

## ON SPENGLER'S DECLINE OF THE WEST

*Lecture by*  
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Dornach, July 2, 1920

*Translated by Norman Macbeth*

One who looks around a little in Germany today, and not at externals but with the eye of the soul; one who sees not only what offers itself to the casual visitor, who seldom learns the true conditions during his visit; one who does not cling to the fact that a few chimneys are smoking again and the trains are running on time; one who can to some degree see into the spiritual situation; such a person sees a picture which is symptomatic not only for this territory but for the whole decay of our world-culture in the present cycle. I would like today to point out to you, in an introductory way, a psycho-spiritual symptom which is far more significant than many sleeping souls even in Germany allow themselves to dream.

In old Germany decay and decline rule today, and the external things which I have mentioned cannot deceive us about this. But this is not what I want to point to now, for in the course of world-history we often see decay set in and then out of the decay there again spring upward impulses. But if we judge externally, basing our opinion on mere custom and routine and saying that here again everything will be just as it has been before, then we do not see certain deeper-lying symptoms. One such symptom (but only one of many), a psycho-spiritual symptom which I want to bring before you, is the remarkable impression made by Oswald Spengler's book *The Decline of the West*, which is already symptomatic in having been able to appear in our time. It is a thick book and widely read, a book which has made an extraordinarily deep impression on the younger generation in Germany today. And the remarkable thing is that the author expressly states that he conceived the basic idea of this book, not during the war or after the war, but already some years before the catastrophe of 1914.

As I have said, this book makes a particularly strong impression on the younger generation. And if you try to sense the imponderables of life, the things which are between the lines, then you will be particularly struck by such a thing. In Stuttgart I recently had to give a lecture to the students of the technical college, and I went to this lecture entirely under the impression made by Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. It is a thick book. Thick books are very costly now in Germany, yet it is much read. You will realize their costliness when I tell you that a pamphlet which cost five cents in 1914 now costs thirty-five cents. Of course, books have not risen in the same proportion as beer, which now costs ten times as much as in 1914. Books must always be handled more modestly, even under the present impossible economic conditions. Still the price increase on books shows what has happened to the economic system in the last few years.

The contents of this book may be easily characterized. It demonstrates how the culture of the Occident has now reached a point which, at a certain period, was also reached by the declining cultures of the old Orient, of Greece, and of Rome. Spengler calculates in a strictly historical way that the complete collapse of the culture of the Occident must be accomplished by the year 2200. In my public lecture in Stuttgart I treated Spengler's book very seriously, and I also combatted it strenuously. But today the

contents of such a thing are not so important. More important than the contents or the psycho-spiritual qualities of a book is whether the author (no matter what view of life he may adopt) has spiritual qualities, whether he is a personality who may be taken earnestly, or even highly esteemed, in a spiritual way. The author of this book is, beyond any doubt, such a personality. He has completely mastered ten or fifteen sciences. He has a penetrating judgment on the whole historical process, as far as history reaches. And he also has something which men of today almost never have, a sound eye for the phenomena of decline in the civilizations of the present day. There is a fundamental difference between Spengler and those who do not grasp the nature of the impulses of decline and who try all kinds of arrangements for extracting from the decayed ideas some appearance of upward motion. Were it not heart-rending it might be humorous to see how people with traditional ideas all riddled with decay meet today in conferences and believe that out of decay they can create progress by means of programs. Such a man as Oswald Spengler, who really knows something, does not yield to such a deception. He calculates like a precise mathematician the rapidity of our decline and comes out with the prediction (which is more than a vague prophecy) that by the year 2200 this Occidental culture will have fallen into complete barbarism.

This combination of universal outward decline, especially in the psycho-spiritual field, with the revelation by a serious thinker that such decline is necessary in accordance with the laws of history — this combination is something remarkable, and it is this which has made such a strong impression on the younger generation. We have today not only signs of decay, we have theories which describe this decay as necessary in a demonstrable scientific way. In other words, we have not only decay but a theory of decay, and a very formidable theory too. One may well ask where we shall find the forces, the inner will-forces, to spur men to work upward again, if our best people, after surveying ten or fifteen sciences, have reached the point of saying that this decay is not only present but can be proved like a phenomenon in physics. This means that the time has begun when belief in decay is not represented by the worst people. We must stress again and again how really serious the times are, and what a mistake it is to sleep away this seriousness of the times.

If one grasps the entire urgency of the situation, one is driven to the question: How can we orient thinking so that pessimism toward western civilization will not appear to be natural and obvious while faith in a new ascent seems a delusion? We must ask if there is anything that can still lead us out of this pessimism. Just the way in which Spengler comes to his results is extremely interesting for the spiritual-scientist. Spengler does not consider the single cultures to be as sharply demarcated as we do when, for example, within the post-Atlantean time we distinguish the Indian, Persian, Egypto-Chaldean, Greco-Latin, and present-day cultures. He is not familiar with spiritual science, but in a certain way, he too considers such cultures. He looks at them with the eye of the scientific researcher. He examines them with the methods which in the last three or four centuries have grown up in occidental civilization and been adopted by all who are not prejudiced by narrow traditional faith, Catholic, Protestant, Monadistic, etc. Oswald Spengler is a man who is completely permeated by materialistic modern science. And he observes the rise and fall of cultures — oriental, Indian, Persian, Greek, Roman, modern occidental — as he would observe an organism which goes through a certain infancy, a time of maturity, and a time of aging, and then, when it has grown old, dies. Thus

Spengler regards the single cultures; they go through their childhood, their maturity, and their old age, and then they die. And the death-day of our present Occidental civilization is to be the year 2200.

Only the first volume of the book is now available. One who lets this first volume work upon him finds a strict theoretical vindication and proof of the decline, and nowhere a spark of light pointing to a rise, nothing which gives any hint of a rise. And one cannot say that this is an erroneous method of thought for a scientist. For if you consider the life of today and do not yield to the delusion that fruit for the future can grow out of bodiless programs, then you see that an upward movement nowhere appears in what the majority of men recognize in the outer world. If you regard rising and declining cultures as organisms, and then look at *our* culture, our entire Occidental civilization, as an organism, then you can only say that the Occident is perishing, declining into barbarism. You find no indication where an upward movement could appear, where another center of the world could form itself.

*The Decline of the West* is a book with spiritual qualities, based on keen observation, and written out of a real permeation with modern science. Only our habitual frivolity can ignore such things.

When a phenomenon like this appears, there springs up in the world-observer that historical concern of which I have so often spoken and which I can briefly characterize in the following words: One who today makes himself really acquainted with the inner nature of what is working in social, political, and spiritual life, one who sees how all that is so working strives toward decline — such a person, if he knows spiritual science as it is here meant, must say that there can only be a recovery if what we call the wisdom of initiation flows into human evolution. For if this wisdom of initiation were entirely ignored by men, if it were suppressed, if it could play no role in the further development of mankind — what would be the necessary consequence? You see, if we look at the old Indian culture, it is like an organism in having infancy, maturity, aging, decay, and death; then it continues itself. Then we have the Persian, Egyptian, Chaldean, Greco-Latin, and our own time, but always we have something which Oswald Spengler did not take into account. He has been reproached for this by several of his opponents. For a good deal has already been written against Spengler's book, most of it cleverer than Benedetto Croce's extraordinarily simple article. Croce, who has always written cleverly apart from this, suddenly became a simpleton with Spengler's book. But it has been pointed out to Spengler that the cultures do not always have only infancy, maturity, aging, and death, they continue themselves and will do so in this case also; when our culture dies in the year 2200, it will continue itself again. The singular thing here is that Spengler is a *good* observer and therefore he finds no moment of continuation and cannot speak of a seed somewhere in our culture, but only of the signs of decay which are evident to him as a scientific observer. And those who speak of cultures continuing themselves have not known how to say anything particularly clever about this book. One very young man has brought forward a rather confused mysticism in which he speaks of world-rhythm; but that creates nothing which can transform a documented pessimism into optimism. And so it follows from Spengler's book that the decline will come, but no upward movement can follow.

What Spengler does is to observe scientifically the infancy of the organism which is a culture or civilization, its maturity, decline, aging, death. He observes these in the different epochs in the only way in which, fundamentally, one can observe scientifically. But one who can look a little deeper into things knows that in the old Indian life, apart from the external civilization, there lived the initiation-wisdom of primeval times. And this initiation-wisdom of primeval times, which was still mighty in India, inserted a new seed into the Persian culture. The Persian mysteries were already weaker, but they could still insert the seed into the Egypto-Chaldean time. The seed could also be carried over into the Greco-Latin period. And then the stream of culture continued itself as it were by the law of inertia into our own time. *And there it dries up.*

One must feel this, and those who belong to our spiritual science could have felt it for twenty years. For one of my first remarks at the time of founding our movement was that, if you want a comparison for what the cultural life of mankind brings forth externally, you may compare it with the trunk, leaves, blossoms, and so forth, of a tree. But what we want to insert into this continuous stream can only be compared with the pith of the tree; it must be compared with the activating growth-forces of the pith. I wanted thereby to point out that through spiritual science we must seek again what has died out with the old atavistic primeval wisdom.

The consciousness of being thus placed into the world should be gained by all those who count themselves a part of the anthroposophical movement. But I have made another remark, especially here in recent years but also in other places. I have said that, if you take all that can be drawn out of modern science and form therefrom a method of contemplation which you then apply to social or, better still, to historical life, you will be able to grasp thereby only phenomena of degeneration. If you examine history with the methods of observation taught by science, you will see only what is *declining*; if you apply this method to social life, you will create only the phenomena of *degeneration*.

What I have thus said over the course of years could really find no better illustration than Spengler's book. A genuinely scientific thinker appears, writes history, and discovers through this writing of history that the civilization of the Occident will die in the year 2200. He really could not have discovered anything else. For in the first place, with the scientific method of contemplation you can find or create only phenomena of degeneration; while in the second place the whole Occident in its spiritual, political, and social life is saturated with scientific impulses, hence is in the midst of a period of decline. The important thing is that what formerly drew one culture out of another has now dried up, and in the third millennium no new civilization will spring out of our collapsing Occidental civilization.

You may bring up ever so many social questions, or questions on women's suffrage, and so forth, and you may hold ever so many meetings; but if you form your programs out of the traditions of the past, you will be making something which is only seemingly creative and to which the ideas of Oswald Spengler are thoroughly applicable. The concern of which I have spoken must be spoken of because it is now necessary that a wholly new initiation-wisdom should begin out of the human will and human freedom. If we resign ourselves to the outer world and to what is mere tradition, we shall perish in the Occident, fall into barbarism; while we can move upward again only out of the will, out of the creative spirit. The initiation-wisdom which must begin in our time must, like the

old initiation wisdom (which only gradually succumbed to egoism, selfishness, and prejudice), proceed from objectivity, impartiality, and selflessness. From this base it must permeate everything.

We can see this as a necessity. We *must* grasp it as a necessity if we look deeper into the present unhappy trend of Occidental civilization. But then you also notice something else; you notice that when a justified appeal is made it is distorted into a caricature. And it is especially necessary that we should see through this. Now in our time no appeal is more justifiable than that for democracy; yet this is distorted into a caricature as long as democracy is not recognized as a necessary impulse only for the life of politics and rights and the state, from which the economic life and the cultural life must be dissociated. It is distorted into a caricature when today, instead of objectivity, impartiality, and selflessness, we find personal whims and self-interest made into cultural factors. Everything is being drawn into the political field. But if this happens, then gradually objectivity and impartiality will disappear; for the cultural life cannot thrive if it takes its directions from the political life. It is always entangled in prejudice thereby. And selflessness cannot thrive if the economic life creeps into the political life, because then self-interest is necessarily introduced. If the *associative life*, which can produce selflessness in the economic field, is spoiled, then everything will tend to leave men to wander in prejudice and self-interest. And the result of this will be to reject what must be based on objectivity and selflessness — the science of initiation. In external life everything possible is done today to reject this science of initiation, although it alone can lead us beyond the year 2200.

