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Spengler's Cultural 'Wave Cycles': Nature versus Nurture?

1. Introduction

At the very beginning of *'The Decline of the West'* Oswald Spengler made a rather vague passing reference to a *'metaphysical structure of historic humanity'*. He asked:

Is there a logic of history? Is there beyond all the causal and incalculable elements of the separate events, something we may call a metaphysical structure of historic humanity, something essentially independent of outward forms – social, spiritual, political – which we see so clearly?¹

Is there a logic of history? As might be expected, he answered – Yes. In the very opening sentence of his work:

In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a Culture....²

His book more than adequately fulfilled his promise to unravel the 'stages in the destiny of a Culture'. Also, in providing this general description of the stages through which *'cultures'*³ pass as they expand, evolve and decay, he also presented a compelling argument that he had fulfilled his monumental 'venture of predetermining history'.

In summary, Spengler described in some detail his *'world-as-history'*⁴ model of historical progress, illustrated by the evolution of different *'cultures'* at different times, at different rates, and in different places, from their humble origins into grand civilizations before returning to dust. Notably, Spengler saw that as each *'culture'* rose, blossomed and collapsed it followed a trajectory through significant, identifiable stages 'independent of outward form'. Thus,

¹ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 3.

² Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 3.

³ Spengler uses the term 'culture' for a group of people who share a unique range of cultures and are therefore a distinct, identifiable, cultural group. Here, I denote this meaning of the word by the construction, 'culture'.

⁴ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 5.

although the Egyptian, Indian and Chinese dynasties shared little in the way of a common small ‘c’ culture⁵ the ‘*majestic wave cycles*’⁶ defining the destiny of their civilizations followed identifiably similar patterns of development.

Set forth the Classical Culture as a self-contained phenomenon embodying and expressing the Classical soul, put it beside the Egyptian, the Indian, the Babylonian, the Chinese, and the Western (Cultures), and determine for each of these the higher individuals what is typical in their surgings and what is necessary in the riot of incident. And then at last will unfold itself the picture of world history that is natural to us, men of the West, and to us alone.⁷

Each culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which rise, ripen and decay, and never return.⁸

This rising and falling of civilizations, like the tides ebbing and flowing with the cycles of the moon, all followed the rules of Spengler’s grand ‘*wave-cycles*’. By extracting the common threads that Spengler saw repeated in the evolution of multiple past civilizations he was able to generate a common abstraction, the ‘Culture-form’, capturing the stages of development for the life of a generalised, hypothetical ‘civilization’.

And if we set free their shapes, till now hidden all too deep under the surface of a trite ‘history of human progress’, and let them march past us in the spirit, it cannot but be that we shall succeed in distinguishing, amidst all that is special or unessential, the primitive culture-form, the Culture that underlies as ideal all the individual Cultures.⁹

To complete his thesis, by comparing our current Western civilization with this generalised abstraction he asserted that we should be able to determine what temporal stage of development our civilization currently fits within his abstracted scheme, and therefore be able to make serious predictions of just what is in store for us in the future. Thus Spengler achieved his ‘venture of predetermining history’. No surprises here – this is Spengler’s thesis pure and simple.

In describing the wave form and stages of development of his ‘*wave-cycles*’, Spengler successfully described the structural part of his ‘*metaphysical structure of historic humanity*’. My problem though is that he appears to have made no attempt to actually define the processes that drive this metaphysical structure, and which must have controlled the wave forms of all the different ‘*wave-cycles*’ for all the previous ‘*cultures*’ that have formed civilizations as well.

⁵ By small ‘c’ culture I mean specific cultural practices, as distinct from the group who practices those cultures, denoted by the construction ‘*culture*’ as indicated in footnote 3, above.

⁶ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 106.

⁷ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 21.

⁸ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 17.

⁹ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 104.

It is clear that all '*cultures*', for example, the Egyptian, Indian, Babylonian and Chinese, share little of their specific learned cultures. However, as Spengler categorically demonstrated, if these '*cultures*' are all to follow the same identifiable stages of the '*wave-cycle*', then the driving mechanism of these '*wave cycles*' must be completely independent of all learned culture. One is forced to conclude then that these big '*wave-cycles*' that control the rise and fall of civilizations, must be controlled by some even deeper human force than learned culture itself. It occurs to me that the only truly shared attributes that all '*cultures*' and all humans have in common, which sits below all learned culture, is the shared genetic inheritance derived from 25 million years, or 1 million generations, of man's primate past. Somehow, there must be some deep controlling genetic influence on the allowable political structures which drive the way societies can develop.

In truth, I find this thought more than alarming, and yet I cannot see any way past it. Does it indeed make any sense? Having made the suggestion, I guess it is up to me offer some form of resolution. At best I can only offer a guess, looking more closely at aspects of our shared genetic inheritance.

