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Message for the Pandemonium: Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, and the potential for the German people.

Oswald Spengler was born in 1880 in Blankenburg, Germany. His father was a bureaucrat who worked for the Duchy of Brunswick in the German Empire. He studied history at the universities of Munich, Berlin, and Halle. Spengler found the Pre-Socratics to be fascinating. His academic career culminated in his doctoral thesis which focused on the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. He worked as a teacher in Hamburg at a Realgymnasium or grammar school where he taught German history, science, and mathematics.

Oswald Spengler found himself caught up into the turbulent events of 1914. What unfolded surprised many people, after all; he had been a simple school teacher from an unremarkable family in an unremarkable place in Germany. One historian referred to Spengler before 1918 as “nobody in particular, an *Oberlehrer* or *Gymnasium* teacher who had thrown up his job in 1910 in order to write.”¹ Unable to serve his fatherland due to his weak heart, Spengler decided to do something radical. He worked to answer the most pressing question of the time and perhaps the most pressing question of the Twentieth Century. Spengler sought to explain why the great powers of Europe destroyed the peace, power, and prosperity of Europe to fight a horrific war that consumed the continent while involving the entire world. Spengler recognized the utter madness of the war as well as its lack of guiding reason and sought to find refuge from the deluge of insanity.

Spengler saw himself as the prophet of potential for the German people. As the old world of bourgeois Europe burned beneath the fires of hatred, war, and blockade, Spengler foresaw a

¹ Northrop Frye, “Review of “The Decline of the West” by Oswald Spengler,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 103, No. 1, Twentieth-Century Classics Revisited, (Winter, 1974), 1.

renewal that held the promise of potential. Spengler argued that history was the chronicle of the rise and fall of the great cultures of human history. For Spengler, nations, ethnicities, and even races of people were too transient for history to focus upon; instead, history followed the cultures of human civilization which rarely are in similar stages of development. Spengler foresaw that the culture of the Western World, which he entitled the Faustian Culture. This culture of the Europe and America, Spengler explained, was within its twilight hours of its last stage of life. Spengler did not believe that this meant the end of civilization within Europe, but far from it!

Instead, he wanted to arm the Germans for the coming hardships that would follow in the wake of the death of the Faustian Culture. Spengler desired for the Germans to create a culture that would replace the Faustian Culture. He understood that this would not be an easy process and required the Germans to follow the example of another people who created a new culture to replace its predecessor, the Romans. The Romans had accomplished numerous feats such as their victory over the champions of the old culture under the leadership of Hannibal Barca of Carthage.² The Romans overcame the other Italians and united most of the known world under their political apparatus, their military might, and most importantly, under their culture. The Roman culture ruled most of the known world for such a length of time that Spengler used them as the epitome of the strength that allows the creation of a new culture.

What Spengler preached in his works was the opportunities afforded to a strong people who see the conclusion of the winter of the previous culture for what it is, the spring of their new culture. Spengler wanted the Germans to create a new culture for themselves and the Western World. This was his primary motivation for all of his works. Any reader must understand what Spengler's motivation was before reading his works. *The Decline of the West* clearly outlines the

² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume 2, perspectives of World-History*, Trans. Charles F. Atkinson, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1928), 422.

fates of cultures throughout history, but it was the Roman Culture that fascinated Spengler above all others.

The reason that Rome so fascinated Spengler was tied directly into his motivation for writing a philosophy of history, he wanted the Germans to follow the path of the Romans to create a grand and glorious culture for themselves and the Western World. It is within that context that Spengler is neither a cynic of his era, uselessly lambasting the bourgeois Europeans for destroying their old order or lackadaisically predicting the cyclical movements of humans throughout time without purpose or choice. In contrast, the reality Spengler prescribed for the metaphorical children of the dying Faustian Culture was to rise up and take the place of the ancestors of the Faustian Culture itself. Spengler wanted his German people who had suffered so greatly to seize the future as the past had brought them to the point where security and cultural supremacy was within their grasp. Oswald Spengler believed that his people possessed the potential, that the culture had exhausted itself, and that he had the knowledge that could enable the Germans to be the masters of their own fate, to master the history not yet written. Thus armed with hope, Spengler wrote of the decline and eventual downfall of his own culture.