This is the great anxiety as regards our culture, which can come over you if you look with a clear eye at the events of the present. On this basis, I regard Spengler's book as only a symptom, but can anyone possibly say today: "Ah yes, but Spengler is wrong. Cultures have risen and fallen; ours will fall, but another will arise out of it."? No, there can be no such refutation of Spengler's views. It is falsely reasoned, because trust in an upward movement cannot today be based on a *faith* that out of the Occidental culture another will develop. No, if we rely on such a faith nothing will develop. There is simply nothing in the world at present which can be the seed to carry us over the beginning of the third millennium. Just because we are living in the fifth post-Atlantean epoch, we must first *create* a seed.

You cannot say to people — Believe in the Gods, believe in this, believe in that, and then all will be well. You must confess that those who speak of, and even demonstrate, the phenomena of degeneration are right with regard to what lives in the outer world. *But we, every individual human being must take care that they shall not remain right.* For the upward movement does not come out of anything objective, it comes out of the subjective will. Each person must will, each person must will to take up the spirit anew, and from the newly received spirit of the declining civilization each person must himself give a new thrust; otherwise it will perish. You cannot appeal today to any objective law, you can appeal only to the human will, to the good-will of men. Here in Switzerland, where things have unrolled themselves differently, there is little to be seen of the real course of events (although it is also present here); but if you step over the border into Middle Europe you are immediately struck, in all that you observe with the eye of the soul, by what I have just described to you. There comes before your soul the sharp and

painful contrast between the need for adopting initiation-wisdom into our spiritual, legal, and economic life and the perverted instincts which reject everything which comes from this quarter. One who feels this contrast must search hard for the right way to describe it, and one who does not choose words haphazardly often has trouble in finding the right expression for it. In Stuttgart I spoke on Spengler's book and I used this expression, "perverted instincts of the present." I have used it again today because I find it is the only adequate one. As I left the stand that day I was accosted by one of those who best understand the word "perverted" in a technical sense, a physician. He was shocked that I had used just this word, but out of curious reasons. It is no longer commonly supposed that one who speaks on a foundation of facts, out of reality, chooses his words with pain; rather is it supposed that everyone forms his words as they are usually formed out of the superficial consciousness of the times. I had a talk with this physician, told him this and that, and then he said he was glad that I had not meant this word "perverted" in any elegant literary sense. I could only reply that this was certainly not the case, because I was not in the habit of meaning things in an elegant literary way. The point is that the man in the street today never assumes that there is such a thing as a creation out of the spirit; he simply believes, if you say something like "perverted instincts," that you are speaking on the same basis as the last litterateur. That tone dominates our minds today; our minds educate themselves by it. Just in such an episode you can see the contrast between what is so necessary to mankind today — a real deepening, which must even go back as far as the basis of initiation-wisdom — and that which, through the caricature of democracy, comes before us today as spiritual life. People are much too lazy to draw something up from the hidden forces of consciousness within themselves; they prefer to dabble at tea-parties, in beer-gardens, at political meetings, or in parliaments. It is the easiest thing in the world now to say witty things, for we live in a dying culture where wit comes easily to people. But the wit that we need, the wit of initiation-wisdom, we must fetch up from the will; and we will not find it unless the power of this initiation-wisdom flows into our souls. Hence, we cannot say that we have refuted such a book as Spengler's. Naturally, we can describe it. It is born out of the scientific spirit. But the same is true of what others bring to birth out of the scientific spirit. Thus he is right if there does not enter into the wills of men that which will make him wrong. We can no longer have the comfort of proving that his demonstration of decline is wrong; we must, through the force of our wills, make wrong what seems to be right.

You see, this must be said in sentences which seem paradoxical. But we live in a time when the old prejudices must be demolished and when it must be recognized that we can never create a new world out of the old prejudices. Is it not understandable that people should encounter spiritual science and say they do not understand it? It is the most understandable thing in the world. For what they understand is what they have learned, and what they have learned, is decay or leading to decay. It is a question, not of assimilating something which can easily be understood out of the phenomena of decline, but of assimilating something to understand which one must first enhance his powers. Such is the nature of initiation-wisdom. But how can we expect that those who now aspire to be the teachers or leaders of the people should discern that what gives man a capacity for judgment must first be fetched out of the subconscious depths of soul-life and is not sitting up there in the head all ready-made. What really sits up there in the head is the destructive element.

Such is the nature of the things which you encounter wherever the consequences have already been drawn, where you have only to look at this seeming success. It is comprehensible that in the decline of occidental civilization our consciousness cannot easily enter into this field. Hence, we stand today entirely under the influence of this contrast which has been described to you; on the one side the need for a new impulse to enter into our civilization, and on the other side a rejection of this impulse. Things simply cannot improve if a sufficiently large number of people do not grasp the need for this impulse from initiation-wisdom. If you lay weight on *temporary* improvement you will not notice the great lines of decline, you will delude yourself about it, and you will march just so much more surely toward decline because you fail to grasp the only means there is to kindle a new spirit out of the will of men. But this spirit must lay hold of everything. Above all, this spirit must not linger over any theoretical philosophical problems. It would be a terrible delusion if a great number of people — perhaps just those who were somewhat pleased by the new initiation-wisdom and derived therefrom a somewhat voluptuous soul-feeling — should believe it would suffice to pursue this initiation-wisdom as something which was merely comfortable and good for the soul. For just through this the remainder of our real external life would more and more fall into **barbarism**, and the little bit of mysticism that could be pursued by those whose souls had an inclination in that direction would right soon vanish in the face of universal barbarism. Everywhere, and in an earnest way, initiation-wisdom must penetrate into the various branches of science and teaching, and above all into practical life, especially practical will. *Fundamentally everything is lost time today that is not willed out of the impulses of initiation-wisdom.* For all strength which we apply to other kinds of willing retards matters. Instead of wasting our time and strength in this way, we should apply whatever time and strength we have to bringing the impulse of initiation-wisdom into the different branches of life and knowledge.

If something is rolling along with the ancient impulses, no one will stop it in its rolling; and we should have an eye to how many younger people (especially in the conquered countries) are still filled with old catch-words, old chauvinism. These young people do not come into consideration. But *those* young people do come into consideration on whom rests the whole pain of the decline. And there are such. They are the ones whose wills can be broken by such theories as those of Spengler's book. Therefore, in Stuttgart I called this book of Oswald Spengler's a clever but fearful book, which contains the most fearful dangers, for it is so clever that it actually conjures up a sort of fog in front of people, especially young people.

The refutations must come out of an entirely different tone than that to which we are accustomed in such things, and it will never be a faith in this or that which will save us. People recommend one happily nowadays to such a faith, saying that if we only have faith in the good forces of men the new culture will come like a new youth. No, today it cannot be a question of faith, today it is a question of will; and *spiritual science* speaks to the will. Hence it is not understood by anyone who tries to grasp it through faith or as a theory. Only he understands it who knows how it appeals to the will, to the will in the deepest recesses of the heart when a man is alone with himself, and to the will when a man stands in the battle of daily life and in such battle, must assert himself as a man. Only when such a will is striven for can spiritual science be understood. I have said to you that for anyone who reads my *Occult Science* as he would read a novel, passively

giving himself to it, it is really only a thicket of words — and so are my other books. Only one who knows that in every moment of reading he must, out of the depths of his own soul, and through his most intimate willing, create something for which the books should be only a stimulus — only such a one can regard these books as musical scores out of which he can gain the experience in his own soul of the true piece of music.

We need this active experiencing within our own souls.



OSWALD SPENGLER

*Two lectures by Rudolf Steiner*

August 6 and 9, 1922

*Translated by Frances E. Dawson*

I

When some time ago the first volume of Spengler's *Decline of the West* appeared, there could be discerned in this literary production something like the will to tackle more intensively the elemental phenomena of decay and decline in our time. Here is a man who felt in much that is now active in the whole western world an impulse toward decline that must necessarily lead to a condition of utter chaos in western civilization, including America; and it could be seen that the man who had developed such a feeling — a very well-informed person, indeed, with mastery of many scientific ideas — was making the effort to present a sort of analysis of these phenomena.

It is clear, of course, that Spengler recognized this decline; and it is evident also that he had a feeling for everything of a declining nature exactly because all his thinking was itself involved in this decline; and because he felt this decadence in his very soul, I might say, he anticipated nothing but decadence as the outcome of all mass civilization. That is comprehensible. He believed that the West will become the prey of a kind of Caesarism, a sort of development of individual power, which will replace the differentiated, highly-organized cultures and civilizations with simple brute-force.

It is evident that Spengler, for one, had not the slightest perception of the fact that salvation for this western culture and civilization can come out of the will of mankind, if this will, in opposition to all that is moving headlong toward destruction, is directed toward the realization of something that can yet be brought forth out of the soul of man as a new force, if the human being of today wills it so. Of such a new force — naturally a spiritual force, based on spiritual activity — Oswald Spengler had not the slightest understanding.

Thus we can see that a very well-informed, brilliant man, with a certain penetrating insight, and able to coin such telling phrases, can actually arrive at nothing beyond a certain hope for the unfolding of a brute-power, which is remote from everything spiritual, from all inner human striving, and which depends entirely upon the development of external brutish force.

However, when the first volume appeared, it was possible to have at least a certain respect for the penetrating spirituality (I must use the expression again) — an abstract, intellectualistic spirituality — as opposed to the obtuseness of thinking which by no means is equal to the driving forces of history, but which so often gives the keynote to the literature of today.

Oswald Spengler's second volume has now appeared, and this indeed points out much more forcefully all that lives in a man of the present which can become his world-conception and philosophy, while he himself rejects, with a sort of brutality, everything genuinely spiritual. This second volume is likewise brilliant; yet in spite of his clever observations, Spengler shows nothing more than the dreadful sterility of an excessively

abstract and intellectualistic mode of thought. The matter is extraordinarily noteworthy because it shows what a peculiar configuration of spirit can be attained by an undeniably notable personality of today.

In this second volume of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, it is primarily the beginning and the end that are of exceptional interest. But it is a melancholy interest which this beginning and end arouse; they really characterize the whole state of this man's soul. You need to read only a sentence or two at the beginning in order to estimate at once the soul-situation of Oswald Spengler, and likewise of many other people of the present time. What is to be said of it has not merely a German-literary significance, but an altogether international one.

Spengler begins with the following sentence: [*The Decline of the West*, by Oswald Spengler; Volume II: *Perspectives of World History*. Translated by Atkinson (Knopf). The above citation, however, and all others used herein are translated from the original of Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, by the translator of this lecture. Ed.] “Observe the flowers in the evening, when in the setting sun they close one after the other; something sinister oppresses you then, a feeling of puzzling anxiety in the presence of this blind, dreamlike existence bound to the earth. The mute forest, the silent meadows, yonder bush, and these tendrils, do not stir. It is the wind that plays with them. Only the little gnat is free. It still dances in the evening light; it moves whither it will,” and so on.

Notice the starting-point from the flowers, from the plants. Now when I have wished to point to what gives its significance to the thinking of the present, I have again and again found it necessary to begin with the kind of comprehension applied today to lifeless, inorganic, mineral nature. Perhaps some of you will remember that in order to characterize the striving of present-day thinking for clarity of view, I have often used the example of the impact of two resilient balls, where from the given condition of one ball you can deduce the condition of the other by pure calculation.

Of course, anyone of the Spenglerian soul-caliber can say that ordinary thinking does not discover how resilience works in these balls, nor what the relations are in a deeper sense. Anyone who thinks thus does not understand upon what clarity of thought depends at the present time. For such an objection would have neither greater validity nor less than would an assertion by someone that it is impossible for me to understand a sentence written down on paper without first having investigated the composition of the ink with which it is written. The important thing is always to discover the point at issue. In surveying inorganic nature, the matter of concern is not what may eventually be discovered behind it as force-impulse, just as the composition of the ink is not the important thing for the understanding of a sentence written with it; but the matter of importance is whether clear thinking is employed.

This definite kind of thinking is what humanity has achieved since the time of Galileo and Copernicus. It shows first that man can grasp by means of it only lifeless, inorganic nature; but that, on the other hand, only by yielding himself to it, as to the simplest and most primitive kind of pure thinking, can he develop freedom of the human soul, or any kind of freedom for man. Only one who understands the character of clear, objective thinking, as it holds sway in lifeless nature, can later rise to the other processes of thinking and of seeing — to that which permeates thought with vision, with inspiration, with imagination, with intuition.