2. Dominant male back to dominant male.

In his writings Spengler demonstrated both an admiration for the old aristocratic traditions, and a deep regret over their passing. In the *Hour of Decision*, he wrote:

Everywhere there ruled an ancient and powerful tradition. There were aristocratic conventions of government, of opposition, of diplomatic and warlike interstate relations, of admission of defeat and of challenges and concessions at the peace table. Honour still played an undisputed role.¹⁰

He also spelt out his contempt for the modern traditions that were replacing them:

And thus, everywhere, home politics became a sphere which made demands on experienced statesmen that were quite out of relation to its importance, wasting their time and strength, and causing them to forget – and to will to forget – the original meaning of statesmanship, which is the direction of external policy. This condition of things is the anarchic intermezzo known today as democracy, which leads from the destruction of monarchial State supremacy by way of political, plebeian Rationalism to the Caesarism of the future. There are already signs, in the dictatorial tendencies of our time, of this Caesarism, which is destined to assume the unlimited mastery over the ruins of historical tradition.¹¹

¹⁰ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 25.

¹¹ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 40.

Democracy drew particular scorn:

What we recognize as ‘order’ today, and express in ‘Liberal’ constitutions, is nothing but *anarchy become a habit*. We call it democracy, parliamentarianism, national self-government, but in fact it is the mere nonexistence of a conscious responsible authority, a government – that is, a true State.¹²

However, while denouncing that which replaced it, I am not really convinced that Spengler ever mounted a convincing argument in his support for the old traditional order other than one based on sentiment. And yet I believe there is genuine argument in favour of the old aristocratic order implicit in what he wrote.

To begin, I present this quote from Friedrich Hayek that I came across, in a piece by Rory Sutherland, published in the UK Spectator Magazine:

Just then, ... an email arrived from David Sloan Wilson with a transcript of a 1985 talk by Friedrich Hayek.

Hayek: Our basic problem is that we have three levels of moral beliefs. We have, in the first instance, our intuitive moral feelings, which are adapted to the small person-to-person society, where we act toward people that we know. Then we have a society run by moral traditions, which – unlike what modern rationalists believe – are not intellectual discoveries of men who designed them. They are an example of a process that I now prefer to describe by the biological term of group selection. Those groups that quite accidentally developed favourable habits, such as a tradition of private property and the family, succeed but they never understood this. So we owe our present extended order of human co-operation very largely to a moral tradition, of which the intellectual does not approve because it had never been intellectually designed. It has to compete with a third level of moral beliefs; the morals that intellectuals design in the hope that they can better satisfy man’s instincts than the traditional rules. And we live in a world where the three moral traditions are in constant conflict: the innate ones, the traditional ones, and the intellectually designed ones.... You can explain the whole of social conflicts of the last 200 years by the conflict of the three...¹³

The first of Hayek’s three ‘moral beliefs’ are the inherited ones – the result of our primate past – which spring from 25 million years, living as ‘hunters and gatherers’ in small primate ‘troops’. With a million generations behind us, we do not easily or quickly lose the inherited behaviours which have ensured our survival for so long. Those inherited social and political behaviours are deeply hard-wired into every person’s psyche.

I’m guessing that everyone will have seen the same endless wildlife programs on their televisions and will therefore have some familiarity with the social structures of our living primate relatives, chimpanzees for example; small family groups, strongly hierarchical, and presided

¹² Spengler (1933/1934), p. 34.

¹³ Sutherland (2015).

over by a dominant male. These small family 'troops' generally form tight social groups with strong internal solidarity, and display altruism and charity towards other family members, but fierce aggression in defence of their territory whenever they encounter their neighbours in the forest.

Man has evolved directly from such primate groups, and then lived for generations more in similar, simple, hierarchical groups largely controlled by the same inherited, genetically derived, protocols of our primate ancestors. Spengler describes this period of human pre-history in *'The Decline of the West'*:

Life as experienced by primitive and by fellaheen peoples is just the zoological up and down, a planless happening without goal or cadenced march in time, wherein occurrences are many, but, in the last analysis, devoid of significance.¹⁴

But around the time of the invention and introduction of farming, rising population densities increased the likelihood of contact between different 'troops', and the changing nature of these interactions forced these groups to develop larger and more complex social structures. With increasing contacts there was a transition towards a linear development of successive cultural forms. This linear 'history' is referred to by Spengler as the *'world-as-nature'*¹⁵ view of history, since it has similar features to linear nature of biological, i.e. natural, evolution.

The professional historian [...] sees it (history) like a sort of tape worm, industriously adding on to itself one epoch after the other.¹⁶

Spengler used derogatory terms to describe this *'world-as-nature'* view of history because to his mind the old subdivisions into historical categories of Ancient, Medieval and Modern dealt inappropriately with the evolution of his *'wave-cycles'* of the later complex societies. Significantly, the linearity of *'world-as-nature'* implied that the future is unknowable, whereas his interpretation of the repeated cycles of *'world-as-history'* rendered the future as knowable. But that does not concern us here. However much Spengler liked to reject this linear, *'world-as-nature'* model of history, it is clear that we can follow a linear development in pre-historic societies.

