here, we need to turn to Rawls' lectures. Specifically, to Rawls' claim that Kant's philosophy has a 'religious aspect' that grants a 'dominant place' to the 'moral law in conceiving of the world itself'[54]. Morality has a value beyond the mundane: 'it is in following the moral law as it applies to us, and in striving to fashion in ourselves a firm good will, and in shaping our social world accordingly that alone qualifies us to be the final purpose of creation'. Without this, 'our life in the world, and the world itself, lose their meaning and point'. If the conditions of the possibility of morality irredeemably falter, then so does the entire project of morality, and the meaning of a peculiarly human life as ends in ourselves. There would be no path to redemption, and no way to lead a moral life in an evil world.

Natural Goodness: Are we Intrinsically or Contingently Corrupt?

What practical beliefs must Rawls adopt to show that the world is 'friendly' to perfect justice? Rawls has to explain how the overwhelming evidence of human evil across the past and present is compatible with the possibility of our redemption, without relying on supernatural concepts – providential design, the afterlife – to overlay the natural world with a hidden moral economy. If we turn to the draft in which Rawls describes LP as a 'theodicy', we find his solution[55]. Humans are 'naturally good', but the expression of our capacities 'vary depending on the principles of right and justice, or lack thereof, realized in different basic structures of society', and there exists 'principles of right and justice – namely, those of the social contract – that when realized in society educate its citizens to the virtues of justice and

51 Ibid. p. 128.

52 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* pp. lix-lx.

53 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 128.

54 Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. See pp. 158-161. On what Rawls means by 'religious aspect', see Weithman, 2016, *Rawls, Political Liberalism and Reasonable Faith*, pp. 213-241.

55 Rawls, 'Law of Peoples, P.U. Seminar', p. 7.

reasonableness and not to the vices of the old regime'[56]. Rousseau provides the right kind of answer because his explanation of evil – our psychology has been corrupted by political injustice – is compatible with the idea that we have natural capacities for good which, under adventitious conditions, can support perfect justice.

Susan Neiman describes Rousseau as the first 'modern' philosopher of evil: the first to conceive of evil as something created by human volition in a process amenable to naturalistic explanation[57]. On this view evil is something peculiarly human. Indeed, the scope of Rawls' theodicy is merely to show that the 'social world is good'[58]. When Rawls claims that the evils of human history are the result of political injustice, and can be eliminated by the creation of just social institutions, he is recapitulating Rousseau. Rawls draws this connection, quoting *The Social Contract* and writing: 'to say that human nature is good is to say that citizens who grow up under reasonable and just institutions… will affirm these institutions and act to make sure their social world endures'[59].

In some guise, Rawls has *always* had a theory of natural goodness. The point of his Augustinian conception of the person was to show that our nature is innocent and that all evil arises from volitional sin. Kenzie Bok shows how Rawls transposed his conception of the person into a form of Wittgensteinian naturalism in the 1950s, and it was this account that, in the 1960s, evolved into a Rousseaun theory of natural goodness[60]. We find it in the stability argument of *A Theory of Justice*.

Rawls attributes three capacities to humans[61]. We have two forms of natural self-love: an instinctual desire for the means of survival (*amour de soi*), and a social desire for the esteem of others (*amour-propre*). We also possess a moral feeling, an ability to feel the pull of the moral law and adopt it as our regulative desire. Rawls then argues that, when others treat us fairly and care for our self-love, we have an extra-rational tendency to develop natural attitudes of love, trust and fellow-feeling towards them: first when our parents care for our *amour de soi* (stage 1), then when we observe the willingness of our associates to cooperate on fair terms, augmenting our *amour-propre* (stage 2). These attitudes of love and care make us 'liable' to moral feelings, so that when we violate our duties of cooperation, for instance, we feel moral guilt. Eventually, we come to recognise that we, and those we care for, are the beneficiaries of enduring social institutions, and are moved to adopt the underlying *principles* of those institutions as our regulative desire (stage 3). It is only then,

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56 Ibid. p. 7.

57 Susan Neiman, 2002, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, USA.

58Rawls, 'Law of Peoples, P.U. Seminar'.

59 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 7.

60 Bok, To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Post-war America.

61 John Rawls, 1999b, *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, pp. 397-441.

when we explicate our moral emotions with reference to principles that are independent of – but supported by – our particular relationships, that our moral feelings become complete.