Spengler noted that the Faustian Culture, with its Christian influence, separated human history into sections. The Western Culture craved infinity beginning in what has been called the Baroque period. However, their separation of history into separate periods was simply one fragment of their division of what Spengler referred to as the “world picture” and its horizons. The Faustian Culture divided everything into separate spheres: science was excluded from history and even science was separated into many other forms such as astronomy and biology.³

³ Ibid, 28-29.

Spengler's philosophy was uniquely personal. He did not accept the philosophies of history held by the historians of the Enlightenment or Romanticism. Spengler wrote his works because he believed that the western culture within which all Germans lived and he furthermore believed that this culture was on the verge of collapse. He wanted to prepare Germany for the coming of the new culture so that they would be able to seize the opportunities afforded to them by his knowledge and perspective.

The culture of the Western world, which Spengler called the Faustian Culture, began during the reign of Otto the Great in 962. Otto's yearning for spatial and historical "infinity" created the "Holy Roman Empire, German by nation".⁴ Spengler implies that the German desire to be Roman began hundreds of years before he began to advocate for the creation of a new Romanesque culture in Germany. The Faustian Culture had brought the Germans to the place in space and time where they would be afforded the chance to create a new culture to replace the declining culture that had dominated the Western World.

Spengler in both volumes of his iconic work, *The Decline of the West*, used his own notions of history. He also clearly avoided using the methods of the eminent Prussian historian, Leopold von Ranke, who argued that historians should try to show history as it actually happened. Ranke remained firmly rooted within the Enlightenment and the logic it espoused. In contrast, Spengler abandoned the view of history as a series of time blocks from the ancient period through the modern period. Instead, he focused on the life cycles of cultures as the guiding currents of history; he also believed that events throughout history were unique and would continue to be unique.

⁴ Ibid, 373.

Spengler argued that history was the chronicle of the rise and fall of cultures throughout the world. He believed that the cultures seldom coexisted with one another at similar places in their lifecycle. He did not view history as a series of nations, wars, or even races competing on a grand scale as other historians before him described it. For Spengler, history did not repeat itself endlessly; instead, it was the way in which cultures rose, lived, and died that repeated itself throughout time. Spengler used nature to illustrate his discovery throughout both volumes of his work. In the same way that the seasons of the year are the same and the events within those seasons change ceaselessly; so too do the stages of cultures' lives remain constant while the affairs of the humans who life, work, and die within them provide an ever changing tapestry events.

Spengler also argued against the notion of Heilige Geschichte or salvation history that many Germans held to in his time. As he explained, if there could be truths which were "independent of the currents of being" then there could simply be no truths at all. For Spengler's view of history, Christianity and the various Christian views of history needed to be discarded. He can be seen as the turning point in Europe as the long-held beliefs in the Judeo-Christian God began to effectively decline. The monotheistic religions which claimed to be the "single eternally right religion" contradict the very notion of Heilige Geschichte. Spengler explained that Heilige Geschichte's fundamental premise, that is the concept of a religion which possessed a monopoly on truth and God, was flawed. If the premise were true, then "religious history would be an inconceivable idea."⁵ The reason Spengler wrote about the flawed premise of Heilige Geschichte and Christianity was to explain the nature of truth in history according to his philosophy.

⁵ Ibid, 274.

Truth for Spengler's philosophical position was rooted within the situations of life. Spengler held a relativistic view of truth. He used religion to illustrate the reality of truth. While the Faustian culture interpreted Christianity, Judaism, and the other monotheistic religions of the Middle East in the way that made sense to them, the Magian culture understood them in a completely different way. When the worshipers of Yahweh left their exile to worship their god, it was the believers of Ahuramazda who allowed them to return to their homeland.⁶ The various members of the Magian Culture did not argue that the other gods did not exist, in spite of their profession to believing only one god.

The Magian idea of religion could not understand a monotheistic religion that claimed to be following the only God in existence. For the Magian peoples, the concept of one god whether he was called Yahweh or Marduk-Baal, meant that the one god was the only good and strong god in contrast to the other gods which were weak or evil.⁷ Spengler elucidated that the Jews obtained their rites of circumcision and the Sabbath while in exile within the Chaldean lands.⁸ This was further evidence for the disparity of truth from culture to culture. When Spengler explained that the Magian concept of a singular diety was entirely different from the Faustian concept of one god, he addressed the issue of the essence of truth.

