The Shadow of Empire: Francis Parker Yockey After Twenty Years

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by Revilo P. Oliver

IN 1857, less than fifty thousand British troops overawed and held in check the whole of the teeming subcontinent of India while suppressing the mutiny of almost a quarter of a million sepoys, native troops whom they had trained and armed.

Less than a hundred years later, the British, at a time when they had at their disposal tanks, airplanes, high-explosive and incendiary bombs, poison gas, and all the other weapons of modern warfare that are, by their very nature, a monopoly of great powers, meekly and cravenly surrendered India — not only surrendered the territory, but, hat in hand, recognized as equal or superior “nations” the natives whom a few regiments had once reduced to total submission.

In a century, the British, for whom the determination and blood of their heroes had won an empire on which the sun never set, were reduced — or reduced themselves — to a herd of sheep, huddled together on an island, on which the sun may soon set for the last time.

And now, that there may be no debasement that they have not brought on themselves, the cud-chewing herd have endorsed by their votes a scabrous agitator, the hireling of international criminals, on whose behalf he notoriously plans to use the remnant of the British army to despoil and butcher the yet virile and rational British in Rhodesia. That vile policy may fail, and the unspeakable Mr. Wilson may be unable to please his employers by furnishing their pet cannibals with white meat. But morally it is not the result but the intent that counts, and all who voted for an arrant traitor to his race and people will henceforth bear on their brows the indelible mark of Cain.

Britain is one of the terrible spectacles of history that no man can contemplate without feeling a melancholy blend of pity and awe — that no thinking man can contemplate without asking himself whether such cataclysmic changes are wrought by the weakness and folly of men or by blind and ineluctable forces of nature. That is the great problem of history.

Urgent Problem

For us, the problem became urgent in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, when thoughtful men began to suspect or foresee that the world’s mightiest civilization was moving rapidly toward a climax that might be catastrophe. There have been many attempts to ascertain and formulate laws of history that would enable us to predict — or, perchance, to control — our future. This study, both analytic and synthetic, of the historical process is often called historionomy, and by now it has produced thousands of books and articles — but the powerful and original minds that have been engaged in this inquiry do not number more than a score. As a kind of introduction to them (including Francis Parker Yockey), I undertook a survey of which the first four installments appeared in American Opinion for May, June, November, and December, 1963.

Oswald Spengler

The great modern philosopher of history is, of course, Oswald Spengler, whose Decline of the West formulated the problem in terms so clear and universal that everything written on the subject since 1918 has perforce had to be a commentary on Spengler — an attempt to extend, modify, or refute his magisterial synthesis. That great work, which has certainly been read and pondered by all who are interested in a philosophy of history, is not the clearest and most immediate proof of Spengler’s genius. That is to be found in a shorter and later book that comparatively few seem to have read, Die Jahre der Entscheidung, of which the first volume was published in Germany (Munich, 1933) and felicitously translated into English by Charles Francis Atkinson as The Hour of Decision (New York, Knopf, 1934). The displeasure of the Hitlerian regime precluded the publication of a second volume during Spengler’s lifetime, and it is reported that no manuscript of it was found among his papers by his executors. The published volume, however, is complete in itself and, as a cogent and accurate analysis of the contemporary world, does not depend for its validity on Spengler’s philosophy. It has been abundantly confirmed by subsequent events, and it is nothing less than a basic textbook for all who would understand the world today. The German text has been reprinted (Munich, C. H. Beck, DM 9.60) and is readily available; the English translation, I understand, can still occasionally be found on the second-hand market.

Spengler’s Disciple

Francis Parker Yockey proudly proclaimed himself the disciple of the man to whom he often refers as simply The Philosopher, and it is true that at least a general understanding of Spengler’s historionomy is taken for granted in the pages of Yockey’s major work. But the young American had his own method and reached conclusions of his own. We must recognize in him a powerful and original mind. And we must be grateful that his Imperium, which a few years ago was one of the rarest of rare books, is now available in a handsome and beautifully printed edition from The Noontide Press.

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A promotional card for the 1962 edition (Noontide Press) of Imperium, with a photograph of a very young Yockey

This is not a book for “liberal intellectuals” or other children. No man can study history until he has learned that he must study it objectively and dispassionately, without reference to his emotions or predilections.. Whether you view Caesar with admiration or horror, whether you love or hate him, has nothing whatever to do with the fact that he was victorious at Pharsalus.