Rawls identifies with the 'rationalist' tradition of moral psychology, for whom moral learning involves the 'free development of our innate intellectual and emotional capacities according to their natural bent'[62]. With one exception: our natural attitudes do not *cause* our moral feelings, only *support* them. He is careful to avoid moral naturalism. Rawls associates Rousseau, Kant and Jean Piaget with rationalism. Rousseau's *Emile* is the fount of Rawls' moral psychology, Rawls adopts a Rousseaun interpretation of Kant's psychology (as we shall see momentarily), and Piaget – director of the Jean-Jacque Rousseau Institute – provides Rawls with much of his theory of moral development

Rawls never fundamentally changes the template of this psychology. It provides him with an explanation for why our natural psychology is 'friendly' to the possibility of a moral community. Even though Rawls restructures his stability argument in PL so that his moral psychology is presented as part of the ideal of the reasonable person with which he starts, when he claims that this ideal has to be consonant with natural psychology, he defers to the account in TJ[63]. Yet he does refine and modify it, and elaborate on its significance.

Did Rawls attach the religious significance to Rousseau's theory of natural goodness that he would in the 1990s? David Reidy argues so[64]. Rawls, he points out, claims to have only figured out how to theorise justice within a social contract framework when he 'read Rousseau with understanding' in the mid-to-late 1950s. We know from Rawls' personal library that it was around this time that he read Ernst Cassirer's 1954 *The Question of Jean-Jacque Rousseau*. Cassirer urges that the genealogy of vice in Rousseau's two *Discourses* and the utopianism of *The Social Contract* form one coherent philosophy[65]. Humans are both corrupted, and capable of justice: what holds these apparently contradictory arguments together is the idea of natural goodness. This allows Rousseau to argue that humans are not encumbered by original sin but have been corrupted by society, and that 'ultimate deliverance' is not found through grace but in the reformation of society into a 'free form of political and ethical community'. Cassirer urges that Rousseau's philosophy is a solution to the 'theodicy problem', that 'consisted in his removing the burden of responsibility from God and putting it on human society'. This is suggestive, but scarcely dispositive.

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62 Ibid. p. 401.

63 See Thomas Baldwin, 2008, Rawls and Moral Psychology. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 3, see pp. 247-271 for an explanation of how Rawls reconciles natural psychology and constructivism.

64 Reidy, 2010, Rawls's Religion and Justice as Fairness. See p. 328.

65 Errnst Cassirer, 1989, *The Question of Jean-Jacque Rousseau.* Yale University Press: New Haven, USA, pp. 70-84.

If we jump forward to Rawls' lectures on Kant, however, things start to become clearer[66]. Rawls reads Kant's moral psychology through the first step of his Christian theodicy. Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Rawls suggests, contains an 'Augustinian' conception of the person. Our natural capacities – *amour de soi*, *amour-propre*, moral feeling – are good. Morality is a question of how we use the power of free choice to order our capacities. We can either accept our moral feeling as our regulative desire that subordinates our self-love to the moral law, or we can choose the path of pride and pursue our self-love at the expense of morality. The 'essential feature of the Augustinian moral psychology of the *Religion* is that moral failures… must all arise, not from the desires of our physical and social nature, but solely from our exercise of our free power of choice'. Rawls contrasts this with a 'Manichean' psychology that lingers in some of Kant's remarks. This divides humans into the 'good self we have as intelligences belonging to the intelligible world; and the… bad self we have as natural beings belonging to the sensible world'. Our natural desires would confront morality as 'a foreign element that blocks the way to what we want'. Torn between two selves, evil would be intrinsic to our nature.

Rawls can read Kant's *Religion* through Augustine, because Kant was drawing from Rousseau, who was heavily influenced by Augustine[67]. Like Augustine, Rousseau's *Discourses* narrate a story of how wilful pride led to our fall from prelapsarian into a condition of self-compounding vice. Not only is Rawls using this moral psychology to fulfil a homologous role to that of the first step of his Christian theodicy, but there is a substantive overlap in its philosophical content – a neo-Augustinianism. It is unlikely that this is a coincidence which Rawls only registered *ex post*: more plausibly, it is what drew him to Rousseau in the first place.