If one looks at the political structure of the Australian Aborigines we find that the focal unit of power is what is referred to as the 'clan'.¹⁷ The clan is a small hierarchical family group, numbering from

¹⁴ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 170-171.

¹⁵ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 117.

¹⁶ Spengler, 1923/1927, p. 22.

¹⁷ Berndt/Berndt (2018) describe the Narinyerri 'tribe' of South Australia as having 74 separate clans.

1 up to 30, or even 50 individuals maximum, headed by an all powerful patriarch. Hierarchy is defined largely by the stage of initiation into clan secrets. Clans are loosely grouped together into larger dialect groups, commonly referred to as 'tribes', which come together for ceremonies, to share seasonal food abundances like swan eggs during the swan breeding season, to obtain wives, or for warfare. These 'tribes' are not political units *per se* in that there is no tribal leadership structure, each clan remaining strictly autonomous within the 'tribe'. What we can see here is that the political structure of the Australian Aborigine revolves around one which is only slightly removed by learned culture from an earlier, pre-historic, 'troop'-like structure. Learned culture which controls religion and law, called 'The Dreaming' by Aborigines and ostensibly handed down from spirit ancestors, sits above older inherited traits, but in reality only provides the justification for the inherited, hierarchical structures of the clans. Anthropologist, William Stanner, summed it up quite neatly:

The narrow self-interest of men exploits The Dreaming.¹⁸

Following the Australian Aborigines, I am drawn to the work of anthropologist, Napoleon Chagnon and his descriptions of the political structure of the Yanomamö Indians of the Amazon basin.¹⁹ It would appear that here groups were living closer together than the Australian Aborigines and were therefore more likely to come into contact with each other. Because of intergroup aggression, these groups had developed into larger defensive, and indeed offensive, associations. These groups were still strictly close family, but now numbering up to 300 individuals. Chagnon explained that while increasing size was considered advantageous for defensive or offensive reasons, the Yanomamö had not developed the cultural mechanisms to hold such large groups together, and internal divisions often caused them to fission back into smaller groups. These groups traded increased vulnerability to outside aggression for a stronger internal group solidarity and lower internal aggression. Again, however, I point to the hierarchical structure of these groups, and the all-powerful patriarch who had complete control over all of his group.

In the linear development that I am suggesting we would now step on to tribes, and then kingdoms. Perhaps it is not necessary to go into any great detail here as most people will be familiar with internal political structures of both, and have their own personal favourites. I might mention that my own background is rooted in the Scottish

¹⁸ Stanner (1953/2009), p. 72.

¹⁹ Chagnon (2013).

Highland 'clans', though strictly speaking I believe that they should be referred to as 'tribes' since they are large extended family associations, numbering into the low thousands, but still under an all-powerful 'tribal' chief. If one can believe historian John Prebble²⁰ the tribal structure of these Highland clans was still the dominant political force in the north of Scotland into the eighteenth century. The traditional tribal history was largely replaced by a sanitised, Sir Walter Scott, mythologised version of life in the Scottish Highlands during the Victorian era.

What I have described here are living examples displaying possible steps in the evolution, segments of the tape worm if you prefer, to larger and more complex societies as we pass from primate 'troop', to clan, to tribe, to kingdom. These new political entities required the negotiated development of new learned cultural forms to hold larger and larger numbers together, in opposition to the old inherited instincts which naturally induced animosity and suspicion towards any individuals other than close family members of the 'troop'. This is what was referred to by Hayek in the quote above regarding the second of his 'moral traditions'. These comprise the set of learned culturally-derived traditions passed on over the centuries that arose by trial and error - traditions that may seem haphazard with many seemingly strange inexplicable anomalies, the origin and justification for which is long forgotten, but which ultimately have worked in holding cultures together into larger workable groups. Hayek used the 'biological term' 'group selection' for this second 'moral tradition' but in no way did he intend us to believe this was other than learned culture.

In his book *'The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism'* Hayek made the clear distinction between the first two 'moral belief' systems that have been described above.

I have been attempting to explain how extended order of human co-operation has evolved **despite opposition from our instincts**.²¹ (my emphasis)

This book has shown mankind as torn between two states of being. On the one hand are the kinds of attitudes and emotions appropriate to behaviour in the small groups wherein mankind lived for more than one hundred thousand years, wherein known fellows learnt to serve one another, and pursue common aims. [...] On the other hand there is the more recent development in cultural evolution wherein we no longer chiefly serve known fellows or pursue common ends, but where institutions, moral systems and traditions have evolved that have produced and now keep alive many times more people than existed before the dawn of civilisation, in pursuing thousands of different ends of their own

²⁰ Prebble (1981) and Prebble (1967).

²¹ Hayek (1988), p. 120.

choosing in collaboration with thousands of persons whom they will never know.²²

The older instinctive inherited moral belief system was appropriate for the use in small groups, but as societies grew, new learned cultural forms were needed to override certain behaviours which were no longer appropriate in larger group settings. In a sense it's the very origins of 'political correctness!'