No man should consider problems in historionomy if he does not realize that the only question before him will be the accuracy of the diagnosis or prognosis. The validity of the analysis does not in the least depend on the reader’s emotional reaction to the future that it portends. When a physician diagnoses diabetes or arteriosclerosis or cancer, the only question is whether he has observed the symptoms accurately and reasoned from them correctly. Our wish that the patient did not have the disease is utterly irrelevant.

Infantile minds, accustomed to living almost entirely in the vaporous realm of their own imagination, are incapable of distinguishing between reality and their own fancies. That is why I counsel “liberal intellectuals” not to read Imperium. If they are able to understand it, the book will certainly send them into a tantrum and may induce a paroxysmic fit. They had better stay in their academic lecture-halls or other play-pens, where they can be happy making mud-pies, which they can call “world peace” and about which they can dance in a circle, chanting

Higgledy-piggledy, my fat hen,

Now we’ve got a big U.N.

I also hope that Imperium will not fall into the hands of tenderhearted Conservatives who want to Love Everybody. Those dear ladies have noble souls, but they are much too good for this world.

II

Francis Parker Yockey

Spengler’s morphology of history and therefore Yockey’s, is open to challenge at some points that are so basic that they are virtually premises. It will here suffice to mention briefly three cardinal points.

(1) There is undoubtedly an analogy between civilized society and a biological organism. The frontispiece to the first edition of Hobbes’ Leviathan (1651) depicts a giant whose enormous body is composed of an infinite multitude of men and women, each of whom is a tiny and scarcely discernible part of the giant’s hair or eyes or fingers or other organs. As a symbolic representation of the complex unity of a nation or civilization, that has validity. In that sense, one of Spengler’s followers, Alexander Raven, is justified in speaking of a culture as a “divine superman” formed of millions of human beings. But the symbolic analogy does not prove that a culture, which is by definition a body of common beliefs and values — of thoughts and sentiments that are impalpable and immaterial — is itself a biological organism subject to the biological processes that decree the birth, adolescence, maturity, senescence, and death of all living things. Why need a culture decay? How can a body of concepts and ideas suffer physical deterioration?

(2) The hypothesis that cultures have a life-cycle depends on Spengler’s chronological parallels, of which the most important and best documented is obtained by positing that Classical civilization was completely distinct from, and alien to, our own. This forces Spengler, Yockey, Raven, Lawrence Brown, and others to dismiss as a “pseudo-morphosis,” a kind of universal hallucination, the West’s absolute certainty, down to the Twentieth Century, that it was a continuation of Graeco-Roman civilization. The problem thus posed is intricate, and one would have to write a treatise to discuss it. I cannot, however, be persuaded that a thousand indications of very close relationship are illusory. For example, of all the cultures and civilizations that flourished on this earth before ours, only the Classical ascertained that the earth is a globe and only the Classical saw that the earth could be moving in an annual orbit about the sun. No other people, so far as we know, had a mentality that could conceive of a spherical earth or contemplate the possibility that the earth was not the center of the universe. One could cite many other examples, equally significant.

Pseudo-Science

(3) Spengler assumed such plasticity of human nature that he greatly underestimated and almost ignored the biological differences between human beings. Spengler was deceived by the pseudo-scientific data forged or distorted by the school of Franz Boas, a twisted little man consumed with hatred of the stupid Americans who had admitted him to their country and endowed him with a lush professorship — which he used to peddle pro-Communist propaganda under the guise of “science.” (On Boas, see the Veritas Foundation’s The Great Deceit: Social Pseudo-Sciences, which is an excellent and indeed invaluable book, although unfortunately marred by some historical errors in digression that are irrelevant to the main subject. The book is entirely reliable in its description of the ways in which Fabian-Socialist-Bolshevik conspirators infiltrated, captured, and debauched American colleges and universities.)

Spengler cites Boas with unjustified respect, and Yockey follows Spengler, though with some prudent reservations. Both try to refute genetics by citing examples of apparently total cultural assimilation; they do not see that these could be explained by phenomena they recognize elsewhere: the cultural passivity of the majority in all nations and cultures, and the tendency of isolated individuals to adapt themselves to the society in which they find themselves. It is true that Orientals in the West have conformed, with apparent eagerness and sincerity, to Occidental culture; it is also true that White men have “gone native” among the American Indians and Polynesians. The one example proves no more than the other.