Rawls begins his lectures on Rousseau on much the same terms as Cassirer. Rawls asks how the 'dark and pessimistic' view of human nature in the *Discourses*, and the 'sunnier' vision of *The Social Contract*, 'hangs together in one unified view'[68]. Rawls recognises that the answer rests in Rousseau's theory of natural goodness, but 'the meaning of this theme is not obvious'. For upon reading the *Discourses*, it appears 'inevitable that the social evils and vices Rousseau deplores will come about'. Indeed, Rousseau has usually been interpreted as having argued that solitary humans are guided by an innocent desire for self-preservation in the state of nature (*amour de soi*), but that the development of society brings with it a desire for recognition that *invariably* leads to a vainglorious competition for status (*amour-*

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66 Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. See pp. 291-308.

67 See, for instance, Christopher Brooke, 2001, Rousseau's Political Philosophy: Stoic and Augustinian Origins. In: Riley P (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Robin Douglass, 2015, *Rousseau and Hobbes: Nature, Free Will, and the Passions*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.. See pp. 149-188.

68 Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 192-195.

propre). Rawls appears to have adopted this interpretation of *amour-propre* in his lectures on Kant's *Religion* (c. mid-1980s)[69]. Despite claiming that Rousseau is a unified thinker, Cassirer did nothing to show this at the level of Rousseau's psychology. In TJ Rawls drew directly from Rousseau's concept of *amour de soi*, but appears to have relied on Piaget's mediated theory of *amour-propre* – 'mutual respect'[70]. This is no small problem: it threatens the entire 'theodicy interpretation' of Rousseau.

Yet Rawls now believes he has found an answer, in the form of N.H. Dent's 1988 book *Rousseau*[71]. Dent proposes an interpretation of *amour-propre* that would make Rousseau's psychology fully consistent with a theodicy of natural goodness. Only when distorted by inequality does *amour-propre* take on an 'unnatural' form, becoming a desire 'to be superior to and to dominate others, and to be admired by them'. In its 'natural' form *amour-propre* is a desire to secure for ourselves an equal status to others. It provides the affective basis of mutual respect, the recognition that your wants and needs place a limit on my conduct, on the same basis as my wants and needs do on yours. Within a society whose institutions secure for us the social basis of self-respect, 'moved by *amour-propre* we are ready to accept and act on a principle of reciprocity whenever' it is made available to us[72]. This mirrors TJ: our nature supports moral reason, but does not contain it.

Inequality is substituted for original sin as the primordial source for evil. Humans are responsible for evil because they have co-created unequal social relations that inflame (without determining) the vices of *amour-propre*. Rawls is fully cognizant of this substitution[73]. He systematically compares Rousseau's theory of natural goodness with 'the Augustinian doctrine of original sin'. On Augustine's view, 'our propensities to sin… began with the Fall and are now embedded in our sinful nature', and 'can be mitigated only by God's grace'. For Rousseau, we possess natural 'potentialities for perfection', the vices 'are propagated by social institutions', and 'the way out lies in our own hands'.

We are now in a position to return to LP. Rawls transposes this moral psychology into a theory of international politics. He conceives of liberal and decent 'peoples' as societies with a developed moral nature, to be contrasted with the maligned nature of 'outlaw' states, and undeveloped moral nature of 'burdened' societies. Societies are moved by two 'fundamental interests'. First, they want to secure their means of survival (*amour de soi)*: their independence, territory, security, and the well-being of their citizens. Second, they desire to

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69 This is complicated by the fact that in his lectures on Rousseau, Rawls claims that Kant's *Religion* supports his new interpretation of *amour-propre*. Given the chronology, this appears to be a *re-reading*.

70 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 406.

71 Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 198-200.

72 Ibid. pp. 199, 219.

73 Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With 'On My Religion',* pp. 205, 208-209.

be recognised as equals among others. This 'falls under what Rousseau called *amour-propre*'[74]. But as we know, this has a twin nature. On the one hand, societies can become 'inflamed by… arrogant or wounded pride or by lack of due self-respect'[75]. On the other, when it comes to peoples – with a developed moral nature – 'the due respect they ask for is a due respect consistent with the equality of all peoples'. These relations of mutual respect move societies to exercise their moral feeling and adopt the principles of justice, which then subordinates their self-love to morality[76]. In contrast, 'states' pursue their self-love without limit: their malformed *amour-propre* kindles a lust for expansion, wealth and domination, enacted through an unscrupulous policy of *realpolitik*.