For Spengler, truth was relative to the culture and the situation. One of the historian's primary functions, therefore, was to communicate the difference in the truths of the past and the present culture. Spengler does this in his magnum opus by explaining the differences in monotheistic religions between the Faustian Culture and the Magian Culture as well as explaining the nature of truth itself. The example of the difference in the understanding of one

⁶ Ibid, 206.

⁷ Ibid, 206-207.

⁸ Ibid, 207.

god proved the disparity of truth. According to Spengler's theory, truth could not be the same from culture to culture.

Spengler believed that Rome represented the most magnificent elements of any culture. He also believed that the Germans were uniquely placed as the Faustian Culture declined. The Germans, he argued, had benefited from the Faustian Culture's positive aspects and would be able to eventually surpass the Roman Culture.⁹ This element involved the hardships the Germans would overcome, as the Romans had before them, to create their new culture which would reign for centuries. The element of hope drove Spengler to continue writing after *The Decline of the West* in order to cement his idea within the minds of his fellow Germans.

Spengler focused on the example of Rome throughout history. He explained that in many cultures possessed a type of Roman development. He gives numerous examples from a variety of cultures to support his theory. He explains that the Chinese and Mayan Cultures both had a dynasty ruled their respective kingdoms in a Romanesque fashion.¹⁰ The Romans, for Spengler, represented the strongest aspects of humanity and culture. The Romans rose above the dregs of their time to create a new culture that was able to control most of the ancient world. By doing so, the Romans became the standard for the strength in each culture that rose above the old ways within Spengler's philosophy.

Spengler wrote his work in the real world throughout the tumultuous events of the First World War. He was affected by the world he lived within. In the years before the First World War, the various crises showed Spengler the willingness of Europe to end its complacency and

⁹ John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on world history and politics*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 37.

¹⁰ Spengler, *The Decline of the West...* 45.

destroy itself in war. When the war broke out, he began writing his work in earnest as the war seemed to confirm his hypothesis that the culture of the west was in its last season of existence,

When the first volume of *The Decline of the West* was published it was when Germany seemed poised to win the war. In the summer of 1918, Germany had defeated the Russian Empire and created a new order in the East with independence coming both to the Poles and the Ukrainians. The Kaiser himself, on August 1, promised the German people that the worst of the war was over.¹¹ Although many Germans eagerly looked forward to the successful conclusion of the Great War, Spengler did not. The fires of war proved that the Faustian Culture, which all of the European states lived under, had decayed to near collapse. Regardless of the outcome of the war; Spengler still foresaw the eventual collapse of the culture of the western world.

Spengler viewed history differently than his contemporaries. His view of history shared a unique link to the Romantic period through his use and view of nature. Spengler used examples found in nature in order to illustrate his thesis for the readers of his works. Whether he looked at animals or plants, the entire world seemed to function in the same manner as cultures within history. Spengler equated the lifecycles of cultures, with their rises and falls, to elements of nature which could easily be understood by any reader. History, for Spengler, was the story of organic cultures behaving in the only method available to them.

The German position in post-war Europe as well as the misconceptions that arose around Spengler's work drove him to further explain his position in volume two of his principle work *The Decline of the West* as well as several key essays. The ethnic Germans of Europe were particularly vulnerable after the conclusion of the First World War. The victorious Entente battered the German economy with war reparations and the Great Depression virtually shattered

¹¹ Berliner Tageblatt, 1 August 1918, quoted in David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918: the sins of omission*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 241.

the economy of the once thriving empire. In Germany between 1924 and 1931 real wages in Germany rose seventy five percent.¹² Germans found themselves within several states which possessed various levels of hostility for the former masters of Central Europe. German communities “came under attack by Polish mobs in Bydgoszcz (formerly Bromberg) and Ostrowo (formerly Ostrow).”¹³ Spengler realized that he needed to explain his purpose and goals for the German people to them.

It was both in his essay *On Prussianism and Socialism* as well as his second volume of *The Decline of the West* that he spoke directly to the Germans he wanted to prepare. As the Great Depression leveled the last bastions of defense the German people had against change, Spengler sought to give them hope. He wanted to arm them with the knowledge that cultures rise and fall as a part of a natural process. He argued that the Germans could master the process by knowing how to react as the Faustian culture of the West collapsed under its own weight in the twilight hours of the winter season of the western culture.