However, critically, we should note that the underlying structure of these new associations, the new cultural institutions, closely mimic the original political structures that had developed over the 25 million years of primate behaviour, or Hayek's one hundred thousand years of human behaviour. The inequality inherent in the leadership by a dominant male in the 'troop' became leadership by a patriarch, followed by leadership by a tribal chief, followed by leadership by a king, as the associations enlarged by novel necessity, and the new political structures were devised. By the same process, the sub-dominant males became, in effect, a ruling aristocratic class under the king.

All successful '*cultures*' evolve by developing the cultural tools needed for survival, and all appear to have followed this same path, developing the same inequality in their political forms, based on this initial starting point of hard-wired genetic inequality. It worked for a million generations and thus was an automatic default starting point for cultural evolution into larger groups as well.

Thus, when Spengler spoke of the natural order of things being hierarchical, unequal if you like, and yearned for the old proven system of the old ruling families and a peasantry who are ruled more or less by consent, he was indirectly alluding back to the 'natural' inequalities derived from the primitive 'troop'.

A nation cannot of course govern itself any more than an army can lead itself – it has to be governed, and as long as it possesses healthy instincts, it likes to be governed.²³

'Equal rights' are contrary to nature, are an indication of the departure from type of ageing societies, are the beginning of their irrevocable decline. It is a piece of intellectual stupidity to want to substitute something else for the social structure that has grown up through the centuries and is fortified by tradition. There is no substituting anything else for Life. After Life there is only Death.²⁴

While I don't think Spengler actually explicitly made this connection with our genetic inheritance, I believe it was there implicitly to be made.

²² Hayek (1988), p. 135.

²³ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 37-38.

²⁴ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 92-93.

Spengler was in fact correct - inequality is indeed the 'natural' way in which societies have traditionally organised themselves based on their deep inherited past. The aristocracy ruled on the basis of their inherited position which was derived over time from, and mimicked, the deep structures inherited over a million generations in primeval societies.

Of course, the corollary of this is that when the new so-called 'bourgeois',²⁵ or 'burgher', elites wanted to take over from the established aristocracy, they pled the case to 'reason' for the establishment of a society of equals (with themselves as the democratically elected leadership of course). Here we encounter Hayek's third level of 'moral beliefs'. These are the set of moral beliefs derived by the intellectuals who believe that by the power of their own intellect they would be able to derive a better set of moral beliefs for the organisation of society than the seemingly haphazard form that currently exists. This is the 'fatal conceit' that Hayek referred to in his book of the same name. And what Spengler called 'a piece of intellectual stupidity'.

As we have seen, Spengler had no time for the intellectuals and their utopian ideas, who claimed to be 'rational', but misused 'reason' as a weapon to displace the old aristocracy and assume power for themselves. In *The Hour of Decision* he derides the 'Age of Rationalism':

The word (Rational) is familiar enough, but who knows how much it implies? It is the arrogance of the urban intellect, which, detached from its roots and no longer guided by strong instinct, looks down with contempt on the full-blooded thinking of the past and the wisdom of ancient peasant stock. It is the period in which everyone can read and write and therefore must have his say and always 'knows better.'²⁶

These elites based their claim for power on the so-called 'reasonable' proposition that all people were created equal and therefore should have an equal democratic right to determine who ruled and how. This, however, was actually based on the Pauline fallacy of 'All souls are created equal' - 'All men are created equal'²⁷ - 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?' That is, the fallacy of equality was based on the now dubious proposition of the Biblical story of man's creation six thousand years ago, that everyone equally has a soul, and that all people were created equal before a 'God'. I am suggesting that not too many people who are cheerleaders of democracy these days would actually agree with this proposition, and yet they continue to base their utopian models on this fallacy.

²⁵ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 14.

²⁶ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 9.

²⁷ Siedentop (2014).

I also note with some bemusement that even the Bible itself does not provide much support for the Pauline position of equality before God. Ignoring the Old Testament status of slaves and women, I note that the evolution of society from family to clan to tribe to kingdom as I have described it above is quite neatly depicted in the Old Testament narrative, as family patriarch Abraham, makes way for clan patriarch Abraham, makes way for tribal chief Isaac, on to patriarchal leader of the twelve tribes under Moses, and finally the arrival of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, under David and his descendants. If one can actually believe the historicity of Old Testament narrative, then it provides an excellent case study of Hayek's haphazard, trial and error, success and failure, negotiated accumulation of the learned culture necessary to provide cohesion in a rapidly expanding social group. Even if one does not accept the historicity, I think it still provides an important example worthy of a second look in this *'history-as-nature'* phase of human development.

And so, in fact, I would assert that man, with his long primate past, was never created equal in the first place, and any system of government based on the idea of equality is actually based on a falsehood, and therefore not really 'reasonable' at all. Thus, as Spengler seemed keen to point out, democracy is not, never has been, and never will be, 'natural' in the sense of 'derived from nature'.