Rawls uses this psychology to argue, against Realism, that the struggle for wealth and power is not the eternal fate of world politics[77]. For the pathologies of *amour-propre* are rooted in socio-psychological relations that can be changed. Rawls adds to this a further idea, taken from Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Law*: commerce means that societies can acquire commodities 'more easily and cheaply by trade than by war'. Liberal peoples, Rawls concludes, would be 'satisfied peoples'. What does this mean? First, their *amour de soi* is satisfied: trade allows the effective acquisition of goods; institutional malleability allows for self-improvement; and the society of peoples guarantees their security. Second, their *amour-propre* is satisfied: peoples are not inflamed by 'wounded pride', or 'swayed by the passion for power and glory', and they mutually 'respect one another'. Peoples do not go to war, because they have no reason to.

Transition: Can we Be Saved?

Rawls has shown that evil is a result of the contingent perversion of our nature by political injustice and that we possess dormant capacities for good. But to complete his vision Rawls needs to explain how a world of evil people can lift themselves out of abjection. These are distinct steps. It could be that humans are originally good but that we have fallen into an abyss from which we cannot escape. Rawls needs a functionally equivalent but naturalistic version of his theory of 'conversion' in SF.

TJ explains how individuals growing up in an ideally just society would come to affirm and act from the principles of justice. But this presupposes what has to be shown: that a just society could establish itself in the first place. We can infer one reason for this absence from Rawls' lectures: he appears to think that Rousseau lacks a theory of transition, relying

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74 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 34.

75 Ibid. p. 44.

76 Ibid. p. 29.

77 Ibid. pp. 19, 46-48.

instead on the fictional '*deus ex machina*' of the law-giver to imagine the apparition of just institutions[78].

When Rawls turned to constructivism in the 1980s, he embedded his philosophy within the history and culture of liberalism. PL reconciles us to the emergence of reasonable pluralism after the Reformation through a retrospective (Hegelian) vindication of the possibility of an 'overlapping consensus'. LP reconciles us to the great evils of human history through a prospective (realistically utopian) vindication of the possibility of a law of peoples anchored in a 'democratic peace'. Rawls needs some basis on which to draw upon the history of these two practices to ground his ideal of them. It was at this time that Rawls adopted a secular version of Kant's doctrine of practical faith, including Kant's specifically historical arguments for the possibility of the 'realm of ends'.

Kant's solution to the problem of transition was to argue that evil people create the conditions for the maturation of their moral capacities as an unintended consequence of their acting from self-interest[79]. It is the distress of the state of nature which moves individuals to erect a sovereign to reconcile their conflicting wills, and the exhaustion of interminable conflict between states, along with their desire for a stable basis of commerce, which moves them to enter a *foedus pacificum*. The more that conflict between states is tamed, the greater the space within states for reason, reform and culture, which in turn strengthens peace, in a slow but ascending feedback loop. Eventually, moral duty supplants self-interest, and a 'pathologically enforced social union is transformed into a *moral* whole'[80]. After the French Revolution, Kant argued republics can guarantee peace where despots cannot: republics can only declare war with the consent of the people, who, because they bear the costs of war, will be reluctant to acquiesce[81].

Rawls repeatedly tells us that his 'basic idea is to follow Kant's lead in *Perpetual Peace*', and that 'the Law of Peoples is greatly indebted to Kant's idea of the *foedus pacificum* and to so much in his thought'[82]. He adopts three features of Kant's theory of moral development: (i) evil creates the conditions for its own overcoming; (ii) the internal structure of peoples make them peaceful; (iii) domestic and international justice evolve in symbiosis. But where for Kant progress rides on the back of self-interest until its revolution into a moral order, Rawls inserts

78 Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 239-241.

79 The two key texts here are: Immanuel Kant, 1991a, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'. In H.S. Reiss (eds) *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; and Immanuel Kant, 1991b, Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch. In: H.S. Reiss (eds) *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For a full account see Pauline Kleingeld, 1999, Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 16(1), pp. 59-80; and Pauline Kleingeld, 2012, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

80 Kant, 1991a, Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose, see pp. 45-48.

81 Kant, 1991b, Perpetual Peace, pp. 99-102.

82 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 10, 26, 29, 36, 54, 93.

amour-propre as an intermediate step between degeneracy and rectitude. Like Kant, this story has two levels: domestic and international.