Therefore, the first task confronting one who wishes to speak today with any authority on the ultimate configuration of our cultural life is to observe what it is that the power of present-day thinking rests upon. And those who have become aware of this power in the thinking of our time know that this thinking is active in the machine, that it has brought us modern technical sciences, in which by means of this thinking we construct external, lifeless, inorganic sequences, all of whose pseudo-intelligence is intended to contribute to the outer activities of man.

Only one who understands this begins to realize that the moment we start to deal with plant-life, this kind of thinking, grasped at first in its abstractness, leads to utter nonsense. Anyone who uses this kind of crystal-clear thinking — appropriate in its abstractness to the mineral world alone — not as a mere starting point for the development of human freedom, but instead employs it in thinking about the plant-world, will have before him in the plant-world something nebulous, obscure, mystical, which he cannot comprehend. For as soon as we look up to the plant-world we must understand that here — at least to the degree intended by Goethe with his primordial-plant (*Urpflanze*), and with the principle by means of which he traced the metamorphosis of this primordial-plant through all plant-forms — here at least in this Goethean sense, everyone who approaches the plant-world with a recognition of the real force of the thought holding sway in the inorganic world must perceive that the plant-world remains obscure and mystical in the worst sense of our time, unless it is approached with imagination — at least in the sense in which Goethe established his botanical views.

When anyone like Oswald Spengler rejects imaginative cognition and yet starts describing the plant-world in this way, he reaches nothing that will give clarity and force, but only a kind of confused thinking, a mysticism in the very worst sense of the word, namely *materialistic mysticism*. And if this has to be said about the beginning of the book, the end of it is in turn characterized by the beginning. The end of this book deals with the machine, with that which has given the very signature to modern civilization — the machine, which on the one hand is foreign to man's nature, yet is on the other precisely the means by which he has developed his clear thinking.

Some time ago — directly after the appearance of Oswald Spengler's book, and under the impression of the effect it was having — I gave a lecture at the College of Technical Sciences in Stuttgart on *Anthroposophy and, the Technical Sciences*, in order to show that precisely by submersion in technical science the human being develops that configuration of his soul-life which makes him free. I showed that, because in the mechanical world he experiences the obliteration of all spirituality, he receives in this same mechanical world the impulse to bring forth spirituality out of his own being through inner effort. Anyone, therefore, who comprehends the significance of the machine for our whole present civilization can only say to himself: This machine, with its impertinent pseudo-intelligence, with its dreadful, brutal, demonic spiritlessness, compels the human being, when he rightly understands himself, to bring forth from within those germs of spirituality that are in him. By means of the contrast the machine compels the human being to develop spiritual life.

But as a matter of fact, what I wished to bring out in that lecture was understood by no one, as I was able to learn from the after-effects.

Oswald Spengler places at the conclusion of his work some observations about the machine. Well, what you read there about the machine finally leads to a sort of glorification of the fear of it. We feel that what is said is positively the apex of modern superstition regarding the machine, which people feel as something demonic, as certain superstitious people sense the presence of demons. Spengler describes the inventor of the machine, tells how it has gradually gained ground, and little by little has laid hold of civilization. He describes the people in whose age the machine appeared.

“But for all of them there also existed the really Faustian danger that the devil might have a hand in the game, in order to lead them in spirit to that mountain where he promised them all earthly power. That is what is meant by the dream of those strange Dominicans, like Peter Peregrinus, about the perpetual motion device, through which God would have been robbed of His omnipotence. They succumbed to this ambition again and again; they extorted his secret from the Divinity in order to be God themselves.”

So Oswald Spengler understands the matter thus: that because man can now control machines, he can through this very act of controlling, imagine himself to be a God, can learn to be a God, because, according to his opinion, the God of the cosmic machine controls the machine. How could a man help feeling exalted to godhood when he controls a microcosm!

“They hearkened to the laws of the cosmic time-beat in order to do them violence, and then they created the *idea of the machine* as a little cosmos which yields obedience only to the will of man. But in doing so they overstepped that subtle boundary where, according to the adoring piety of others, sin began; and that was their undoing, from Bacon to Giordano Bruno. True faith has always held that the machine is of the devil.” Now he evidently intends at this point to be merely ironic; but that he intends to be not only ironic becomes apparent when in his brilliant way he uses words which sound somewhat antiquated. The following passage shows this:

“Then follows, however, contemporaneously with Rationalism, the invention of the steam-engine, which overturns everything and transforms the economic picture from the ground up. Till then nature had given service; now it is harnessed in the yoke as a *slave*, and its work measured, as in derision, in terms of horse-power. We passed over from the muscular strength of the negro, employed in organized enterprise, to the organic forces of the earth's crust, where the life-force of thousands of years lies stored as coal, and we now direct our attention to inorganic nature, whose waterpower has already been harnessed in support of the coal. Along with the millions and billions of horse-power the population increases as no other civilization would have considered possible. This growth is a *product of the machine*, which demands service and control, in return for which it increases the power of each individual a hundredfold. Human life becomes precious for the sake of the machine. *Work* becomes the great word in ethical thinking. During the eighteenth century it lost its derogatory significance in all languages. The machine works and compels man to work with it. All civilization has come into a degree of activity under which the earth quivers.

“What has been developed in the course of scarcely a century is a spectacle of such magnitude that to human beings of a future culture, with different souls and different emotions, it must seem that at that time nature reeled. In previous ages, politics has

passed over cities and peoples; human economy has interfered greatly with the destinies of the animal and plant world — but that merely touches life and is effaced again. This technical science, however, will leave behind it the mark of its age when everything else shall have been submerged and forgotten. This Faustian passion has altered the picture of the earth's surface.

“And these machines are ever more dehumanized in their formation; they become ever more ascetic, more mystical and esoteric. They wrap the earth about with an endless web of delicate forces, currents, and tensions. Their bodies become ever more immaterial, even more silent. These wheels, cylinders and levers no longer speak. All the crucial parts have withdrawn to the inside. Man senses the machine as something devilish, and rightly so. For a believer it indicates the deposition of God. It hands over sacred causality to man, and becomes silent, irresistible, with a sort of prophetic omniscience set in motion by him.

“Never has the microcosm felt more superior toward the macrocosm. Here are little living beings who, through their spiritual force, have made the unliving dependent upon them. There seems to be nothing to equal this triumph, achieved by only *one* culture, and, perhaps, for only a few centuries. But precisely because of it the Faustian man has become the *slave of his own creation*.”

We see here the thinker's complete helplessness with regard to the machine. It never dawns on him that there is nothing in the machine that could possibly be mystical for anyone who conceives the very nature of the unliving as lacking any mystical element.

And thus we see Oswald Spengler beginning with a hazy recital about plants, because he really has no conception at all of the nature and character of present-day cognition — which is closely related to the evolution of the mechanical life — because to him thinking remains only an abstraction, and on this account he is also unable to perceive the function of thinking in anything mechanical. In reality, thinking here becomes an entirely unsubstantial image, so that the human being in the mechanical age may become all the more real, may call forth his soul, his spirit, out of himself by resisting the mechanical. That is the significance of the machine-age for the human being, as well as for world-evolution.

When anyone intending to begin with metaphysical clarity starts out instead with a hazy recital about plants, he does so because in this mood he is in opposition to the machine. That is to say, Oswald Spengler has grasped the function of modern thinking only in its abstractness, and he sets to work on something that remains dark to him, namely, the plant-world.

Now taking the mineral, the plant, the animal, and the human kingdoms, the last-named may be characterized for the present time by saying that since the middle of the fifteenth century we have advanced to the thinking that makes the mineral kingdom transparent to us. So that when we look at the human being of our time, as he is inwardly, as observer of the outer world, we must say that as human being he has at this precise time developed the conception of the mineral kingdom. But then we must characterize the significance of this mineral-thinking in the way I have just now characterized it.

But when someone who knows nothing of the real nature of the mineral kingdom takes his start from the plant kingdom, he gets no farther than the animal kingdom. For

the animal bears in itself the plant-nature in the same form we today bear the mineral nature. It is characteristic of Oswald Spengler, first, that he begins with the plant, and in his concepts in no way gets beyond the animal (he deals with man only in so far as man is an animal) ; and second, that thinking really seems to him to be extraordinarily comprehensible, whereas, in reality, as I have just explained, it has been understood in its true significance only since the fourteenth century. He thus lets his thinking slide down just as far as possible into the animal world. We see him discovering, for example, that he has sense-perception, just as has the animal, and that this sense-perception, even in the animal, becomes a sort of judgment. In this way he tries to represent thinking merely as something like an intensification of the perceptive life of the animal.

Actually no one has proved in such a radical way as this same Oswald Spengler that the man of today with his abstract thinking reaches only the extra-human world, and no longer comprehends the human. And the essential characteristic of the human being, namely, that he can think, Oswald Spengler regards only as a sort of adjunct, which is inexplicable and really superfluous. For, according to Spengler, this thinking is really something highly superfluous in man.

*“Understanding emancipated from feeling is called thinking. Thinking has forever brought disunion into the human waking state. It has always regarded the intellect and the perceptive faculty as the high and the low soul-forces. It has created the fatal contrast between the light-world of the eye, which is designated as a world of semblance and sense-delusion, and a literally-imagined world, in which concepts with slight but ever-present accent of light pursue their existence.”*

Now in setting forth these things Spengler develops an extraordinarily curious idea; namely, that in reality the whole spiritual civilization of man depends upon the eye, that it is really only distilled from the light-world, and concepts are only somewhat refined, somewhat distilled, visions in the light, which are transmitted through the eye. Oswald Spengler simply has no idea that thinking, when it is pure thought, not only receives the light-world of the eye, but unites this light-world with the *whole man*. It is an entirely different matter whether we think of an entity which is connected with the perception of the eye, or speak of conceptions or mental pictures. Spengler has something to say also about conceptions, or mental pictures (*Vorstellen*); but at this very point he tries to prove that thinking is only a sort of brain-dream and rarified light-world in man.

Now I should like to know whether with any kind of thinking that is not abstract, but is sound common sense, the word “*stellen*” (to put or place), when it is experienced correctly, can ever be associated with anything belonging to the light-world. A man “places” himself with his legs; the whole man is included. When we say “*vorstellen*” (to place before, to represent), we dynamically unite the light-entity with what we experience within as something dynamic, as a force-effect, as something that plunges down into reality. With realistic thinking, we absolutely dive down into reality. Consider the most important thoughts. Aside from mathematical ones, thoughts always lead to the realization that in them we have not merely a light-air-organism, but also something which man has as soul-experience when he causes a thought to be illuminated at the same time that he places both feet on the earth.

Therefore, all that Oswald Spengler has developed here about this light-world transformed into thinking is really nothing but exceedingly clever talk. It is absolutely

necessary that this should be stated: the introduction to this second volume is brilliant twaddle, which then rises to such assertions as the following:

“This impoverishment of the sense-faculties involves at the same time an immeasurable deepening. The human waking existence is no longer mere tension between the body and the surrounding world. It is now life *in* a closed, surrounding light-world. The body moves *in* observable space. The experience of depth is a mighty penetration into *visible distances from a light-center*. This is the point which we call ‘I’, ‘I’ is a light-concept.”

Anyone who asserts that “I” is a light-concept has no idea, for example, how intimately connected is the experience of the I with the experience of gravity in the human organism; he has no notion at all of the experience of the mechanical that can arise in the human organism. But when it does arise consciously, then the leap is made from abstract thinking to the realistic, concrete thinking that leads to reality.

It might be said that Oswald Spengler is a perfect example of the fact that abstract thinking has become airy, and also light, and has carried the whole human being away from reality, so that he reels about somewhere in the light and has no suspicion that there is also gravity; for example — that there is also something that can be experienced, not merely looked at. The onlooker standpoint of John Stuart Mill, for instance, is here carried to the extreme. Therefore, the book is exceedingly characteristic of our time.

One sentence on page 13 [*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Vol. II.] appears terribly clever, but it is really only light and airy: “One fashions conception upon conception and finally achieves a thought-architecture in great style, whose edifices stand there in an inner light, as it were, in complete distinctness.”

So Oswald Spengler starts out with mere phraseology. He finds the plant-world “sleeping”; that represents first of all the world around us, which is thoroughly asleep. He finds that the world “wakes up” in the animal kingdom, and that the animal develops in itself a kind of microcosm. He gets no farther than the animal, but develops only the relation between the plant-world and the animal-world, and finds the former in the sleeping state and the latter in the waking state.