Like Spengler, I suggest then that a society based on 'equality' is arguably 'unnatural' and could be expected to be inherently unstable. It is possible that that inherent instability could really only be resolved by a return to the inequality, but now inequality in a form represented by Spengler's *'Caesarism'*, since that form more closely resembles the old, 'natural,' primate, political structure. However, there is a tendency to tyranny embedded in this style of leadership since it is technocratic, not rooted in the ancient sacred traditions of the foundational tribes, and devoid of the *'noblesse oblige'* of the old aristocratic families. I will give Plato the last word on how it may be expected to play out:

Tyrannies are democracies fully played out. ... Extreme freedom cannot be expected to lead to anything but extreme slavery. (Plato, Rep.)

Thus, the *'wave-cycle'* comes full circle, from dominant male to back to dominant male.

3. Immediate gratification back to immediate gratification

But there is another way of describing this same *'wave-cycle'*. I have asserted, above, that man derived his fundamental genetic inheritance from 25 million years, one million generations, of

primate ancestry living a hunter and gatherer lifestyle. On the other hand, man has lived only a couple of hundred generations as a farmer. And yet, as Professor Carroll Quigley²⁸ pointed out, the survival strategy of two modes of living are almost exactly opposite, which must surely have left their mark on human society.

Hunter and gatherer societies live in the here and now. They live in isolated family groups. They maintain the old inherited responses of charity, altruism and generosity for the person's 'inner group', but fear, suspicion and aggression for the 'outer groups' which surround them. They need to be spontaneous, aggressive, impulsive. They have a well-developed flight-or-fight response. They hunt when they are hungry and consume food surpluses as soon as they are caught because there is limited potential for food storage. Their survival strategy is based on immediate gratification.

Farmers who follow this survival strategy, that of immediate gratification and who eat the seed required for the new season's planting, or eat their breeding stock because they are hungry, will not remain farmers for long.

Successful farmers need to be forward planners. Farming societies tend to live in larger closer social groups. In larger communities, aggression may not be a great advantage, while cooperation and negotiation skills are more highly regarded and rewarded attributes. Food needs to be carefully husbanded (seed for next season's plantings, domesticated animals for breeding stock). The survival strategy of farmers is based on deferred gratification.

Thus, while we carry with us a burden of a million generations of inherited behaviours favouring immediate gratification, we have but a few inherited behaviours that a successful farming community would need to counter this deeply ingrained, but counter-productive, survival strategy imposed on us from our primitive ancestry. However, over time, by trial and error, we have developed the learned behaviours and developed the cultural institutions essential to counter those old inherited traits to become successful farming communities. Deferred gratification has for a long time succeeded over immediate gratification. This learned culture is Hayek's second moral tradition taking precedence over his first moral tradition.

Quigley explained ²⁹ - a successful '*culture*' (I am still using the term culture in this form in Spengler's sense of the word) and by inference a successful farming '*culture*', or indeed a successful '*civilised*' '*culture*', must be able to do two things; firstly, be able to create a surplus, and secondly, have a culture which rewards the investment of that surplus back into the production of new, and

²⁸ Quigley (1961), p. 77.

²⁹ Quigley (1961), p. 132.

bigger, surpluses. It is this the development of a culture which promotes this deferred gratification which creates the positive feedback loop of surplus, investment, followed by greater surplus, which forms the springboard for successful '*cultures*' to grow and prosper.

However, as Spengler noted, and indeed as did Quigley as well, as societies become more and more successful they begin to drift from investment in productive capacity into expenditure on consumption. This is the moment that '*cultures*', i.e. civilizations, begin to decline. I present an extract from Samuel Huntington, in reviewing Quigley's book mentioned above as an excellent summary of Quigley's position:

Civilizations grow, Quigley argued in 1961, because they have an 'instrument of expansion', that is, a military, religious, political, or economic organisation that accumulates surplus and invests it in productive innovations. Civilizations decline when they stop the 'application of surplus to new ways of doing things. In modern terms we say that the rate of investment decreases'. This happens because the social groups controlling the surplus have a vested interest in using it for 'non-productive, but ego-satisfying purposes [...] which distribute the surpluses to consumption but do not provide more effective methods of production'. People live off their accumulated capital and civilization moves from the stage of the universal state to the stage of decay. This is a period of acute economic depression, declining standards of living, civil wars between various vested interests, and growing illiteracy. The society grows weaker and weaker. Vain efforts are made to stop the wastage by legislation. But the decline continues. The religious, intellectual, social, and political levels of the society began to lose the allegiance of the masses of people on a large scale. New religious movements begin to sweep over the society. There is a growing reluctance to fight for the society or even support it by paying taxes. Decay then leads to the stage of invasion 'when the civilization, no longer able to defend itself because it is no-longer willing to defend itself, lies wide open to "barbarian invaders"' who often come from 'another, younger, (now) more powerful civilization'.³⁰

Douglas Murray, said the same thing in a slightly different way with reference to Western civilization, but the general principle holds for all civilizations :