Spengler explained that the First World War involved the “nineteenth century habit” of overestimating the economic factors of the nations involved in the war. The conflict was shrouded in completely superficial terms, such as capitalism and socialism to create a “verbal façade” for the nations involved. This shroud covered the “last great struggle” of the Faustian soul in the twilight of the culture.¹⁴ The Faustian soul, as Spengler refers to it, was exhausted by the decline of the culture of the Western World. Due to the exhaustion of the culture’s soul, Spengler claimed that the Faustian Culture declared war upon itself in a cultural civil war.

¹² Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century conflict and the descent of the West*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 195.

¹³ *Ibid*, 167.

¹⁴ Oswald Spengler, “On Prussianism and Socialism” in *Selected Essays*, trans. Donald O. White, (Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 6.

Spengler argued that the war was started because of the good qualities of the German people. The lethal blow of the war was brought about by the British people who were intelligent enough to recognize that the German people were better than they. He explained that the “we Germans, with our almost metaphysical will, our stubborn and selfless determination, our honest and enthusiastic patriotism” brought about the wrath of the British. The German people’s will itself, Spengler claimed, was a “handy weapon for any external enemy with the practical sense of the English.” Spengler continued by explaining that in spite of all of the passion and “self-sacrificing zeal” the Germans still were defeated. Spengler explained that the Germans’ good qualities would allow them to create the replacement for the declining Faustian Culture. However, Spengler admitted that these superior traits were the keys to the defeat of the German Empire in the First World War.¹⁵

The defeat of the Germans led to “political dilettantism”.¹⁶ Spengler explained that the war had led to what he disdainfully referred to as the German Revolution. While the French Revolution led to change throughout the gallery of the kingdom, the German Revolution seemed hallow to Spengler. Spengler explained that the British elements of the Germans saw their opportunity for power in Germany, and launched a coup d’état to take it.¹⁷

What Spengler referred to was the Reichstag’s Peace Resolution of July 19, 1917. The German parliament declared that they desired no territorial annexations and that they were in favor of peaceful negotiations of equals to end the war as swiftly as possible. However, they affirmed that as long as the German nation was threatened with territorial conquests and violations; they would remain united to persevere “unshakably” to the peaceful conclusion of the war. They further stated that they would continue to heroically defend the Fatherland until its

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

right and the rights of its allies to “life and free development” were secured.¹⁸ This declaration by the German parliament aggravated Spengler. He felt that these men held to political opposition as their Weltanschauung or world view. But Spengler was not the only one who was enraged by the resolution. Later that same year, in December 1917, Conservative leader Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa exclaimed to the Prussian Landtag that “As a Prussian, I feel betrayed and sold out!”¹⁹ Spengler exclaimed that in “1917 not one person had the right to repeat this proud, sad statement.” He viewed this as a bid for power which irrevocably damaged the German war effort.²⁰

Spengler explained that this declaration was the first act in the drama of the German Revolution. This revolution, in contrast to the French Revolution, was, according to Spengler, a revolution of the caucus rooms. The French Revolution, Spengler explains was a populist revolution where the people stormed the gates of the Bastille itself. In the German Revolution, the leaders borrowed the tricks of the British. He singled out Matthias Erzberger as the “most gifted demagogue” of the revolution. But he had nothing to offer, but an “abstract principle” in place of the incompetence of the former leaders.²¹

Spengler bemoaned his generation’s lack of the great leaders of the former generation, such as the founder of the Social Democratic Party, August Bebel. August Bebel was a Marxist politician who founded the SPD as well as the primary socialist party newspaper, Vorwärts. Bereft of the iron leadership of August Bebel, the leaders of the German Revolution oversaw a “shameless spectacle”. The weak leaders overthrew the state to replace it with an “oligarchy of

¹⁸ Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Vol. 2, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), 471.

¹⁹ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: the rise and downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006), 614.

²⁰ Oswald Spengler, “On Prussianism and Socialism” ... 8.