	Mineral	
Sleeping: _		Plant
Waking:		Animal
	Human	

But everything that happens in the world really comes about under the influence of what is sleeping. The animal — therefore, for Oswald Spengler, man also — has sleep in himself. That is true. But all that has significance for the world proceeds from sleep, for sleep contains movement. The waking state contains only tensions — tensions which beget all sorts of discrepancies within, but still only tensions which are, as it were, just

one more external item in the universe. Actually, an independent reality is one which arises from sleep.

And in this broth float all sorts of more or less superfluous, or savory and unsavory blobs of grease — which is the animal element; but there could be broth without these blobs of grease, except that these bring something into reality. In sleep the *Where* and the *How* are not to be found, but only the *When* and the *Why*. So that we find the following in the human being, who contains the plantlike as well — of the role played by the mineral element in the human being Oswald Spengler has no notion — so that in man we find the following: in as far as he is plantlike, he lives in time; he takes his stand in the “When” and the “Why,” the earlier being the Why of the later. That is the causal factor. And by living on thus through history man really expresses the plantlike in history. The animal-element — and therefore the human as well — which inquires as to the “Where” and the “How,” these (the animal and human elements) are just the blobs of grease that are added to it. (This is quite interesting as far as the inner tensions are concerned, but these really have nothing to do with what takes place in the world.) So we can say: Through cosmic relationships the “When” and the “Why” are implanted in the world for succeeding ages.

And in this on-flowing broth the grease-blobs float with their “Where” and “How.” And when a man — just one such drop of grease — floats in this broth, the “Where” and the “How” really concern only him and his inner tensions, his waking existence. What he does as a historical being proceeds from sleep.

Long ago it was said as a sort of religious imagination: *The Lord giveth to his beloved in sleep*. To the Spenglerian man it is nature that gives in sleep. Such is the thinking of one of the most prominent personalities of the present time, who, however — in order to avoid coming to terms with himself — plunges into the plant kingdom, thence to emerge no farther than the animal kingdom, into which the human also is stirred.

Now one would suppose that this concoction with its cleverness would avoid the worst blunders that thinking has made in the past; that is, that it would somehow be consistent. If the plant-existence is to be poured out over the history of humanity, then let the concoction be confined to the plant kingdom. It would be difficult, however, to enter upon a historical discussion concerning the man of the plant kingdom. Yet Oswald Spengler does discuss historically, even very cleverly, the plantlike activity of humanity during sleep. But in order that he may have something to say about this sleep of humanity, he makes use of the worst possible kind of thinking, namely, that of anthropomorphism, artificially distorting everything, imagining human qualities into everything. Hence, he speaks — as early as on page 9 — of the plant, which has no waking-existence, because he wants to learn from it how he is to write history, and also give a description of the activity of man that arises from sleep.

But let us read the first sentences on page 9: “A plant leads an existence with no waking state” — Good. He means: “In sleep all beings become plants,” that is, man as well as animal — All right. — “the tension with the surrounding world is released, the measure of life moves on.” And now comes a great sentence: “A plant knows only the relation to When and Why.” Now the plant begins not only to dream, but to “know” in its blessed sleep. Thus one faces the conjecture that this sleep, destined to spread perpetually as history in human evolution, might now begin to wake up. For then Oswald Spengler



could just as well write a history as to attribute to the plants a knowledge of When and Why. Indeed this sleep-nature of the plant has even some highly interesting qualities:

“The thrusting of the first green spears out of the winter-earth, the swelling of the buds, the whole force of blossoming, of fragrance, of glowing, of ripening — this is all desire for the fulfilment of a destiny and a constantly yearning query as to the Why.”

Of course history can very easily be described as plantlike, if the writer first prepares himself to that end through anthropomorphisms. And because all this is so, Oswald Spengler says further:

“The Where can have no meaning for the plantlike existence. That is the question with which the awakening human being daily recalls his world. For only the pulse-beat of existence persists through all the generations. The waking existence begins anew with each microcosm. That is the distinction between procreation and birth. The one is guarantee for permanence, the other is a beginning. And therefore, a plant is procreated but not born. It exists, but no awakening, no first day, spreads a sense-world around it ...”

If anyone wishes to follow Spenglerian thoughts, he must really, like a tumbler, first stand on his head and then turn over, in order mentally to reverse what is thought of in the human sense as right side up. But you see by concocting such

metaphysics, such a philosophy, Spengler arrives at the following: This sleeping state in man, that which is plantlike in him, this makes history. What is this in man? The blood — the blood which flows through the generations.

Well, in this way Spengler prepares a method for himself, so that he can say: The most important events developed in human history occur through the blood. To do this he must of course cut some more thought-capers:

“The waking existence is synonymous with ‘ascertaining’ (*Feststellen*), no matter whether the point in question is the sense of touch in one of the *infusoria* or human thinking of the highest order.”

Certainly when anyone thinks in such an abstract way, he simply fails to discover the difference between the sense of touch in one of the infusoria and human thinking of the highest order. He comes then to all sorts of extraordinarily strange assertions, such as: that this thinking is really a mere adjunct to the whole human life, that deeds originate in the blood, and that out of the blood history is made. And if there are still a few people who ponder about this, they do so with purely abstract thinking that has nothing whatever to do with actuality.

“That we not only live, but know about life, is the result of that observation of our corporeal being in the light. But the animal knows only life, not death.”

And so he explains that the thing of importance must come forth out of obscurity, darkness, out of the plantlike, out of the blood; and he claims that those people who have achieved anything in history have done so not at all as the result of an idea, of thinking — but that thoughts, even those of thinkers, are merely a by-product. About what thinking accomplishes, Oswald Spengler has no words disparaging enough.

And then he contrasts with thinkers all those who really act, because they let thinking be thinking; that is, let it be the business of others.

“Some people are born as men of destiny and others as men of causality. The man who is really alive, the peasant and warrior, the statesman, general, man of the world, merchant, everyone who wishes to become rich, to command, to rule, to fight, to take risks, the organizer, the contractor, the adventurer, the fencer, the gambler, is a world apart from the ‘spiritual’ man” (Spengler puts ‘spiritual’ in quotation marks), “from the saint, the priest, the scholar, idealist, ideologist, regardless of whether he is destined thereto by the power of his thinking or through lack of blood. Existence and being awake, measure and tension, instincts and concepts, the organs of circulation and those of touch — there will seldom be a man of eminence in whom the one side does not unquestionably surpass the other in significance.

“... the active person is a *complete* human being. In the contemplative person a single organ would like to act without the body or against it. For only the active man, the man of destiny” (that is, one whom thoughts do not concern) — “for only the active man, the man of destiny, lives, in the last analysis, in the *real* world, the world of political, military, and economic crises, in which concepts and theories count for nothing. Here a good blow is worth more than a good conclusion, and there is sense in the contempt with which the soldiers and statesmen of all times have looked down on the scribbler and the book-worm, who has the idea that world-history exists for the sake of the spirit, of science, or even of art.”

That is a plain statement; in fact, plain enough for anyone to recognize *who* said it: that it is definitely written by none other than a “scribbler and book-worm,” who merely puts on airs at the expense of others. Only a “scribbler and bookworm” could write:

“Some people are born as men of destiny and some as men of causality. The man who is really alive, the peasant and warrior, the statesman, general, man of the world, merchant, everyone who wishes to become rich, to command, to rule, to fight, to take risks, the organizer, the contractor, the adventurer, the fencer, the gambler, is a world apart from the ‘spiritual’ man, from the saint, the priest, the scholar, idealist, ideologist” ... As if there had never been confessionals and father confessors! Indeed, there are still other beings from whom all those classes of men glean their thoughts. In the society of all such people as have been mentioned — statesmen, generals, men of the world, merchants, fencers, gamblers, and so on — there have even been found soothsayers and fortune-tellers. So that actually the “world” that is supposed to separate the statesman, politician, etc., from the “spiritual” man is in reality not such an enormous distance. Anyone who can observe life will find that this sort of thing is written with utter disregard of all life-observation. And Oswald Spengler, who is a brilliant man and an eminent personality, makes a thorough job of it. After saying that in the realm of real events a blow is worth more than a logical conclusion, he continues thus:

“Here a good blow is worth more than a good conclusion, and there is sense in the contempt with which the soldiers and statesmen of all times have looked down on the scribbler and the book-worm, who has the idea that world-history exists for the sake of the spirit, of science, or even of art. Let us speak unequivocally: Understanding liberated from feeling is only one side of life, and not the decisive side. In the history of western thought, the name of Napoleon may be omitted, but in actual history Archimedes, with all his scientific discoveries, has perhaps been less influential than that soldier who slew him at the storming of Syracuse.”

Now if a brick had fallen on the head of Archimedes, then, according to this theory, this brick would be more important, in the sense of real logical history, than all that originated with Archimedes. And mind you, this was not written by an ordinary journalist, but by one of the most clever people of the present time. That is exactly the significant point, that one of the cleverest men of the present writes in this way.

And now exactly *what* is effective? Thinking? That just floats on top. What is effective is the blood. Anyone who speaks about the blood from the spiritual viewpoint, that is, speaks scientifically, will ask first of all how the blood originates, how the blood is related to man's nourishment. In the bowels blood does not yet exist; it is first created inside the human being himself. The flow of the blood down through the generations — well, if any kind of poor mystical idea can be formed, this is it. Nothing that nebulous mystics have ever said more or less distinctly about the inner soul-life was such poor mysticism as this Spenglerian mysticism of the blood. It refers to something that precludes all possibility, not only of thinking about it — of course that would make no difference to Oswald Spengler, because no one really needs to think, it is just one of the luxuries of life — but one should cease to speak about anything so difficult to approach as the blood, if one pretends to be an intelligent person, or even an intelligent higher animal.

From this point of view, it is perfectly possible, then, to inaugurate a consideration of history with the following sentence:

“All great historical events are sustained by such beings of a cosmic nature, as dwell in peoples, parties, armies, classes; while the history of the spirit runs its course in loose associations and circles, schools, educational classes, tendencies — in ‘isms.’ And here it is again a matter of destiny whether such a group finds a leader at the decisive moment of its greatest efficiency, or is blindly driven forward, whether the chance leaders are men of high caliber or totally insignificant personalities raised to the summit by the surge of events, like Pompey or Robespierre. It is the mark of the statesman that he comprehends with complete clarity the strength and permanence, direction and purpose of all these soul-masses which form and dissolve in the stream of time; nevertheless, here also it is a question of chance as to whether he will be able to rule them, or is dragged along by them.” In this way a consideration of history is inaugurated which lets the blood be the conqueror of everything that enters historical evolution through the spirit! Now:

“*One power may be overthrown only by another power*, not by a principle, and against money, there is no other” (but blood, he means). “Money is vanquished and deposed only by blood. Life is the first and last, the illimitable cosmic flux in microcosmic form. It is *the* fact in the world as history. Before the irresistible rhythm of successive generations, everything that the waking life has built up in its worlds of spirit finally disappears. The fact of importance in history is life, always only life, the race, the triumph of the will to power, and not the victory of truths, discoveries, or money. *World-history is world-judgment*. It has always decided in favor of life that was more vigorous, fuller, more sure of itself, in favor, that is, of the right to live, whether it was just or not in the waking life; and it has always sacrificed truth and righteousness to power, to race, and has condemned to death men and whole peoples to whom truth was more precious than deeds, and justice more essential than power. Thus another drama of lofty culture, this whole wonderful world of divinities, arts, thoughts, battles, cities, closes with the

primeval facts of the eternal blood, which is one and the same with the eternally circling, cosmic, undulating flood. The clear, form-filled waking existence plunges again into the silent service of life, as demonstrated by the Chinese epoch and by the Roman Empire. Time conquers space, and time it is whose inexorable passage imbeds on this planet the fleeting incident — culture, in the incident — man, a form in which the incident — life, flows along for a time, while behind it in the light-world of our eyes appear the flowing horizons of earth-history and star-history.

“For us, however, whom destiny has placed in this culture at this moment of its evolution when money celebrates its last victories, and its successor, Caesarism, stealthily and irresistibly approaches, the direction is given within narrow limits which willing and compulsion must follow, if life is to be worth living.”

*Thus does Oswald Spengler point to the coming Caesarism*, to that which is to come before the complete collapse of the cultures of the West, and into which the present culture will be transformed.