A generation earlier Nietzsche had considered the same possibility and saw some of the same warning signs. 'We are no longer accumulating,' he wrote in his late notebooks. 'We are squandering the capital of our forebears, even in our knowing.' With the help of such thinkers it is easier to recognise that what was already affecting Germany in the late nineteenth-century was not an exhaustion caused by a lack of muesli or fresh air, but an exhaustion caused by a loss of meaning, an awareness that the civilization was 'no longer accumulating' but living off a dwindling cultural capital. If that was the case in the late nineteenth-century then how much stronger is the case today, when we live on even smaller

³⁰ Huntington (1996), p. 303.

portions of that inheritance and breathe even further away from the sources that gave that culture energy.³¹

Daniel Greenfield also put it quite neatly:

There's an old Hemingway quote about going bankrupt. How did you go bankrupt? Two ways, gradually and then suddenly. Here in the United States, we've had a front row seat to gradual bankruptcy. What does that mean? Under Obama, good policies have been replaced by bad policies. Good money has been replaced by bad money. Debt has been piled up in every state of the union. We have the same speech. The state of the union is strong. We're investing trillions of dollars in Muslim, green energy self-esteem. Of course, that's not an investment because an investment is when you get money back. It's just spending, but that's how you go bankrupt. And at the end of the day, the bill comes due and suddenly it's, 'Where did all the money go?' 'How did we suddenly go bankrupt?'³²

In a quote usually attributed to Alexander Fraser Tytler, the change in emphasis from productive investment to 'ego-satisfying' consumption was noted:

Democracy ends when the voters discover they can vote themselves the contents of the treasury. [...] From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship.³³

To this I add my own corollary and state:

... and when the treasury is empty, they force the treasurer to borrow extensively to prop up the failing economy and keep the benefits flowing on the unfounded assumption that the future will be more prosperous than the present and will therefore be untroubled in repaying the debt. It is the extension of the personal joke 'Ha Ha! I'm spending the kids' inheritance' to the level of a national, economic policy.

Thus the old social order of accumulation and thrift passes to the new social order of consumption and debt.

To Friedrich Hayek, the 'fatal conceit', as in the title of his book, was the belief of the academic elites (his 'socialists') that since they have access to modern rational thinking and logic, they are in a position to design a social 'order' which, because it is based on pure reason, would of necessity be superior to the rules which had arisen haphazardly before.

Imagining that all order is the result of design, socialists conclude that order must be improvable by better design of some superior mind.³⁴

³¹ Murray (2017), p. 209.

³² Greenfield (2015).

³³ This quotation is usually attributed to Alexander Fraser Tytler (1747-1813) but apparently does not appear in any of his works. It has also been attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville.

³⁴ Hayek (1988), p. 108.

Of course, they mean their own 'superior mind'. Again, this is Hayek's third moral tradition usurping his second moral tradition, as was defined above.

With respect to social order, Hayek made a particular point in emphasizing the importance of maintaining the distinction between the 'inner' and 'outer' groups, and the need for the separate 'rules of engagement' for each of these groups in which learned cultural distinctions have naturally arisen over time. With one group it's 'family', and the other group it's 'business'. These two groups coincide with the old 'inner' and 'outer' groups of primitive society where the old inherited responses of charity, altruism and generosity for the person's 'inner group' and fear, suspicion and aggression for the 'outer groups' which surround them has been somewhat ameliorated by learned culture to perhaps just suspicion and wariness of the 'outer' groups.

However, according to Hayek, intellectual elites, because it seems so 'reasonable' to them, believe that people could use culture to extend the old innate responses of charity, altruism and generosity, normally reserved for the person's 'inner group', to the 'outer groups' as well, without collapsing the special relationships within the individual's 'inner group' and dissipating the cohesiveness of the social group as a whole. To Hayek this is the goal of 'socialism' and the Socialist State which he warned cannot be achieved without destroying the core group of any society.

The origin of the word 'socialist' is from the Latin *socius* – *socii* – an associate, colleague, or someone known personally to you. Thus, 'society' traditionally was a group of people known to each other, with an agreed common sense of purpose in forming that association. This accurately reflects the situation of human 'societies' for many thousands of years.

This principle, however, has been misappropriated by the socialists. They use the warm and fuzzy ('instinctive nostalgia') sense of the word 'society', i.e. a small group of people known to one another with an agreed shared purpose as implied in the Latin origin of the term 'society', but then apply the principle to a larger group of people who don't know each other (i.e. to Hayek's 'outsiders') and who don't necessarily have any shared purpose with the 'inner group'. They then use the fact that the groups have joined for one specific purpose, i.e. come together in a market place, to impose conditions on another purposes even though the people involved do not share a common aim with respect to those purposes. This is misappropriation. Hayek again:

Bertrand de Jouvenel has well described this instinctive nostalgia for the smaller group – "The milieu in which man is first found, which retains for him an infinite attraction: but any attempts to graft the same features on a large

"society" is utopian and leads to tyranny.' The crucial difference overlooked in this confusion is that the small group can be led in its activities by agreed aims, or by the will of its members, while the extended order that is also a 'society' is formed into a concordant structure by its members' observance of similar rules of conduct in pursuit of different individual purposes.³⁵

The point Hayek made was that culture was the way through which the conflicting individual purposes of different groups could be reconciled into a mutually beneficial outcome. However, he doubted that a new intellectually-derived order built by socialist elites based on pure reason could achieve the same balance of mutually beneficial outcomes in the highly complex network that is a civilization.