We find the domestic argument in PL. Rawls wants to vindicate the possibility of political liberalism by setting out a conjectural history, modelled on the Reformation, of the steps by which an 'overlapping consensus' might emerge[83]. Protestantism and Catholicism were 'locked in mortal combat', and no compromise could be had between their 'conflicting authorities of Church and Bible'. In this situation, only the 'exhaustion' brought about by conflict itself can motivate cooperation. Liberal principles of toleration are adopted as the basis of a *modus vivendi*, as 'the only workable alternative to endless and destructive civil strife'. Once brought together by self-interest (*amour de soi*), cooperation catalyses a process of moral learning modelled on Rousseau's moral psychology, leading first to a principle-based constitutional order (*amour-propre*), and then a conception-based overlapping consensus (moral feeling).

Rawls presents a parallel argument in LP[84]. It is their basic interests in trade and security which first draw states into cooperation. Rawls suggests that states operating outside of international law, will tend to 'exhaustion'[85]. Once cooperation is established, societies will 'tend to develop mutual trust and confidence in one another' (*amour-propre*). Eventually, societies come to see the law of peoples 'as advantageous for themselves and for those they care for', and accept the 'ideals and principles of liberal and decent civilizations' (moral feeling).

When Rawls sets out this moral psychology to show that the law of peoples is 'stable', he cautions that this 'conjecture needs to be confirmed by what actually happens historically'[86]. Just as Rawls appealed to the history of the Reformation, he now appeals to the 'democratic peace thesis'. Drawing from Michael Doyle's work, Rawls asserts that 'since 1800 firmly established liberal societies have not fought one another'.

Rawls wants to demonstrate that peoples would only enter into war in self-defence or to prevent egregious human rights abuses, and would do so from a fidelity to the principles of the law of peoples. It is striking how little the democratic peace thesis does to confirm this. First, the thesis does nothing to show that liberal peoples would not attack peaceful non-liberal societies (decent, burdened, benevolent), let alone that decent peoples would abstain from unjustified aggression. Second, there is consensus on the historical fact that

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83Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* pp. xxxviii-xxxix, 158-168.

84 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 44-45, 113.

85 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 113, 44.

86 Ibid. pp. 45, 48-54.

established democracies have not waged war against one another, but little agreement on the explanation for this fact. Rawls cannot invoke this literature to support his claim that peoples would abstain from conflict because of their 'moral nature'.

Read carefully, however, Rawls merely suggests that the historical behaviour of democracies is 'not incompatible' with the ideal of the law of peoples[87]. He is cognizant of the 'great shortcomings of actual, allegedly constitutional regimes', that they have constructed globe-straddling empires, pursued war 'for expansionist reasons', and have frequently intervened 'in weaker countries, including those exhibiting some aspects of democracy'. But if Rawls knows there is a drastic shortfall between the behaviour of democracies, and what is required of the law of peoples, then how can he invoke the former to justify the possibility of the latter? The answer is that Rawls is not offering an apodictic theoretical proof. He is claiming that, whatever its shortcomings, the achievement of peace between democracies gives us a *practical basis of hope* in the possibility of a law of peoples.

Rawls suggests that 'whether Kant's hypothesis of a *foedus pacificum* is met depends on how far the conditions of a family of constitutional regimes attain the ideal of such regimes'[88]. Rawls appears to think two of the internal 'conditions' of peoples are fundamental in making them outwardly peaceful. First, the *motives* of their citizens are irenic[89]. It is in their basic interests to secure a stable basis of trade and security (*amour de soi*), they are not corrupted by the pathologies of pride and envy because their societies enshrine the social basis of self-respect (*amour-propre*), and they are guided by conceptions of justice – political liberalism or a peaceful comprehensive doctrine – compatible with reciprocal toleration (moral feeling). Second, a well-motivated people has no reason to go to war, but their foreign policy can only reflect this fact if their government *represents* them[90]. It is that the governments of liberal societies have so often been captured by 'oligarchic interests' which explains the 'great shortcomings' in their foreign policy[91].