I have put this before you today because truly the man who is awake — he matters little to Oswald Spengler — the man who is awake, even though he be an Anthroposophist, should take some account of what is happening. And so I wished from this point of view to draw your attention to a particular problem of the time. But it would be a poor conclusion if I were to say only this to you concerning this problem of our time. Therefore, before we must have a longer interval for my trip to Oxford, I will give another lecture next week Wednesday.

## OSWALD SPENGLER

### II

The author whom I discussed here the last time should really provide much food for thought for those very people who count themselves in the Anthroposophical Movement; for Oswald Spengler is a personality who has a scientific mastery of a very large part of all that can be known today. It can be said that he has complete command of the great variety of thoughts that have become the possession of civilized humanity in the course of recent centuries. Spengler can be regarded as a man who has assimilated a large number of the sciences, or at least the ideas contained in them.

The thought-combinations he achieves are sometimes dazzling. He is in the highest degree what may be called in Central Europe a brilliant man — not in France, but in Central Europe; Oswald Spengler's thoughts are too heavy and too dense for western — that is, French — genius; but, as has been said, in the Central European sense he may undoubtedly be regarded as a brilliant thinker. He can hardly be called an elegant thinker in the best meaning of the word, for the investiture of his thoughts, in spite of all his cleverness, is certainly extremely pedantic. And it can even be seen in various places that out of the sentence-meshes of this gifted man the eye of a Philistine unmistakably peers forth. In any case, there is something unpolished in the thoughts themselves.

Well, this is more what might be called an esthetic consideration of the ideas; but the important point is this: we confront here a personality who has thoughts, and they are in keeping with the spirit of the time, but he really has a poor opinion of thinking in general. For Oswald Spengler regards as decisive for the real happenings in the world not what results from thinking, but in his opinion the more instinctive life-impulses are the deciding factors. So that with him thinking really floats above life, as something of a luxury, we might say; and from his point of view, thinkers are people who ponder on life, from who's pondering however nothing can flow into life. Life is already there when thinkers appear who are ready to think about it. And in this connection, it is entirely correct to say that in the world-historical moment when a thinker masters the special form of present-day thoughts with something of universality, at that very moment he senses their actual sterility and unfruitfulness. He turns to something other than these unfruitful thoughts, namely, to what bubbles up in the instinctive life, and from the point of view thus provided he sees the present civilization. This really appears to him in such a way that he says: Everything that this civilization has brought forth is on the way to ruin. We can only hope that something instinctive will emerge once again from what Spengler calls "the blood," which will have nothing to do with what constitutes present civilization, will even crush it, and put in its place a far-reaching power arising only from the instinctive realm.

Oswald Spengler sees that people of the modern civilization have gradually become slaves of the mechanistic life; but he fails to see that just through reaction, human freedom can result within this mechanistic life — that is, technical science in general — because it is fundamentally devoid of spirit. He has no notion of this; but why is this so?

You know that in the last lecture I quoted the passage in which Spengler says: The statesman, the practical man, the merchant, and so on, all act from impulses other than

those that can be gained from thinking; and I said more or less *jokingly*: Oswald Spengler never seems to have noticed that there are also father-confessors, and others in similar positions. Neither has Spengler adequately observed something else, in regard to which the relation to the father-confessor represents only a decadent side-issue, from a world-historical point of view.

When we go back in humanity's evolution, we find everywhere that the so-called men of action, those people who have outwardly something to do in the world, turned, in later times to the oracles, and in earlier times to what can be recognized in the Mysteries as the decrees of the spiritual world. We need only to observe the ancient Egyptian culture to see that those who learned in the Mysteries the decrees of the spiritual world transmitted what they discovered by spiritual means to those who wished to become, and were intended to be, men of action. So that we have only to look back in the evolution of humanity to find that it is out of the spiritual world, not out of the blood — for this whole theory of the blood is about as mystically nebulous as anything could be — it is not, then, out of the obscure depths of the blood that the impulses were derived which entered into earthly deeds, but out of the *spirit*. In a certain sense the so-called men of action of that time were the instruments for the great spiritual creations whose directions were learned in the spiritual research of the Mysteries. And I might say that echoes of the Mysteries, which we see everywhere in Greek history, play a part in Roman history, and they are also unmistakably to be found even in the early part of the Middle Ages. I have called your attention, for instance, to the fact that the Lohengrin-legend can be understood only if one knows how to follow it back from the external physical world into the citadel of the Grail in the early, or properly speaking, in the middle part of the Middle Ages.

It is, therefore, a complete misunderstanding of the true progress of humanity's evolution when Oswald Spengler supposes that world-historical events originate in any way in the blood, and that what the human being acquires through thoughts has nothing to do with these events. Looking back into ancient times we find that when people had tasks to perform, they were to a large extent dependent upon research in the spiritual world. The designs of the Gods had to be discovered, if we may so express it. And this dependence upon the Gods existing in ancient times made the human being of that time unfree. Men's thoughts were completely directed toward serving as vessels, as it were, into which the Gods poured their substance — spiritual substance, under whose influence men acted.

In order that men might become free, this pouring of substance into human thoughts on the part of the Gods had to cease; and as a result, human thoughts came more and more to be images. The thoughts of the humanity of earlier times were realities to a far greater degree; and what Oswald Spengler ascribes to the blood are those very realities which lay hidden in the thoughts of ancient humanity, those substances which still worked through men in the Middle Ages.

Then came modern times. The thoughts of men lost their divine, substantial content. They became merely abstract thought-images. But it is only thoughts of this kind that are not constraining and coercive; only by living in such thought-images can man become free.

Now throughout recent centuries and into the twentieth century there was organically present in man scarcely more than the disposition to fashion such thought-images. This is

the education of man toward freedom. He did not have the atavistic imaginations and inspirations of ancient times: he experienced only thought-images, and in these he could become ever more and more free, since images do not compel. If our moral impulses manifest in images, these impulses no longer compel us as they once did when they lay in the ancient thought-substance. They acted upon human beings at that time just as nature-forces; whereas the modern thought-images no longer act in this way. In order, therefore, that they might have any content whatsoever, the human being had, on the one hand, either to fill them with what natural science knows through ordinary sense-observation, or, on the other, to develop in secret societies, in rites or otherwise, something which was derived more or less from ancient times through tradition. By means of sense-observation he thus gained a science which filled his thoughts from without, but these thoughts rejected more and more anything from within; so that if man's thoughts were to have any inner content at all, he was compelled to turn to the ancient traditions, as they had been handed down either in the religious denominations or in the various kinds of secret societies which have flourished over the whole earth. The great mass of mankind was embraced in the various religious denominations, where something was presented whose content was derived from ancient times, when thoughts still had some content. Man filled his thoughts from without with a content of sense-observation, or from within with ancient impulses which had become dogmatic and traditional.

It was necessary for this to occur from the sixteenth century up to the last third of the nineteenth; for during that time human cooperation throughout the civilized world was still influenced by that spiritual principle which we may call the principle of the Archangel Gabriel, if we wish to employ an ancient name (it is only a terminology; I intend to indicate a spiritual Power); this Being, then, influenced human souls, albeit unconsciously in modern times. Human beings had themselves no inner content, and because they accepted a merely traditional content for their spirit-soul life, they were unable to feel the presence or influence of this Being.

The first really to become aware of this utter lack of spiritual content in his soul-life was Friedrich Nietzsche; but he was unable to reach the experience of a new spirituality. Actually his every impulse to find a spirit-soul content failed, and so he sought for impulses as indefinite as possible, such as power-impulses and the like.

People need not merely a spiritual content which they may then clothe in abstract thoughts, but they need the thorough inner warming which may be occasioned by the presence of this inner content. This spiritual warming is exceedingly important. It was brought about for the majority of people through the various rituals and similar ceremonies practiced in the religious denominations; and this warmth was poured into souls also in the secret societies of more recent times.

This was possible in the time of Gabriel, because practically everywhere on the earth there were elemental beings still remaining from the Middle Ages. The farther the nineteenth century advanced the more impossible it became — entirely so in the twentieth century — for these elemental beings, which were in all natural phenomena and so forth, to become parasites, as it were, in the human social life. In most recent times there has been much which has unconsciously resisted this condition.

When in these secret societies which followed ancient tradition — it is really unbelievable how “ancient” and “sanctified” all the rituals of these societies are supposed

to be — but when rituals were arranged or teachings given, in the sense of ancient tradition, when something was developed in these societies which had been carried over as an echo of the ancient Mysteries, no longer understood, conditions were exactly right for certain elemental beings. For when people went through all sorts of performances — let us say, when they attended the celebration of a mass, and no longer understood anything about it, the people were then in the presence of something filled with great wisdom; they were present, but understood nothing at all of what they saw, although an understanding would have been possible. Then these elemental beings entered the situation, and when the people were not thinking about the mass, the elementals began to think with the unused human intellect. Human beings had cultivated the free intellect more and more, but they did not use it. They preferred to sit and let something be enacted before them from tradition. People did not think. Although conditions are becoming entirely different, it is still true today that people of the present time could do a vast amount of thinking if they wished to use their minds; but they have no desire to do this; they are disinclined to think clearly. They say rather: Oh, that requires too much effort; it demands inner activity.

If people desired to think they would not enjoy so much going to all sorts of moving pictures, for there one cannot and need not think; everything just rolls past. The tiny bit of thinking that is asked of anyone today is written on a great screen where it can be read. It is true that this lack of sympathy with active inner thinking has been slowly and gradually developed in the course of modern times, and people have now almost entirely given up thinking. If a lecture is given somewhere which has no illustrations on the screen, where people are supposed to think somewhat, they prefer to sleep a little. Perhaps they attend the lecture, but they sleep — because active thinking does not enjoy a high degree of favor in our time.

It was precisely to this unwillingness to think, lasting through centuries, that the practices of the various secret societies were in many ways adapted. The same kind of elemental beings were present that had associated with human beings in the first half of the Middle Ages — when experiments were still going on in alchemistic laboratories, where the experimenters were quite conscious that spiritual beings worked with them. These spiritual beings were still present in later times; they were present everywhere. And why should they not have made use of a good opportunity?

In most recent centuries a human brain was gradually developed which could think well, but people had no wish to think. So these elemental beings approached and said to themselves: If man himself will make no use of his brain, we can use it. And in those secret societies which cherished only the traditional, and always kept emphasizing what was old, these elementals approached and made use of human brains for thinking. Since the sixteenth century an extraordinary amount of brain-substance has been thus employed by elemental beings.

Very much has entered human evolution without man's cooperation — even good ideas, especially those appertaining to human social life. If you look around among people of our time who would like to be more or less informed about civilization, you will find that to them it has become an important question to ask what it is, really, that acts from man to man. People should think, but do not; what does act, then, from man to man? That was a great question, for instance, with Goethe, and with this in mind he wrote



his *Wilhelm Meister*. In this story your attention is constantly drawn to all sorts of obscure relations of which people are unconscious, which nevertheless prevail, and are half unconsciously taken up by one and another and spread. All kinds of threads are interwoven; and these Goethe tried to find. He sought for them, and what he could find he aimed to describe in his novel, *Wilhelm Meister*.

This was the condition existing in Central Europe throughout the nineteenth century. If people today had any kind of inclination to spend more time with a book than between two meals — well, that is speaking figuratively, for usually they go to sleep when they have read one-third between two meals; then they read the next third between the next two meals, and the final third between the next two — and in that way, it is somewhat scattered. It would be good for people if even those novels and short stories that can be read between two meals, or between two railroad stations, stimulated reflection. We can hardly expect that at the present time; but if, for example, you should look up Gutzkow, and see how in his book, *The Magician of Rome*, and in his *The Champions of the Spirit* he has searched for such relations; if you take the extraordinarily social concatenations sought by George Sand in her novels, you will be able to notice that in the nineteenth century those threads, arising from indeterminate powers and working into the unconsciousness, everywhere played a part; you will notice that the authors are following up these threads, and that in their efforts they — George Sand, for example — are in many ways absolutely on the right track.