At this point is worth visiting Rousseau and his 'General Will'. From the Roger Sandall:

According to the political theory of Rousseau, developed in the '*Social Contract*', the rights of the group and the state flow from the 'General Will', which is infallible, and where the 'General Will' conflicts with the 'individual will' the latter must yield. In totalitarian politics this principle is important – it involves the authority of the state....³⁶

In the normal society of Hayek the 'individual will' of the individual members of the small groups arises from innate behaviours, but culture provides a mechanism by which a 'General Will' can be arrived at by negotiation between the 'inner' and 'outer' groups'. The 'Social Contract' is an agreement to abide by the agreed rules embodied in the culture for the general benefit of both sides.

However, the Rousseau-ian 'Social Contract', once it has been got hold of by the socialists, is a distortion of this general principle. Rousseau's 'General Will', now derived by 'pure reason' by the socialist elites, encompasses the idea that the special relationships that small groups maintain for each member of its group, i.e. generosity, charity and altruism, should be applied universally. Because they think it's a good idea. The 'General Will' is deemed to be infallible and is therefore legitimately imposable over the supposedly selfish 'individual will'. The 'individual will' to the elites now turns out to be Hayek's second 'moral tradition', the old 'Social Contract' which can now be legitimately suppressed. De Jouvenel considered the derivation of the 'General Will' by pure reason by a self-serving elite to be utopian, and its enforcement over the 'individual will' to be tyrannical – as indeed it is.

An interesting point noted by Hayek was that social contract proposed by the socialists taps directly into the innate behaviours of man, by-passing the constraints of the learned cultural behaviours that we have been discussing. Therefore it is not surprising that the

³⁵ Hayek (1988), p. 113.

³⁶ Sandall (2001), p. 36-37.

reaction by the socialists to those who refused to yield to their agenda would exactly mimic the innate behaviour of an ‘inner’ group with respect to ‘outer groups’, namely, with suspicion, aggression and fear!

Hayek noted that the new socialist order (his third ‘moral tradition’) was all about breaking through the network – ‘shackles’ of the old learned rules (his second ‘moral traditions’), the rules that maintained civilization, in effect promoting the old innate primate inheritance (his first moral tradition) :

As we have seen, conflict between an individual’s emotions and what is expected of him in an extended order is virtually inevitable: innate responses tend to break through the network of learnt rules that maintain civilisation. But only Rousseau provided the literary and intellectual credentials for reactions that cultivated people once dismissed as uncouth. Regarding the natural (read ‘instinctual’) as good or desirable is, in his (Rousseau’s) work, an expression of nostalgia for example, the primitive, or even barbarian, based on the conviction that one ought to satisfy his or her desires, rather than obey the shackles allegedly invented and imposed by selfish interests.³⁷

Thus, in effect, rejecting the old restraints imposed by culture, the intellectuals / progressives / socialists use rationalism to justify a return to even older innate patterns of behaviour, particularly individual freedom from societal restraints, and the rejection of behaviours like deferred gratification.

Curiously, these archaic, more primitive attitudes and emotions are now supported by much rationalism, and by the empiricism, hedonism, and socialism associated with it.³⁸

Thus the move from the old objective of deferred gratification and investment in increased productive capacity to the new imperative of self-gratification and immediate consumption is justified by intellectuals on the grounds of ‘rational’ arguments.

It strikes me then that John Lennon’s song, ‘Imagine’, is the perfect anthem of the 21st Century and the true symbol of its decline.

Imagine all the people living for today. [...] ³⁹

This is the very antithesis of civilized life and yet these days it is ‘supported by much rationalism’.

Put simply, from above, Quigley argued that cultural groups were successful when they created surpluses and then re-invested those surpluses in the creation of bigger future surpluses thus founding a positive feedback loop. Man progressed from hunter and gather societies by overcoming the inherited, innate behaviours associated with the ‘immediate gratification’ of the hunter by promoting the

³⁷ Hayek (1988), p. 152.

³⁸ Hayek (1988), p. 135.

³⁹ Lennon, John and Ono, Yoko, 1971, released on an album of the same name.

learned, cultural, behaviours associated with the 'delayed gratification' of the farmer.

There is now an agenda promoted the intellectuals which in effect is a return to the old innate principles of instant gratification and the promotion of consumption while rejecting the need for productive investment, restraint and deferred gratification, the very basis on which our civilization was born.