²¹ Ibid.

party subalterns who regarded opposition as a vocation and responsible government as a presumption.” The spectacle was the storming “of the Bastille *auf-deutsch*”.²²

While in other revolutions the dregs vanished into the darkness of night; in this revolution, Spengler related, the dregs led the struggle. The spectacle of the overthrow of the monarchy led, Spengler recounted, directly to the Marxist uprisings of 1918 and 1919. Spengler explained that the people of Germany were betrayed by their new leaders. This anger led to the Spartacist uprisings. But, all of them were deceived. Their intelligent leaders abandoned their principles privately instead of openly. They dreaded creating “reality rather than combat[ing] it. They feared succeeding “in a cause they had championed for forty years.”²³

The insurrection of the German Revolution contained a secret which Spengler said that he knew. The insurrection, Spengler explained, “was a lie.” Spengler described how the great revolution in Germany had been “heralded in poetry and song for generations.” The Germans had long looked to the revolution as their metaphorical savior, a day when socialism could reach its zenith. Instead, they received leaders who bellowed “slogans into thin air”. These bellowing fools, who had been trained by August Bebel, failed to act when the time was right. They lost the momentum that could never be regained.²⁴ In the end, the German Revolution had come to naught but chaff upon the wind.

Spengler wrote his essay *On Prussianism and Socialism* to explain the need for hope and the lack of all other opportunities for hope from the traditional sources. He wrote his magnum opus to show the hope and potential that the decline of the Faustian Culture possessed for the German people. Both *On Prussianism and Socialism* and volume two of *The Decline of the West*

²² Ibid, 8-9.

²³ Ibid, 10.

²⁴ Ibid, 9-19.

were written to specifically outline the path to potential from the disharmony as well as the chaos of the 1920s within Germany. Spengler honed his focus in the early 1920s precisely because of his popularity and the need for his message in the pandemonium.

Many people failed to understand Spengler's philosophy from the time it was written until today. Although his works became increasingly focused on his true goal, some simplified *The Decline of the West* into pure pessimism. He realized that *The Decline of The West* was too complicated for some people to come to his conclusions. In 1921, Spengler wrote an essay which he entitled *Pessimism?* in order to confront this misunderstanding and published it in the prestigious Preussische Jahrbücher.²⁵

Spengler explained within the essay that his works did “not imply catastrophe.”²⁶ He recognized that his title was “rather disconcerting.” But he wanted to emphasize that title had been chosen several years before the war. He saw the decline in the Faustian Culture before the war and had not anticipated the devastation that came from 1914 through 1918. Although the title, when coupled with the First World War, seemed to spell disaster for Europe; Spengler never meant for pessimism to be his message. He expounded that pessimists fail to see more tasks to be completed. Spengler further stated that he believed that many tasks still remained to be completed as the Faustian Culture's life came to an end.²⁷ Not only was his call for action missed, but he also realized that his goal was part of the misunderstanding.²⁸

Spengler did not write *The Decline of the West* to create a systematic method for academics to “brood over”. He elucidated that “such a book as mine must forever remain an aberration” to the academics of the world. He clarified that the academics were those who

²⁵ Oswald Spengler, “Pessimism?” in *Selected Essays*, trans. Donald O. White, (Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 134.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 148-149.

²⁸ Ibid, 134.

created philosophy for philosophy's sake and demanded logical proofs for everything. These contemplative people, as Spengler referred to the academics, remain aloof from life by their very nature. These people, he explains, view life from a distance as strange and "against the grain" that they prefer. Because of the fact that these people are not engaged in life, Spengler claims that they will be unable to understand his works.²⁹

Spengler clarified those who were included within his target audience. He wrote for his works for the active people within his nation, not for the passive people disconnected from daily life.³⁰ It would be the active people who would complete the tasks which Spengler identified for them.³¹ Spengler asserted that the active people of the world did not need logical proofs and in many cases could not understand them. These people possessed a unique view of the world that enabled them to be dynamic individuals. Many of the individuals had silently held to Spengler's beliefs even if there were unaware of them. He explains that these people needed to avoid theory in order to maintain their very nature as active people.³² Spengler concluded that in no way could his work be pessimistic for its intended audience. In spite of this, Spengler's work has remained misunderstood by many since the day it was published.

Many historians have maintained that Spengler was simply a pessimist. Robert MacMaster who wrote in the 1950s categorized Spengler with historical pessimists such as Danilevsky. MacMaster explained that Spengler represented a denial of the possibility of human progress. MacMaster went so far as to exclaim that Danilevsky's book was a "remarkable anticipation" of Spengler's theories. He went further to claim that the evidence provided little

²⁹ Ibid, 134-135.