But in the last third of the nineteenth century it gradually came about that these elementals — who in the first place thought with the human brain and then, when they had taken possession of human minds and brought about the social conditions of the nineteenth century, really spun these threads — that these beings now at last had enough. They had fulfilled their world-historical task — we might better say, their world-historical need. And something else occurred which particularly hindered their continuing this kind of parasitic activity. This proceeded exceedingly well at about the end of the eighteenth century, then remarkably so in the nineteenth — but after that point of time these elemental beings attained their aims less and less; this was because an increasing number of souls descended from the spiritual world to the physical plane with great expectations regarding the earth-life.

When people have screamed and kicked as little children — and now in more recent times have had their meager education, they have by no means become conscious that they were equipped with very great expectations before they descended to earth. But this lived on nevertheless in the emotions, in the entire soul-organization, and still continues to live today. Souls really descend to the physical world with exceedingly strong expectations; and thence come the disillusionments which have been unconsciously experienced in the souls of children for some time past, because these expectations are not satisfied.

Chosen spirits who had especially strong impulses of anticipation before descending to the physical plane were the ones, for example, who observed this physical plane, saw that these expectations are not being satisfied here, and who then wrote Utopian schemes of how things should be, and what could be done. It would be exceedingly interesting to study, with regard to entrance through birth into physical existence, how the souls of great Utopianists — even the lesser ones and the more or less queer fellows, who have

thought out all kinds of schemes which cannot even be called Utopian, but which reveal much goodwill to form a paradise for people on earth — how these souls who have descended from spiritual worlds were really constituted with regard to their entrance upon the physical earth-plane.

This descent filled with anticipation is distressing for the beings who are to make use of such human brains. They do not succeed in using the brain of the human being when he descends to earth with such anticipation. Up to the eighteenth century those descending had far less expectation. Then the use of the brain by those other beings, not human, went well. But just during the last third of the nineteenth century it became exceedingly uncomfortable for the beings who were to make use of the brains of people descending with such expectations, because these led to unconscious emotions, which were felt in turn by the spiritual beings when they wanted to make use of the human brain. Hence, they no longer do this. And now it is a fact that there exists in modern humanity a very wide-spread and increasing disposition for human beings to have thoughts, but to suppress them. The brain has been gradually ruined, especially among the higher classes, by the suppression of thoughts. Other beings, not human, who formerly took possession of these thoughts no longer approach.

And now — now human beings have thoughts, it is true, but they have no idea how to use them. And the most significant representative of the kind of people who have no understanding of what to do with their thoughts is Oswald Spengler. He is to be distinguished from others — well, now how shall we express it in order not to give offense when these things are repeated outside, as they always are — perhaps we must say that others completely neglect their minds in their early years, so that their brains tend to allow thoughts to disappear in them. Spengler differs from others in that he has kept his mind fresh, so that it has not become so sterile; he is not absorbed only in himself, occupied always with himself alone.

It is true, is it not, that a great part of humanity today is inwardly jellied (*versulzt*, if I may make use of a Central European expression that perhaps many may not understand. *Sulze* is something that is made at the time of hog-slaughter from the various products of the killing which are not of use otherwise, mixed with jelly-like ingredients — what cannot even be employed for sausage-making is used for *Sulze*.) And I might say that as a result of the many confusing influences of education the brains of most people become thus *versulzt*. They cannot help it; and of course, we are not speaking at all in an accusing sense, but perhaps rather in an excusing sense, feeling pity for the jellied brains.

I mean to say, when people have only the one thought: that they have no idea what to do with themselves; when they are as if squashed together, compressed and jellied — then these thoughts can be very nicely submerged in the underworlds of the brain, and from there plunged more deeply into the lower regions of the human organization, and so on. But that is not the case with such people as Oswald Spengler. They know how to develop thoughts. And that is what makes Spengler a clever man: he has thoughts. But the thoughts a man may have amount to something only when they receive a spiritual content. For this result a *spiritual content* is needed. Man needs the content that Anthroposophy wants to give; otherwise he has thoughts, but is unable to do anything with them. In the case of the Spenglerian thoughts it is really — I might almost say — an impossible metaphor comes to me — it is as if a man, who for the occasion of a future

marriage with a lady has procured all imaginable kinds of beautiful garments — not for himself, but for the lady — and then she deserts him before the wedding, and he has all those clothes and no one to wear them. And so you can see how it is with these wondrously beautiful thoughts. These Spenglerian thoughts are all cut according to the most modern scientific style of garment, but there is no lady to wear the dresses. Old Boethius still had at least the somewhat shriveled *Rhetorica* and *Dialectica*, as I said some weeks ago. These no longer had the vitality of the muses of Homer and of Pindar, but at any rate all seven arts still figured throughout the Middle Ages. There was still someone upon whom to put the clothes.

I might call what has arisen, *Spenglerism*, because it is something significant; but with it the time has arrived when garments have come into existence, so to speak, but all the beings who might wear these beautiful thought-garments are lacking — in other words, there is no lady. The muse comes not; the clothes are here. And so people simply announce that they can make no use of the whole clothes-closet of modern thoughts. Thinking does not exist at all for the purpose of laying hold on life in any way.

What is lacking is the substantial content which should come from the spiritual worlds. Precisely that is wanting. And so people declare that it is all nonsense anyway; these clothes are here, after all, only to be looked at. Let us hang them on the clothes-racks and wait for some buxom peasant-maid to come forth out of the mystical vagueness, and ... well, she will need no beautiful clothes, for she will be what we may look for from the primordial Source.

This represents Spenglerism: he expects impulses from something indeterminate, undefined, undifferentiated, which need no thought-garments, and he hangs all the thought-garments on wooden racks, so that at least they are there to be looked at; for if they were not even there to be seen, no one could understand why Oswald Spengler has written two such thick books, which are entirely superfluous. For what is anyone to do with two thick books if thinking no longer exists? Spengler allows no occasion to become sentimental, or we should find much that is amusing. A Caesar must come! but the modern Caesar is one who has made as much money as possible, and has gathered together all sorts of engineers who, out of the spirit, have become the slaves of technical science — and then founded modern Caesarism upon blood-borne money or upon money-borne blood. In this situation thinking has no significance whatever; thinking sits back and occupies itself with all sorts of thoughts.

But now the good man writes two thick books in which are contained some quite fine thoughts; yet they are absolutely unnecessary. On his own showing, no use whatever can be made of them. It would have been far more intelligent if he had used all this paper to ... let us say, to contrive a formula by which the most favorable blood-mixtures might come into existence in the world, or something like that. That is what anyone with his views should do.

What anyone should do corresponds not at all with what he advocates in his books. Anyone reading the books has the feeling: Well, this man has something to say; he knows about the downfall of the West, for he has fairly devoured this whole mood of destruction; he himself is quite full of it. Those who are wishing to hasten the decline of the West could do no better than make Oswald Spengler captain, even leader, of this decline. For he understands all about it; his own inner spirit is completely of this caliber.

And so he is extraordinarily representative of his time. He believes that this whole modern civilization is going to ruin. Well, if everyone believes likewise, it surely will! Therefore, what he writes must be true. It seems to me that it contains a tremendous inner truth.

This is the way the matter stands; and anyone whose basis is Anthroposophy must really pay attention to just such a personality as Oswald Spengler. For the serious consideration of spiritual things, the serious consideration of the spiritual life, is precisely what Anthroposophy desires. In Anthroposophy the question is certainly not whether this or that dogma is accepted, but the important thing is that this spiritual life, this substantial spiritual life, shall be taken seriously, entirely seriously, and that it shall *awaken* the human being.

It is very interesting that Oswald Spengler says: When he thinks, a man is awake (that he cannot deny), but anything truly effective comes from sleep, and that is contained in the plant and in the plantlike in man. Whatever in the human being is of a plantlike nature, he really brings forth in a living state: sleep is what is alive. The waking state brings forth thoughts; but the waking existence results only in inner tensions.

Thus it has become possible for one of the cleverest men of the present to indicate something like this: What I do must be planted in me while I sleep, and I really need not wake up at all. To awake is a luxury, a complete luxury. I should really only walk around and, still sleeping, perform what occurs to me in sleep. I should really be a sleep-walker. It is a luxury that a head is still there continually indulging in thinking about the whole thing, while I go about sleep-walking. Why be awake at all?

But this is a prevailing mood, and Spengler really brings it to very clear expression, namely: The modern human being is not fond of this being awake. All sorts of illustrations come to me. For instance: When, at the beginning of the Anthroposophical Society years ago, a lecture was given, there were always in the front rows people who even outwardly accentuated sleeping a little, so that proper participation might be visible in the auditorium, so that properly devoted participants might be visible. Sleeping is really exceedingly popular, is it not? Now most people do it silently: on the occasions I have mentioned the people were well-behaved in this regard; if there are no specific sounds of snoring, then people are well-behaved, are they not? That is, they are at least quiet. But Spengler, who is a strange man, makes a noise over what other people are quiet about. The others sleep; but Spengler says: People *must* sleep; they should not be awake at all. And he makes use of all his knowledge to deliver an entirely adequate thesis for sleep. So what it comes to is this: *that an exceedingly clever man of the present time really delivers an adequate thesis for sleep!*

This is something to which we must pay attention. We need not make a noise about it, as Spengler does; but we should consider this, and realize how necessary it is to understand the waking state, the state of being more and more awake, which is to be attained precisely through something like the spiritual impulses of Anthroposophy.

It must be emphasized again and again that it is necessary for wakefulness, actual, inner soul-wakefulness, gradually to become enjoyable. Dornach is really felt to be unsympathetic, because its purpose is to stimulate to wakefulness, not to sleep, and because it would like to take the waking state quite seriously. It would really like to pour

*awakeness* into everything, into art, into the social life, and most of all into the life of cognition, into the whole conduct of life, into everything to which human life is in any way inclined.

You may believe me, it is indeed necessary to call attention to such things now and then; for at least in such moments as this, when we are together again only to interrupt these lectures for a short time until my return from Oxford, it must be pointed out, as so often, that precisely among us a certain inclination to be awake must gain a footing. There must be an appropriation of what Anthroposophy contains, in order to relate it to man's waking existence. For that is what we need in all spheres of life: *to be truly awake*.

FOUR ARTICLES BY RUDOLF STEINER

*Translated by Norman Macbeth*

I

*Spengler's "Perspectives of World History"*

August 13, 1922

Oswald Spengler has now issued the second volume of his *Decline of the West*. He calls it *Perspectives of World History* [*The Decline of the West*, by Oswald Spengler; Volume II: *Perspectives of World History*. Translated by Atkinson. (Knopf).] One feels compelled to compare the beginning and end of these perspectives.

The beginning directs our observation toward nature. "Regard the flowers at eventide as, one after the other, they close in the setting sun. Strange is the feeling that then presses in upon you — a feeling of enigmatic fear in the presence of this blind dreamlike earth-bound existence. The dumb forest, the silent meadows, this bush, that twig, do not stir themselves, it is the wind that plays with them. Only the little gnat is free — he dances still in the evening light, he moves whither he will. A plant is nothing on its own account. It forms a part of the landscape in which an accident made it take root. The twilight, the chill, the closing of every flower — these are not cause and effect, not danger and willed answer to danger. They are a single process of nature, which is accomplishing itself near, with, and in the plant. The individual is not free to look out for itself, will for itself, or choose for itself."

Throughout the whole book one feels that the "world-historic perspectives" are colored by this glance at the sleeping plant-life to which we are exhorted at the very beginning. Just why should we look at this? Is this what the man of the present is naturally driven to when the riddles and disturbances of his epoch rage in his mind? Is the mood provoked by this gaze at nature especially suited to penetrating the essence of present-day culture in such a way that it can be evaluated?

At the very end of the volume one is placed before the whole tragedy of the man of the present. "The passion for invention declares itself as early as the Gothic architecture — compare this with the deliberate form-poverty of the Doric! — and is manifest throughout our music. Book-printing appeared, and the long-range weapon. On the heels of Columbus and Copernicus come the telescope, the microscope, the chemical elements, and lastly the immense technological corpus of the early Baroque. Then followed, however, simultaneously with Rationalism, the invention of the steam-engine, which upset everything and transformed economic life from the foundations up. Till then nature had rendered services, but now she was tied to the yoke as a slave, and her work was, as though in contempt, measured by a standard of horse-power. ... As the horse power runs to millions and billions, the numbers of the population increase and increase, on a scale that no other Culture ever thought possible. This growth is a *product of the machine*, which insists on being used and directed, and in return centuples the forces of each individual. For the sake of the machine, human life becomes, precious ... The entire Culture reaches a degree of activity such that the earth trembles under it ... And what now develops, in the space of hardly a century, is a drama of such, greatness that men of a future Culture, with other souls and other passions, will hardly be able to resist the conviction that in our times nature herself was tottering ... And these machines become in

their forms less and ever less human, more ascetic, mystic, esoteric ... Never save here has a microcosm felt itself superior to its macrocosm, but here the little life-units have by sheer force of their intellect made the unliving dependent upon themselves ... But for that very reason Faustian man has become *the slave of his creation* ... The peasant, the hand-worker, even the merchant, appear suddenly as inessential in comparison with the three great figures that the machine has bred and trained up in the course of its development: *the entrepreneur, the engineer, and the factory-worker*."