All of this will be largely familiar to those who read Spengler. However, what I wish to emphasize here is that this agenda, sometimes linked to the so-called Gramscian 'march through the institutions', is not simply a random march through the institutions as such, but very specifically a march through those very cultural institutions through which the deferment of gratification was initially achieved and rewarded. The institutions by which the 'culture' expanded and projected itself into the future. The Church, the financial institutions (I mean, negative interest rates! Really?), the universities and schools, marriage and the family. Manufacturing, mining and farming – eagerly replaced by the so-called 'service industries' which promote consumption and instant gratification - like sporting events, 'cultural festivals', restaurants and tourism. Spengler readers will not be surprised if I was to refer to this as '*panem et circenses*' given that this exactly references a significant feature of the Roman civilization at precisely the same stage of its evolution.

Such is the trend of Nihilism. It occurs to no one to educate the masses to the level of true culture - that would be too much trouble, and possibly certain postulates for it are absent. On the contrary, the structure of society is to be levelled down to the standard of the populace. General equality is to reign, everything is to be equally vulgar. The same way of getting money and the same pleasures to spend it on: *panem et circenses* - no more is wanted, no more would be understood. Superiority, manners, taste, and every description of inward rank are crimes. Ethical, religious, national ideas, marriage for the sake of children, the family, State authority: all these are old-fashioned and reactionary.⁴⁰

And again the '*wave-cycle*' comes full circle; instant gratification back to instant gratification.

4. Conclusions

At the beginning of this essay I noted that Spengler had identified a '*metaphysical structure of historic humanity*', and I asserted that since this structure was independent of culture, it must be controlled

⁴⁰ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 96-97.

by a deeper force shared by all humanity. I tentatively identified this controlling force as our genetic inheritance. Man is inventive and capable of modifying his inherited behaviour with learned culture, and yet it appears that it is the genetic inheritance which provides the parameters which underlie just how much flexibility learned culture can have.

The two different forces that I propose control the evolution of Spengler's '*wave-cycles*' presented here can now be woven together to provide a possible narrative.

An early, primitive, human group would demonstrate innate aggression to his neighbours in the protection of his territory. However, if there was an expanding population and more frequent interaction between groups, there may be a perceived need to temper that aggression to take advantage of new opportunities relating to defence, offence, or even simply for new trading opportunities by forming bigger associations. Under those circumstances there would be an impetus to invent learned culture which allowed man to sidestep his innate, aggressive behaviour in order to form those larger associations. If there was a perception of an increased external threat and this led to the formation of larger and larger defensive associations, this need for larger defensive associations could contribute to the maintenance of group stability in spite of rising group numbers, and help suppress any innate desire to break up and reform back into smaller groups. Those that could not develop that learned culture and fissioned would be unlikely to survive. Notably, the larger and larger associations I envisage were functional because they still honoured the fundamental, innate, hierarchical structure of the original 'troop'.

In parallel with this there was the development of a different strand of learned culture. Rising population pressures promoted the move towards farming and settled life. This required the suppression of the more primitive inherited propensity to immediate gratification by a learned culture which promoted deferred gratification. Again, the perception of an external threat could also contribute to the acceptance of increasing levels of productive reinvestment, into defence, while promoting the suppression of any innate desire for immediate gratification like 'ego-satisfying' consumption.

In this way it is possible to see how positive feedback between neighbouring competing groups could generate the up-cycle part of the '*cultural wave-cycle*' until it became a civilization.

At the peak of the '*wave-cycle*' group size may reach the sort of limit that learned culture could no longer hold together, and any internal inhomogeneities in the group, ethnic or class, could start to eat away at group stability and create internal rivals for power. Similarly, the accumulated wealth of an expanding civilization, or

indeed any inequalities in wealth distribution, could reach a point where the innate desire for consumption begins to press against the learned culture of deferred gratification. It is possible that these limits could be achieved at the point at which the civilization has outgrown its neighbouring rivals, and the perceived defensive need for large group size, or the need for productive investment in defence, is no longer seen as relevant.

At this point there would be a reawakening of primitive inherited instincts and the casting aside of old learned culture, and the civilization would begin its descent on the down-cycle part of the '*wave-cycle*'.

Of course, modern man is a farmer and not a hunter or gatherer and so the descent would not be right back into the forest, how ever much 'romantic nostalgia' might will it. Following Spengler's suggestion with respect to the rise of *Caesarism*⁴¹, it is probable that some charismatic person with leadership aspirations would be able to mobilise sufficient support to take over the remnants and impose his own version of a hierarchical structure on it as the new 'dominant male'.

I suggest that such a model is actually independent of the actual form of learned culture, as long as the learned culture can achieve the broad aims of allowing large group associations and deferred gratification, and so represents a hypothesis that is at least feasible. This would need to be tested in more detail against each civilization, and each of Spengler's stages in the development of each civilization, to see if any validity can be established.

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⁴¹ Spengler (1933/1934), p. 40.

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