Other societies do not meet these conditions[92]. Outlaw states are ruined by a maligned *amour-propre*. Burdened societies lack a developed political culture, and so can neither represent their people nor satisfy their fundamental interests. 'Benevolent absolutisms'

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87 Ibid. pp. 51-54.

88 Ibid. pp. 48-51, 54.

89 Ibid. p. 29.

90 Ibid. p. 24.

91 Ibid. pp. 50, 53, 75.

92 David Reidy makes a strong case that Rawls models benevolent absolutisms, decent peoples and liberal peoples on the three stages of his theory of moral development from TJ. One consequence of this view is that benevolent absolutisms would represent a proto-moral system based on parent-like rulers caring for the *amour de soi* of their child-like subjects. It would also give Rawls a domestic theory of moral learning not just of how liberal societies might emerge (as in PL), but of how non-liberal societies might evolve towards liberalism. See Reidy, Moral Psychology, Stability, and The Law of Peoples.

respect the human rights[93] of their people, and are – presumably for this reason – outwardly peaceful. But this is a fragile peace, based on the whims of their rulers, and not on a stable system of cooperation with institutional channels for the reliable representation of the interests of their people.

Rawls also thinks that the converse is true, however: societies approach domestic justice, the closer they come to international justice. Rawls shares 'Kant's idea that a constitutional regime must establish an effective Law of Peoples in order to realize fully the freedom of its citizens'[94], citing the seventh proposition of Kant's *Idea for a Universal History*[95], and Part III of Kant's *Theory and Practice*[96]. In these texts Kant argues that, absent a *foedus pacificum*, states are trapped in a cycle of war that drains their coffers, maligns their priorities, and strangles freedom. Only when this anarchy is tamed, Kant insists, can the 'dormant capacities' of humans begin to flourish.

Two critical passages support this reading. Rawls suggests that decent peoples should be included in the society of peoples because mutual respect is a condition of their internal moral development towards liberalism[97]. This does not concern 'the internal (liberal or decent) basic structure of each people viewed separately', but the 'relations of *mutual respect* among peoples' as part of the 'structure and political climate of the Society of Peoples'. Elsewhere, Rawls urges that societies can only remain 'satisfied' if there is *general* peace[98]. 'One strong state… embarked on expansion and glory is sufficient to perpetuate the cycle of war and preparation for war'.

We can now summarise Rawls' theory of transition:

1. Societies can only develop an allegiance to the law of peoples insofar as the motives of their people, represented by their government, can support three stages of cooperative learning between societies.
2. Societies can only perfect their moral nature when they are sheltered from the cycle of war and granted a reliable basis of trade, security, and respect[99].

These two processes can only advance in lockstep. The perfection of the moral nature of societies extends their capacities for cooperation, and the shelter that cooperation affords them helps to perfect their capacities, which in turn, helps to further cooperation, and so on

93 Human rights include basic needs – they define the minimum conditions of *amour de soi*.

94 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 10.

95 Kant, 1991a, Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose. See pp. 47-49.

96 Immanuel Kant, 1991c, On the Common Saying: 'This May be True in Theory, But it Does Not Apply in Practice'. In: H. S. Reiss (ed.) *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp. 61-92. See p. 90.

97 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 62, 122.

98 Ibid. pp. 48, 81.

99 Of course, there are also purely internal conditions to their moral perfection.

and so forth. One corollary of (2) is that, because the law of peoples is the only means of achieving global stability without Hobbesian coercion, and this depends in turn upon the justice of its members, universal justice is a condition of the perfection of the law of peoples.

We see this clearly in Part III of LP, 'Non-Ideal Theory'. Ideal theory assumes: (a) conditions favourable to justice, and (b) full compliance with justice. Non-ideal theory collapses these assumptions to ask how, in 'our world with its great injustices and widespread social evils', we can gradually work towards 'a world in which all peoples accept and follow the (ideal of the) Law of Peoples'[100]. Rawls holds that we must identify the ideal first, which then provides non-ideal theory with its objective and orientation. Rawls addresses two kinds of non-ideal society, corresponding to (a) and (b).