³⁰ Ibid, 134-136.

³¹ Ibid, 148-149.

³² Ibid, 134-141.

difficulty in defending the similarities of these two historical theorists.³³ MacMaster simply misunderstood Spengler's writings. Nor is MacMaster alone, Neville Morley argued in 2004 that Spengler's theory could be summarized as the decadence of humanity in a theory.³⁴ Historians like MacMaster and Morley failed to read beyond the surface of *The Decline of the West* to understand Spengler's purpose.

While some continued to view *The Decline of the West* as pessimistic, others, such as Edwin Zeydel implied that Spengler was a communist who looked to the Soviet Union in the East for hope in Europe.³⁵ Although Zeydel realized the tone of hope within Spengler's writings, he failed to realize the target of that hope. Spengler truly was revolutionary for claiming that the Soviet Union would be a viable replacement for the Romanov Russia. If Zeydel's conclusion was correct, however, Lenin himself would not have disparaged Spengler as a "Phillistine".³⁶

Spengler was not a communist, although at times within his works he appears to appreciate the rise of a truly Russian Culture in the place of the Faustian Culture which dominated the Asiatic Russians.³⁷ In 1922, Spengler explained the reason behind the movement of the Soviet capital from St. Petersburg to Moscow. He explains that St. Petersburg was an artificial relic of Peter the Great's era and Moscow was the more natural location of the Asiatic people of Russia. This, Spengler concluded, proved the shift from the Faustian culture to the Russians' own new culture.³⁸ In spite of the joy Spengler seemed to have for the Russian

³³ Robert E. MacMaster, "Danilevsky and Spengler: a new interpretation," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 26, No. 2, June: 1954, 155.

³⁴ Neville Morley, "Decadence as a Theory of History," *New Literary History*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Autumn, 2004), 573-585.

³⁵ Edwin H. Zeydel, "The Trend of Literature in Germany since the War," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (December: 1925), 165-169.

³⁶ Quoted in John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline...*, 183.

³⁷ Spengler, *The Decline of the West...*, 194-196.

³⁸ Oswald Spengler, "The Two Faces of Russia," in *Selected Essays*, trans. Donald O. White, (Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 174.

revolution against the foreign Faustian Culture; Spengler never abandoned hope in the rise of his own people.

Spengler's work polarized readers and resulted in many readers disparaging the work as second rate or worse. Michael Bidiss in 1996 ridiculed *The Decline of the West* by stating that no one would rate it as a "major contribution to scholarship."³⁹ Another, Maria Gough asserted that Spengler's numerous claims in *The Decline of the West* were mistaken.⁴⁰ Readers such as Gough and Bidiss believe that Spengler was simply a product of his times. Their conclusions about Spengler led them to misunderstand Spengler's work.

In the other spectrum of *The Decline of the West*'s readers, a number of people such as John Farrenkopf declared Spengler to be a veritable prophet of what was to come. Farrenkopf claimed that *The Decline of the West* was "one of the most profound investigations of the nature, evolution, and future of Western civilization in intellectual history."⁴¹ Farrenkopf claimed that Spengler's work not only affected the study of history but contained elements of secular prophesy. Although the power of the Soviet Union in comparison to the United States was not foreseen by others, Farrenkopf attributes this insight to Spengler. In addition to seeing the Soviet Union as the "vanguard of the revolt of the non-West against the West", Farrenkopf argues that Spengler foresaw the fall of the Soviet Union. In spite of the fact that the collapse of the mammoth state caught the world by surprise, Farrenkopf claims that Spengler prophesied of its inward collapse. He goes further to state that Spengler emerged "after a fashion, as a major prophet of the Cold War, which dominated international relations from 1947 to 1990."⁴²

³⁹ Michael Biddiss, "History as Destiny: Gobineau, H. S. Chamberlain and Spengler," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 7, (1997), 73-100.

⁴⁰ Maria Gough, "Tarabukin, Spengler and the Art of Production," *MIT Press*, Vol. 93, (Summer, 2000), 83.

⁴¹ Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline...*, 17.

⁴² Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline...*, 275.

Spengler's cyclical lifecycle of parallel cultures remains because of its contrast to the traditional linear view of history. Spengler's theory combined with his message of subtle hope in the face of decline continues to attract historians today.