Why should man, who seems to be placed in such a relation to the machine, undertake to evaluate this position with the gaze directed toward the sleeping life of the plant?

It was certainly not gazing in this direction that brought man into the midst of wheels, cranks, motors, and so forth. Much more was it looking at lifeless nature. Ever since man approached this with a contemplation which wanted its objects to be as transparent as those of mathematics, he has moved toward modern technology. The newer thinking has trained itself to look at the spiritually transparent. This thinking learns something about itself when it understands how it conceives the impact of two elastic balls or the trajectory of a body. In the same way as it conceives these it would fain grasp all the phenomena which confront it in a physical or chemical laboratory. Spiritually transparent phenomena are what it desires. If someone objects that the impact of two elastic balls is not spiritually transparent because the force of elasticity remains dark and impenetrable, we may justifiably answer that this is not the point, that we need not know the nature of the ink in which a letter is written when we want to understand the letter.

In lifeless nature man sees in complete clarity all that he needs to construct a machine. For that purpose, he needs ideas which can dispense with all but what inorganic nature shows in full transparency.

But in the soul of man these ideas are mere *pictures*. Our consciousness recognizes them as such. They live without force in our consciousness; they are related to what they portray as mirror-pictures are related to the objects which stand before the mirror. One mirror-picture does not strike another, yet together they may give a coherent picture of a blow. In this picture-knowledge modern thinking has its greatness and its deficiency. If it understands itself in its greatness and deficiency, it is plunged into riddles and disturbances.

This picture-knowledge has its transparency. One who feels this will confess that all knowledge worthy of the name must be thus transparent. But already in the plant-world this transparency is no longer present if one seeks only for the same cognition as in the case of the pictures of lifeless nature. Goethe felt this. Therefore, he sought a differently formed cognition for the plant-world. He sought for the picture of the archetypal plant, out of which the single plant-form may be grasped as the single physical phenomenon is grasped out of "natural laws."

We can cognize the living as thoroughly as the lifeless only if we expand our faculties of comprehension. In the cognition of the lifeless, men saw for the first time what knowledge could really be. But this cognition reveals only what is foreign to the real human essence. We cannot advance from the grasp of the lifeless to the experiencing of the true human essence if we cling to this method.

In the machine we have something which is transparent but which is foreign to us. We have bound up our lives with this foreign element. The machine stands there cold and alien, a triumph of “reliable” cognition. Besides it stands man himself, with only darkness before him if he looks into himself with this cognition.

Nevertheless, men had to acquire this insight into the dead-and-transparent if they were to be fully awake. They need the picture-knowledge of what is alien to their nature in order to wake up. All previous knowledge was drawn out of the darkness of man's own nature. It becomes clear for the first time when the human soul becomes simply a mirror, reflecting only *pictures* of things alien to man. Formerly when a man spoke of knowledge he had in his mind the impulses and contents of his own nature, which cannot be clear. His ideas were permeated with life, but they were not clear. The *pictures* of the lifeless world are clear. In such pictures, however, he has not only a revelation of the lifeless, but inner experiences as well. Pictures can cause nothing through their own nature. They are impotent. But if a man experiences his moral impulses in the picture-world as he has trained himself to experience lifeless nature, then he raises himself to freedom. For pictures cannot influence the will as passions and instincts do. The epoch which developed this mathematical picture-thinking in the lifeless is the first which can lead man to freedom.

Cold technology gives human thinking a stamp which leads to freedom. Among the gears and levers and motors there is only a dead spirit: but in this realm of death the free human soul *awakes*. It must awaken in itself the spirit which previously dreamed more or less as it ensouled nature. Thinking rises from its dream through the coldness of the machine.

Waking vision, which can be directed toward the machine, again becomes dreaming if, as in Spengler's contemplation, it is driven back to the plant. For this contemplation does not, like Goethe's, go forward to achieve transparency in observing plants; on the contrary it retreats into the twilight in which life appears when we look at it as men looked at the lifeless in the pre-technical period.

The observation to which we are challenged at the beginning of Spengler's contemplation allows technics to appear as something devilish. But this is only because he denies the clarity which is achieved through technics. Through this denial man recoils from his own wakefulness. In place of winning from this clearness the strength to kindle the free human spirit through the machine, this plant-contemplation calls up a fear which says: “These wheels, cylinders, and levers no longer speak. Everything which is decisive withdraws into the inner realm. Man feels the machine to be devilish, and rightly so.” But it seems necessary to drive the devil out of the machine. May one, if one intends to do that, thus frame the beginning and end of his thinking, and place “world-perspectives” in between as Spengler does? We will seek an answer to this question in the continuation of this article.



## II

### *The Flight From Thinking*

August 20, 1922

Spengler speaks of the sleeping plant-life and uses expressions such as these: "A plant has Being without Waking-being. In sleep all beings become plants: the tension with the environment is extinguished, the rhythm of life goes on. A plant knows only the relation to the When and Why. The pressing of the first green tips out of the winter-earth, the swelling of the buds, the whole mighty process of blossoming, giving out aroma, shining, ripening: all this is the wish for the fulfilling of a destiny and a continuous yearning question after the When."

In contrast to this is the awakeness of animals and men. Awakeness develops an inner life. But this is torn away from cosmic being. It seems as though, in the experiences of awakeness, nothing remains of the urging, driving cosmic forces which become destiny in the plant-world. This feeling of being torn away is fully worked out in Spengler's views.

In the life of men, the plant-like element continues to work. It rules in the subconscious activities which appear as the results of the mysterious forces of the "blood." Out of the "blood" arises what lives as the element of destiny in mankind. In contrast to this, what is formed by waking consciousness appears as a chance addition to the true Being. Spengler finds sharply etched words to describe the insignificance of waking consciousness in relation to the really creative plant-like forces in human nature: "Thinking gives itself much too high a rank in life because it does not notice or recognize other methods of apprehension and thereby loses its unprejudiced view. In truth all professional thinkers — and in all cultures almost these alone are vocal — have, as a matter of course, held cold abstract reflection to be the activity by which men attain to 'last things'." Rather than being profound, it is a fairly easily achieved insight which Spengler expresses with the words: "But though man is a thinking being he is far from a being whose whole life consists in thinking." This is as true as "that two and two are four." But for any truth it is important just how one places it into life-connections. And Spengler *never once* inserts thinking into life: he places it *beside* life. He does this because he grasps it only in the form in which it appears in modern scientific research. There it is abstract thinking. In this form it is reflection on life, not a force of life itself. Of this thinking one may say that what works formatively in life comes out of the sleeping plant-element in man; it is not the result of waking abstraction. It is true that "The real life, history, knows only facts. Life-experience and human knowledge address themselves only to facts. The acting, willing, struggling man, who daily asserts himself against the facts and makes them useful to himself or succumbs to them, looks down on mere truths as something insignificant."

But this abstract thinking is only a phase in the development of human life. It was preceded by a picture-thinking, which was bound up with its objects and pulsed in the deeds of men. Admittedly this thinking works in a dreamlike way in conscious human life, but it is the creator of all the early stages in the various cultures. And if one says that what appears as the deeds of men in such cultures is a result of the "blood" and not of thinking, then one abandons all hope of grasping the driving impulses of history and

plunges into a clouded materialistic mysticism. For any mysticism which explains the occurrence of historical events through this or that quality of soul or spirit is clear in comparison to the mysticism of the "blood."

If we take up such a mysticism, we cut off the possibility of rightly evaluating that period of time in which human evolution progressed from the earlier pictorial forms of thinking to the abstract method. This is not, in itself, a force which drives us to action. While this worked toward the formation of scientific research, men were subject, in their actions, to the after-effects of the old impulses springing from picture-thinking. It is significant that in occidental culture during recent centuries abstract thinking continually grows while action remains under the influence of the earlier impulses. These take on more complicated forms but produce nothing essentially new. Modern men travel on railroads in which abstract thoughts are realized, but they do so out of will-impulses which were working already before railroads existed.

But this abstract thinking is only a transitional stage of the thinking capacity. If we have experienced it in its full purity, if we have absorbed in a full human way its coldness and impotence, but also its transparency, then we shall not be able to rest content with it. It is a dead thinking, but it can be awakened to life. It has lost the picture-quality which it had as a dream-experience, but it can attain this again in the light of an intenser consciousness. From the dream-like picture, through fully conscious abstraction, to an equally fully conscious imagination: this is the evolutionary course of human thinking. The ascent to this conscious imagination stands before the men of the Occident as the task of the future. Goethe gave a start toward it when, for the understanding of the forming of plants, he demanded the idea-picture of the archetypal plant. And this imaginative thinking can engender impulses to action.

One who denies this and stops with abstract thinking will certainly come to the view that thinking is an unfruitful appendix to life. Abstract thinking makes the cognizing man a mere spectator of life. This spectator-standpoint shows itself in Spengler. As a modern man he has lived himself into this abstract thinking. He is a significant personality. He can feel how, with this thinking, he stands outside of life. But life is his main interest. And the question arises in him: What can a man do in life with this thinking? But this points us to the tragedy in the life of modern man. He has raised himself to the level of abstract thinking, but he does not know how to do anything for life with it. Spengler's book expresses what is a fact for many persons, but which they have never noticed. The men of our culture are fully awake in their thinking, but with their awakeness they stand there perplexed.

Spengler's *Decline of the West* is a book of perplexity. The author has a right to speak of this decline. For the forces of decay, to which others passively succumb, work actively in him. He understands them, yet he refuses to come to those forces of ascent which can be achieved in waking. Therefore, he sees only decline and expects the continuation of this in the mystic darkness of the "blood."

An alarming trait runs through Spengler's presentation. Accomplished intellectual soul-constitution, grown confused concerning itself, approaches the events of the historical life of man only to be repeatedly overpowered by these facts. The agnosticism of modern times is taken with such complete earnestness that it is not only formulated theoretically but raised to a method of research. The various cultures are so described that

each sets before us a picture which drives us to flee from our own Waking-being. But this flight is not into the fruitful dreams of the poet, which plunge into life and transform cold thinking into spirit; much more is it a flight into an artificial and oppressive nightmare. Glittering abstract thinking, which is afraid of itself and seeks to drown itself in dreams!

### III

#### *Spengler's Physiognomic View of History* August 27, 1922

What is said here about Spengler's book will have to be the view precisely of those who see in him an eminently representative expression of the modern soul-constitution among men of the Occident. Spengler thinks through to the end what others leave one half or one quarter done. This thinking cannot find the spiritual development-forces which work in mankind from the beginning of earth existence until far into the future. These forces live themselves out in the various cultures, so that each culture goes through childhood, maturity, and decay, then finally succumbs to death. But within each culture there is formed a seed which blossoms in the next culture and in this blossoming leads humanity through a stage of development which is necessary to it. Those abstract thinkers are wrong who see in this development only progress to ever higher stages. Many a later thing appears to a sound appraisal to be a step backward. But these steps are *necessary* because they lead humanity through experiences which must be gone through.

Hegel's idea, that history manifests humanity's progress in the consciousness of freedom, is certainly abstract. But at least it is a significant attempt to find a thread running through history. If you try to find for the abstract idea some content which pierces the multiplicity of human history, you need spiritual perception. Intellectualistic thinking is not adequate for this.

If this thinking remains honest, it must limit itself to describing the physiognomies of the cultures. It cannot see through the physiognomies into the souls of the cultures. But just in what reveals itself only behind the physiognomy lies the seed which leads over from one culture into another.