Burdened societies endure unfavourable conditions. In the first instance, this is not a problem of economics. It is the political culture of a society that is 'all-important'. Rawls goes so far as to 'conjecture that there is no society anywhere in the world… with resources so scarce that it could not' become a just society[101]. Rawls, remember, wants to show that the social world is 'friendly' to justice. This cannot be so if societies confront fundamental obstacles to justice that are inherent in the world, rather than a contingent reflection of political injustice. It is for this same reason that Rawls seizes on Amartya Sen's finding that famines are always the result of political negligence, heralds the extension of human rights to women as a fortuitous solution to over-population, and dismisses Charles Beitz's argument that some societies are arbitrarily advantaged by their natural endowment of resources[102]. Peoples have a duty to 'assist' burdened societies to develop their own political culture, while socialising them into global cooperation.

Outlaw states violate the human rights of their own people, and perpetuate the cycle of war and preparation for war. Peoples are to declaim and pressure outlaw states to change their ways[103]. This is 'unlikely to be effective'. Peoples should be ready to levy economic sanctions on outlaw states, and deny them entry into 'mutually beneficial cooperative practices'. In other words, they should exploit their self-interest to bring them to heel and initiate cooperation on fair terms. If this fails, 'no peaceful solution exists except domination by one side or the peace of exhaustion'[104]. Take these in turn. Peoples can wage war against outlaw states in self-defence or to quell egregious human rights violations. Rawls emphasises that peoples must wage war in such a way as to prefigure a 'just and lasting

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100 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 89.

101 Ibid. p. 108.

102 Ibid. pp. 108-110, 116-117.

103 Ibid. p. 93.

104 Ibid. p. 123.

peace', and to 'teach enemy soldiers and civilians' the meaning of human rights[105]. The other option, 'exhaustion', recapitulates Kant's argument that conflict is ultimately self-negating. It is another route back to self-interest, and onto the ladder of moral learning.

Conclusion

Rawls saw this theodicy as a functional substitute for what he lost in 1945, and a satisfactory answer to the challenge of Spengler's nihilism. It is worth drawing this argument together. Rawls says he adopted Christianity not because of the rigour of its metaphysical proofs, but the force of its moral ideas[106]. At the heart of this moral vision was a theodicy, an attempt to show that humans are fundamentally moral beings who, with the grace of God, can be delivered from evil. Rawls' jeremiad suggests why he may have been searching for a solution to the problem of evil. How could a world threatened by the 'demonic madness' of Hitler possess any moral coherence? Rawls did not abandon this problem. Indeed, he repudiated orthodox Christianity precisely because it failed to solve it. The world could not be good *if* a sovereign God existed because this would require the Holocaust to admit providential justification, which Rawls rejected as 'hideous and evil'. His secular theodicy is both a replacement for, and a solution to the crisis of, his Christian theodicy. It is a homologous answer to the same problem, within a naturalistic framework that explains why the turpitude of humankind is compatible with the world being good *without* the need for a sovereign God.

105 Ibid. pp. 96-97.

106 Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With 'On My Religion',* p. 263.

Conclusion

Civilization is a polyphonic concept that has been bent to a variety of ends to ground, imagine and legitimate world order. Yet its history over the last century displays an intelligible pattern. It has followed the permutations of power and potential of Western civilization over the last century. After all, the idea of Europe as the terminal stage of a universal process of development only ever held plausibility because of the gross surplus of power that it enjoyed over the rest of the world over the long nineteenth century. When that power melted in the iron and heat of the First World War, or was taken by burgeoning anti-colonial movements, that narrative faltered. But the very rapidity of that gestalt switch pushed in two extremes. Perhaps Europe's precipitous fall into chaos signalled that it was already beyond recovery, that the curtains had fallen. Yet the full might of European empire was in living memory, and its grip had been weakened, but not broken. Restoration was still conceivable. And so Spengler and Toynbee embraced the dual fantasies of certain death, and imperial retrieval. Spengler simultaneously professed that Occidental civilization was dying just as surely as winter follows autumn, while endorsing no less a revolution than a German imperial mundi. Toynbee could acknowledge, frankly, that the weight of the twenty civilizations to precede Western civilization had all ended in the verdict of suicide, but continue to map out the evolutionary tree to the superhuman. Toynbee's hopes were wrecked by Germany's blitzkrieg, and he fell into a profound personal crisis, rescued only by religious rebirth. If had had lived to see the world fall into the hands of the two mass societies who he thought represented all that was worst in Zivilisation, the United States and Soviet Union, Spengler would no doubt have faced a similar personal reckoning.

