Oswald Spengler and Race

Bradford Hanson

OSWALD SPENGLER (1880-1936) was a German philosopher and historian. He is best known for his magnum opus, The Decline of the West, the first volume of which was published in 1918 and the second in 1923.

Spengler’s core thesis is that civilizations are like biological organisms: they are born, they mature, they grow old, and then they die. He believed that Western civilization was in its twilight years, that is, a period of decline preceding its death. This epiphany, which came to him when the West was at the height of its power and world dominance, is what he is best known for, and rightly so, for he saw the future of Western civilization with a clarity that escaped all others.

A peculiarity of his thought – indeed, a crucial error – is his undervaluing of race as the motor of civilization. The specific reason that civilizations decline and die is that the original race that gave birth to them itself “dies” over time, that is, its birthrate declines, it mixes its blood with lesser peoples whom it has conquered, and it loses its will to power.

However, in 1931, Spengler released a short book entitled Man and Technics, which allowed that race does constitute the basis – he uses the word “stock” – for the formation of civilization. He stated directly that Western civilization was created by the Northern, Germanic peoples.

Another problem with Spengler’s theories is his strange attitude towards the Jews. He correctly recognizes that the Jews are an alien element in Western civilization, but he bizarrely describes them as a “fossilized” people that has exhausted its life-possibilities and which does not play an active role in Western politics or culture.

So, clearly, Spengler was not a National Socialist. Indeed, his relationship with the National Socialist state and movement was contentious. He voted for Hitler (rather than Hindenburg) in the 1932 presidential election. After Hitler was named Reich’s Chancellor in 1933, he was granted a lengthy audience with him. He came away unimpressed, and subsequently made disparaging remarks about the Führer. He saw Mussolini, not Hitler, as the embodiment of his ideals in the 20th century.

However, Spengler remained in Germany. He quarreled publicly with Alfred Rosenberg over points of ideology, and when Dr. Joseph Goebbels invited him to give a series of public lectures, he refused. His final book, The Hour of Decision, was published in Germany in 1933 and quickly became a bestseller. However, it was later banned because of its hostile tone towards National Socialism.

Privately, Spengler was highly critical of National Socialist racial thought, especially as it pertained to the Jews. It should be noted that Spengler himself was part Jewish: one of his great-grandmothers, born Bräunchen Moses, was a Jewess, making Spengler one-eighth Jewish. Perhaps he took NS attitudes towards the Jews as some sort of personal affront, but it is unclear whether his tiny Jewish ancestry played a role in his thought, either conscious or unconscious.

At the heart of things was a divergence between Spengler and Hitler concerning the importance of race in civilization. To Hitler, biological race was primary. Spengler, in contrast, adhered to a mystical, spiritual view of race that was divorced from biological reality. Over time, Spengler moderated his earlier racial views somewhat, but he never completely accepted the primacy of biological race in the rise and fall of civilization.

The short essay presented here appeared in print just a few short months before Spengler’s untimely death at age 56. In it, he expresses a racial view of history more in keeping with National Socialist thought than his earlier writings and he warns the White peoples of Europe of the dire fate that awaits them if they fully succumb to the degeneracy of their times.

The essay was Spengler’s response to a poll that had appeared in Cosmopolitan magazine on the subject of world peace. A number of well-known personalities responded, which resulted in a series of articles. Spengler’s submission was printed in the January 1936 issue of the magazine.

– Martin Kerr

Is World Peace Possible?

by Oswald Spengler

THE QUESTION whether world peace will ever be possible can only be answered by someone familiar with world history. To be familiar with world history means, however, to know human beings as they have been and always will be. There is a vast difference, which most people will never comprehend, between viewing future history as it will be and viewing it as one might like it to be. Peace is a desire, war is a fact; and history has never paid heed to human desires and ideals.

Life is a struggle involving plants, animals, and humans. It is a struggle between individuals, social classes, peoples, and nations, and it can take the form of economic, social, political, and military competition. It is a struggle for the power to make one’s will prevail, to exploit one’s advantage, or to advance one’s opinion of what is just or expedient. When other means fail, recourse will be taken time and again to the ultimate means: violence. An individual who uses violence can be branded a criminal, a class can be called revolutionary or traitorous, a people bloodthirsty. But that does not alter the facts. Modern world-communism calls its wars “uprisings,” imperialist nations describe theirs as “pacification of foreign peoples.” And if the world existed as a unified state, wars would likewise be referred to as “uprisings.” The distinctions here are purely verbal.

Talk of world peace is heard today only among the White peoples, and not among the much more numerous colored races. This is a perilous state of affairs. When individual thinkers and idealists talk of peace, as they have done since time immemorial, the effect is always negligible. But when whole peoples become pacifistic it is a symptom of senility. Strong and unspent races are not pacifistic. To adopt such a position is to abandon the future, for the pacifist ideal is a static, terminal condition that is contrary to the basic facts of existence.

As long as man continues to evolve there will be wars. Should the White peoples ever become so tired of war that their governments can no longer incite them to wage it, the earth will inevitably fall a victim to the colored men, just as the Roman Empire succumbed to the Teutons. Pacifism means yielding power to the inveterate non-pacifists. Among the latter there will always be White men – adventurers, conquerors, leader-types – whose following increases with every success. If a revolt against the Whites were to occur today in Asia, countless Whites would join the rebels simply because they are tired of peaceful living.

Pacifism will remain an ideal, war a fact. If the White races are resolved never to wage war again, the colored will act differently and be rulers of the world.