In this respect Spengler's work is cruelly honest. He limits himself to the physiognomies of cultures. "There are truths for the spirit: there are facts only in reference to life. Historical contemplation, which I call *physiognomic time-beat*, is the resolution of the *blood*, human knowledge expanded over the past and future, the born insight into persons and situations, into events, into what was necessary, into what *had* to be. It is not the mere scientific knowledge and criticism of data. For every true historian scientific experience is irrelevant or superfluous." A man *must* speak this way when he completely immerses himself in intellectualistic thinking and looks honestly at historical evolution. Such a man can go no further into historic forces; but if sharp intellectuality guides his physiognomic time-beat he can depict brilliantly the various cultures.

An example of this brilliance is the chapter on "Problems of the Arabian Culture" which Spengler placed at the center of his *World-historic Perspectives*. The essence of the world-conceptions which, centuries before the appearance of Christianity, emerged from the womb of oriental life, is here described in a penetrating, sharp-eyed, erudite way. The concept of the "Magian" philosophy is worked out in clear contours. You see how an ancient world, in which men were limited to one locality and were placed among kinfolk so that they felt themselves to be members of the clan, is stripped away from a later world, which leads men into communities where they are held together by the consciousness of a spirit above the earthly order. In place of the god who can be thought of only in the particular spot where the clan lives, there arises the god who is independent

of place and lives in the souls of the men who acknowledge him. For a local clan-god one can make no attempts at conversion. Another clan worships the god who reveals himself in another place and in other cults. It would be senseless to try to carry over to another place what bears the character of one place. For local gods there are no missionaries. These first appear when the soul raises itself to the "higher" god whose spiritual force streams into the soul. For this streaming-in one tries to win as many souls as possible.

Thus humanity enters the stage of the Magian religions. Man on earth feels himself as the sheath of the unitary world-spirit which should live in all souls. The human ego is not yet placed entirely on its own feet. It is the sheath of the world-being. This thinks in man, acts through man. This is the characteristic trait of the Magian religious feeling.

In Asia Minor this feeling appears in different peoples. Jesus, in Spengler's opinion, stands in the midst of it. Occidental Christianity arises through the fact that this Magian feeling streams into the Greek and Roman World and takes on its forms. Thus what is essentially oriental Magianism lives on in the outer forms which, in Greece and Rome, arose out of cults which themselves had no Magian orientation. In his book Spengler expresses the abstract thought through which he tries to grasp this: "In a rock-stratum are embedded crystals of a mineral. Clefts and cracks occur, water filters in, and the crystals are gradually washed out so that in due course only their hollow mold remains. Then come volcanic outbursts which explode the mountain: molten masses pour in, stiffen, and crystallize out in their turn. But these are not free to do so in their own special forms. They must fill up the spaces that they find available. Thus there arise distorted forms, crystals whose inner structure contradicts their external shape, stones of one kind presenting the appearance of stones of another kind. The mineralogists call this phenomenon *pseudomorphosis*. I call historical pseudomorphosis those cases where an older alien culture lies so massively over the land that a young culture, born in this land, cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness."

Thus in the western Christianity of the first centuries Magian Arabism lives itself out as a pseudomorphosis. It takes on the forms of the Greek and Roman World. "Actually, Augustine was the last great thinker of Early Arabian Scholasticism, anything but a Western spirit. Not only was he at times a Manichaean, but he remained so even as a Christian in some important characteristics, and his closest relations are to be found amongst the Persian theologians of the later Avesta, with their doctrines of the Store of Grace of the Holy Ones and of absolute guilt."

Thus does the matter appear to one who observes the physiognomy of Arabism and pursues it with a clear eye down to the personalities in whom it can still be traced. But the *soul* is not perceived here, the soul which does not only stream into a strange environment as a pseudomorphosis but *experiences* this environment, shows itself to be a *germ* which comes to birth in new forms. The abstract mineral metaphor is not enough. The soul of a culture lives and perceives its environment. Out of this perceiving it unfolds, not a pseudomorphosis, but a transformed impulse. The characteristic thing in Augustine is not his Manichaeism nor his relation to Persian theologians, but his elemental self-perception which makes itself a part of Christian Rome and thereby forms a concept of grace and guilt. This concept is distorted when one points only to physiognomic similarity to oriental views. On Augustine's physiognomy there is no

living-on of the Orient, transformed and grown older; rather is this physiognomy like that of a son who bears the features of the father, but has a soul of his own.

#### IV

##### *Spengler's Spirit-Deserted History*

September 3, 1922

Especially brilliant is the world-historic perspective in which Spengler sees the state. He would like to grasp it in its reality. But he does not succeed in rightly evaluating the unconscious, instinctive human relations out of which the life of the state first evolves. This is because it lies entirely outside his method of observation to seek for real spiritual forces in that unconscious something which in primitive conditions links one man to another. He finds the connections to be caused in the blood. But he does not see how the spirit works in the blood, how it expresses itself in the instincts.

As the spirit becomes gradually more conscious to man, it appears to the consciousness in a more and more abstract form. It becomes what Spengler has described it as: mere truth, the inefficacious soul-content of the *contemplative* man; nothing for the acting man who lives in *facts*.

Thus Spengler's inquiry into the origins of human community life finds the active nobility, which spends itself entirely in the world of facts, living in the stream of history and making history: and the meditative priesthood, which lives only in truths and really carries on its existence outside of history.

Spengler does not rightly evaluate the priesthood which in early cultures is the inspirer of the deed-men and which, by counselling and giving direction, works further in the deed-men. If he could rightly evaluate this he would see how the deed-men only execute with their arms what the deed-determining spirit-men plan.

Spengler achieves a right historical evaluation only with those facts in which the influence of the impulses of the spirit-men ceases and the outer side of historical life becomes more visible; in those cases in which it *seems* as if the bearers of the fact-stream did not trouble themselves about the inspiration of the spirit-men. For this is only a seeming. Through a thousand channels the impulses of the "counsellors" flow into the deeds. It is as though Spengler were entirely blind to these channels. For only thus can he continue to speak everywhere of the "blood." Only thus can he come to the view which he expresses in the words: "The nobility is the true Estate, the sum of blood and race, being-stream in the fullest imaginable form."

If we place ourselves at the point of departure of Spengler's perspectives in order to see what can be seen in them, we must confess that his presentation is brilliant. He depicts half-truths, which appear in this perspective with especially sharp contours. He describes acutely how the priesthood slips out of the sphere of spiritual impulses and achieves an efficacy which comes from the forces of the blood: "The history of the papacy, right into the eighteenth century, is that of a few noble families which competed for the tiara in order to found princely family-fortunes. This is equally true of Byzantine dignitaries and English prime ministers (witness the family-history of the Cecils) and even of many leaders of great revolutions."

For Spengler, "history" is what wells out of the blood of the ruling Estates. [The German word *Stand* seems best translated as *Estate*, especially since he follows the traditional grouping into three estates, nobility, clergy, and bourgeoisie.] In the "state" this stream is only as it were

materialized. The reality of the onward-moving facts, which spring from the Estates, is crystallized into a sort of illusion in the state, which seeks to hold fast in space (with a diminished reality) what the Estates are continually creating in time. For Spengler that which works itself out between the Estates in the cooperation and clashes of the blood-forces becomes history. "It follows from this that true history is not cultural; in the sense of anti-political, as the philosophers and doctrinaires of all beginning civilizations assert. On the contrary, it is breed history, war history, diplomatic history, the history of being-streams in the form of man and woman, family, people, estate, state, reciprocally attacking and defending in the wave-beat of grand facts." Certainly Spengler is ten times right in thus describing the cultural-historic standpoint which derives its facts from what men think although these facts are only the economic, artistic, or scientific expression of what the Estates work out among themselves. But he has no eye for the way in which, half conscious and half unconscious, the spirit works through men and brings itself to manifestation in the blood. And this spirit is not what Spengler has in mind when he says (rightly in his way:) "A Culture is Soul that has arrived at self-expression in sensible forms, but these forms are living and evolving." For the efficacious spirit is what appears, as a living rather than an abstract truth, in weaving thoughts as the basis for every human deed.

Thus what Spengler sees as history correctly portrays only those Cultures [We capitalize Cultures and Civilizations because of the special way in which Spengler uses and distinguishes the two terms.] which are an expression of the blood-based deed-forming faculty of the Estates and classes.

Therefore, Spengler cannot find the deepest impulses of the present. And just this is important to him. He contemplates the past of the various Cultures in order to gain perspective into the future. But present-day humanity, in all significant Cultures and Civilizations, has reached the point where man, as man, frees himself from those historical associations whose birth, maturing, and aging Spengler sees as history. Man is about to develop, out of his own individual inner faculties, what formerly was developed *into him* by Estates and classes. This world-historic moment, which is here despite all decline in the Cultures, and on account of which just those Cultures which alone Spengler recognizes as such are crashing down, this world-historic moment must be taken up by a living, active, spirit-borne will. (In my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* I tried to characterize man within this world-historic moment as a will-being supported by moral thought-intuitions.) But for Spengler there is no longer any deed-impulse for man when he frees himself from the old associations. Spengler's ideas become sharp and incisive when, out of his perspective, he describes this loosening of the bond. "The nobility of every spring-time has been *the* Estate in the most primary sense, history become flesh, race at highest potential. The Bourgeoisie has definite limits; it belongs to the Culture; it embraces, in the best sense, all who adhere to it, and under the name of people, *populus*, *demos*, rallies nobility and priesthood, money and mind, craftsman and wage-earner, as constituents of itself. This is the idea that Civilization finds prevailing when it comes on the scene, and this is what it destroys by its notion of the Fourth Estate, the *Mass*, which completely rejects the Culture and its matured forms. ... Thus the Fourth Estate becomes the expression of the passing of a history over into the history-less. The mass is the end, the radical nullity."



But in this nullity the world-historic moment of the present must seek the historical “all,” not in the Fourth Estate or in any other, but in Man (of all Estates) who now for the first time must find, out of the deepest inner sources, the true force of freedom. But we do not smooth the way to this freedom when, purely out of the blood-relationships in Spengler's historic perspectives we describe freedom thus: “It was a creative enthusiasm in the man of the city that from the tenth century B.C. (and ‘contemporaneously’ in other Cultures) drew generation after generation under the spell of a new life, with which there emerges for the first time in human history the idea of *freedom*. ... Of *this* freedom the city is the expression; the city-spirit is understanding become free, and everything in the way of intellectual, social, and national movements that bursts forth in late periods under the name of Freedom leads back to an origin in this one prime fact of *detachment from the land*.”

In Spengler's perspective, this seems to be true, but it is equally untrue from a wider standpoint. For the process of becoming inwardly aware of the deepest soul-forces of humanity, which process lives itself out in the impulse of freedom, is a historical moving force which founded cities in order to experience freedom in an external fact.

Only one who can see this moving force will be able to see in the present time the beginning of a period which will fetch history out of the innermost parts of man and will thus be an advance over the epochs which inserted history into man. One who cannot see this will, like Spengler, see only an end, which is the expression of all that this distinguished representative of the modern method of thought has found in the preceding cultures. “With the formed state, high history also lays itself down weary to sleep. Man becomes a plant again, adhering to the soil, dumb and enduring ... The mighty ones of the future may possess the earth as their private property — for the great political form of the Culture is irremediably in ruin — but it matters not, for formless and limitless as their power may be, it has a task. And this task is the unwearying care for the world as it is, which is the very opposite of the interestedness of the money-power age, and demands high honor and conscientiousness. But for this very reason there now sets in the final battle between Democracy and Caesarism, between the leading forces of dictatorial money-economics and the purely political will-to-order of the Caesars. ... The coming of Caesarism breaks the dictatorship of money and its political weapon democracy. ... For us, however, whom a Destiny has placed in this Culture and at this moment of its development — the moment when money is celebrating its last victories and Caesarism, its heir, is approaching with quiet, firm step — our direction, willed and obligatory at once, is set for us within narrow limits.”

In face of this one can only say: may the men of the present and the near future find the force of the spirit, so that out of free will this will not become history! May a time come when a spiritually oriented view will not say, as Spengler does: “And a task that historic necessity has set *will* be accomplished with the individual or against him.” Rather let us hope that a time may come in which what the individual can form in freedom out of his world-experience will become historical necessity. Spengler is a personality who has great wit, but who takes it to be his mission to sweep away everything spiritual in nature and history.