The battle-lines of the Cold War admitted no such ambiguity, inhibiting the play of desire - hope and fear - from the stark vacillations of Spengler and Toynbee. The Soviet Union was neither the equal of the United States nor posed any near-term threat to its vital interests, having just passed through the gauntlet of the Wehrmacht. Fears lay elsewhere, dwelling on the possibility that the human crisis of Europe might make easy prey for communism, toppling the continent into the hands of Stalin. Communism was not an alien doctrine, but a theory that emerged from and was continuous with Western thought. The image of the Soviet Union as parasitic dystopia, gnawing slowly at the foundations of Western civilization, drawing its life-force not from any inherent quality, but from the very weakness of its victim, fit neatly onto these coordinates. Popper's meta-theory of civilization places emphasis not on the fall of civilization, but on its perpetual embattlement. For Schlesinger, too, the problem is not so much existential as aporetic, of contradictions inherent in industrial modernity that cannot be eradicated, only ameliorated. Kennan imagined if the West could only reassert its

spiritual vitality, the Soviet Union would collapse of its own volition. Ward and Burnham, hemming close to Toynbee's philosophy of history, veer closer to the last generation's extremes. Ward entertains the possibility of the disintegration of Western civilization, without foregrounding it. Burnham sees Soviet weakness as a brief window in which to deliver a knock-out blow and claim the world for American empire, and although Burnham calls for the qualification of the sovereignty of small powers around the world, on his vision empire has a single aim: atomic monopoly. It is wide and thin.

If the crisis of civilization was terminal in the interwar period, aporetic during the high Cold War, it was merely philosophical by the 1990s. With the fall of the Soviet Union, history was seen to have swung back in Western civilization's favour. Benefiting from this new, vaulting perspective of American power, Fukuyama and Rawls sought to exorcise the demons of fascism by repealing the verdict of Spengler. Cast in the longue duree, Fukuyama saw he first half of the twentieth century as an aberration, regressing back to the mean of progress in the second half. Rawls refitted Rousseau's theory of natural goodness to argue that no single event, like the Holocaust, can vitiate the possibility of justice, for these events may simply be the result of the corruption of human psychology by unjust institutions that can be remade. Fukuyama and Rawls alike believe that, either Western civilization is the seat of objective morality, or there is no such thing as morality, and humans are condemned to repeat the crimes of the likes of Hitler. And both believe this morality has to carry the weight of universal history behind it, or it is invalid. The challenges of world order are no longer existential, but involve the policing and absorption of 'historical' or 'outlaw' states, expediting their historic merger with the liberal democratic peace.

A further pattern is genealogical in character. The point of a genealogy is not to debunk, but to pull apart the geological strata of a concept in order that we can gain a kind of historical high ground from which to survey the forces, byways and details of its formation. As we have traced it over the twentieth century, civilization has witnessed three major transformations: it was pluralised in the interwar years, liberalised in the Cold War, and deterritorialized during the 1990s. All of these meanings are accreted in our contemporary lexicon of civilization. That civilization connotes a particular civilization in a circumscribed area of the world and not a process that embraces all societies, that liberalism comes readily to hand when describing Western civilization, or that Western civilization may be the base of a project exceeding the North Atlantic, are contingent political creations that can only be understood through historical reflexivity. One result of the compression of these competing meanings into the concept of civilization is semantic overload, a kind of polysemous across which commentators glide easily back and forth. Its weight of meaning has become a burden. But the deeper significance, perhaps, is that if we pull apart these strata we find an uncanny

resemblance. The inundation of warnings about the crisis of Western civilization that we see today stands, in many respects, in the same relation to the 1990s as the interwar period did to the belle epoque. Fears of existential catastrophe, global retrenchment and the rise of the non-West belong to both eras. It was in the interwar period that fears of a secular worldwide catastrophe first became widespread, while the retreat of European empire and the concomitant rise of the non-European world dominated the era's global political thought. Today we are witnessing a similar conceptual slide from the universal to the particular, from visions of deterritorialized world order, to a reaffirmation of the North Atlantic as the keystone of Western civilization.