Farrenkopf is not alone; others too have argued that Spengler's work greatly impacted the study of history itself. Joseph Vogt argued that Spengler made "the breakthrough to a historical world that spans the planet, to a historical universe."⁴³ Spengler wrote about history without a prejudicial view towards Europe. The glowing way that he wrote about dynasties in cultures around the world impressed many, such as Vogt. Spengler never felt that Europe was superior to the other cultures of the world. Only the Romans, the culture creators who are used as the greatest examples of Spengler's work, are given a metaphorical pedestal to stand on.

Another way that Spengler is believed to have impacted the humanity was not through history, but sociology. Neil McInnes, argued that Spengler had laid the foundation for the study of societies in general. McInnes explained that the Decline of the West "led directly to a new would-be science, the comparative sociology of civilizations."⁴⁴ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto included that Spengler added previously unbeknownst connections between cultures.⁴⁵ Through his research, Spengler unintentionally laid the foundation for a new field of study.

Throughout his adult life, Oswald Spengler strained to prepare the Germans to move beyond the declining Faustian Culture and become the Romans of their era. He believed that the culture of Europe was declining through the last days of its existence. Furthermore, he argued that its downfall would give the Germans the opportunity to emulate the ancient Romans. The Romans, for Spengler's view of history represented the greatest creators of new cultures

⁴³ Quoted in Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline...*, 17-18.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline...*, 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

throughout world history. The creators of new cultures throughout the world did so in Romanesque fashion. For Spengler, the decline of the Faustian Culture in the West meant that the active Germans would be presented with an opportunity to create their own culture to replace the decaying Faustian Culture.

He never lived to see his mission accomplished. On 8 May, 1936 Oswald Spengler succumbed to the congenital heart defect that had kept him out of the dangers of the First World War. Spengler had hoped that his works would inspire a strong leader to lead the German people to create a new culture. Spengler hearkened to the Romans and their counterparts throughout the cultures of the world as examples of what the Germans needed to do as the Faustian Culture decayed around them.

Spengler did not view human history as a cohesive linear sequence of events. Instead, he argued that history ought to be viewed as multiple cultures existing parallel to one another, often in different stages of development. Spengler's emphasis on cultures rather than time periods was in complete contrast to his predecessors who divided history into time periods such as the ancient and the modern periods. In further contrast to his peers, Spengler claimed that cultures each existed organically with cyclical life cycles. In his opus magnum, *The Decline of the West*, Spengler described how cultures rise and fall similarly to the seasons of the year. Each culture began in the spring time and ended with the completion of its winter season. Cultures progressed independently of one another within their lifecycles like flowers in a field. Spengler explained that the lifecycles of the cultures are a "drama noble in its aimlessness, noble and aimless as the course of the stars, the rotation of the earth and alternance of land and sea, of ice and virgin forest upon its face." He concluded that "[humans] may marvel at it or we may lament it – but it

is there.”⁴⁶ The Faustian Culture of Europe, Spengler stated, was declining late in the winter season of its lifecycle. Spengler did not simply react to the Great War, instead, he wrote about the western decline before the war seemed to vindicate his position. According to Spengler’s position, the late date in the lifecycle of the Faustian Culture led to the First World War and the events which followed.

The true purpose of Spengler’s life’s work shone through *The Decline of the West* in addition to several of his key essays written in the 1920s. Spengler wrote his works for the active individuals of the German people. Spengler desired for his people, the Germans, to seize the opportunity that presented itself due to the decline of the Faustian Culture. The decline of the western culture created the opportunity for a tough people to rise above the chaos. These people would then be able to create a new culture to continue the cycle. He hoped that the Germans would create a culture to replace the rotten structure of western culture. Spengler concluded that “We Germans will never again produce another Goethe, but indeed a Caesar.”⁴⁷ While Hitler may not have been the exact Caesar Spengler predicted, Hitler did attempt to create a new culture for Europe. Instead of the fulfillment of all of Spengler’s dreams for Germany, the Nazis burned Europe into the ground and forever destroyed European influence over world affairs. Spengler’s thesis of potential for the German people was a message for the pandemonium that swept through Europe. Spengler preached that the potential for the Germans existed, but he never explained what would happen if they failed in their endeavors.

⁴⁶ Spengler, *The Decline of the West*..., 435.

⁴⁷ Oswald Spengler, “Pessimism?” ... 154.

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