Race Ignored

Spengler virtually ignores race as a biological reality and even uses the word “race” in a non-biological sense to designate full participation in a culture. But no culture, however much of a “divine superman” it may be, can change the color of a man’s eyes or the shape of his skull, nor is it likely that it can change the convolutions of his brain or his moral (or immoral) instincts, although, of course, it can, by social pressures and, in extreme cases, force, inhibit or divert the indulgence of those instincts. The late William S. Haas, in The Destiny of the Mind, East and West (New York, Macmillan, 1956), has conclusively shown that there are at least two fundamentally different mental processes and ways of thinking, each of which is incomprehensible to the other.

For Yockey, the question is less critical than for Spengler. Yockey is concerned primarily with showing that “race-differences between White men, which means Western men, is vanishingly small” in comparison with the gulfs that separate Western men from Negroes and Orientals. That, no one can deny.

III

Imperium contains a number of historical oversights and lapses, such as are inevitable when a man tries to generalize from a vast mass of complex details — inevitable even when the author writes in a well-stocked library after decades of intensive study and meditation. Yockey, it must be remembered, was a young man of thirty-one, by profession a lawyer, who wrote in a room of an isolated inn on the lonely shore of the Irish Sea north of St. George’s Channel — wrote from memory in a fire of inspiration and while still feeling the moral revulsion caused, by his participation in the early stages of the obscene farce that was enacted at Nuremberg to provide a hypocritical pretext for the lynchings that the United States carried out as a pawn of the International Communist Conspiracy. I shall merely list the three most conspicuous historical errors.

(1) When Yockey wrote that Germany, during the five hundred years that followed 1267, was comparatively spared and did not suffer as great a loss of life in war as other European nations, he momentarily forgot the Thirty Years War, which he mentions in other connections.

(2) His statement that the bloody do-gooders of the French Revolution killed “between two and four thousand” during the Terror comes from a confused recollection of a figure given for a few days. Prudhomme, who participated in part of that democratic orgy and certainly had no reason to exaggerate, computed the total number of victims of the Terror at 1,022,351, exclusive of the massacres at Toulon, Marseilles, Bedouin, La Force, and many other places.

The Jewish Race

(3) When Yockey concluded that the Jewish “race” (in his non-biological sense of the word) was formed by the ghettoes of Mediaeval Europe, he probably did not know that the historical record extends over twenty-five centuries. There is no reason to suppose that the Jews who migrated to the Mediaeval cities and established their ghettoes aroused more resentment among the Christian populations than the Jews who settled on an island in the Nile near the First Cataract aroused among the native Egyptian population in the fifth century B.C. Yockey’s mistake, by the way, vitiates the parallel that he draws between the Jews in Europe and the Parsees in India.

Such errors of detail do not invalidate the general thesis of Imperium. Yockey’s analysis of the forces that are eroding our civilization is significantly supported by the fact that Lawrence R. Brown, who wrote when Imperium was almost unprocurable and seems never to have heard of it, reached substantially the same conclusions by an entirely different method in his learned and lucid work, The Might of the West (New York, Obolensky, 1963). And in several distinct areas, the future that Yockey forecast in 1947 seems to be taking shape before our eyes today. Imperium is not a revelation of an ineluctable future, but it is a work that we must study and ponder, if we would act intelligently in our time.

Distressing Philosophy

With few exceptions, American conservatives will be deeply distressed by Imperium. In the United States today, virtually all of the opposition to the Communist takeover now in progress comes from men and women who believe firmly in the principles on which our Constitution was founded, and who are working, often with dedication and devotion, to restore what they regard as the fundamentals of civilized society: a strictly limited government, the feasible maximum of personal liberty, a free market of private enterprise, and a society that is reasonably cohesive and homogeneous because the intelligent individuals in it will accept certain common moral values from an inner conviction, and will, furthermore, be able to control, by their influence and activity, the legislative and other decisions that the society makes. (I suppose that most conservatives realize, although they do not say, that the last point implies some limitation of suffrage at least as stringent as that which prevailed in the various states and was taken for granted at the time that the Constitution was formulated.) The Conservative attitude, furthermore, seeks peace and tranquillity, both domestic and foreign, regarding war as a regrettable necessity of national self-defense, and categorically rejecting foreign conquests except in such limited areas as may be strategically necessary for defense. (This opposition to imperialism is, for the most part, rational: it has nothing to do with sentimental and usually hypocritical snivelling about “underprivileged” cannibals and “‘underdeveloped” barbarians; it is based on the observation that imperial nations have to disperse and dissipate the most valuable part of their population, and are likely to find that an authoritarian government is the price of empire.)

The future prefigured by Yockey is an almost complete antithesis to what American Conservatives want and hope to attain. The one point of agreement is that the Bolsheviks and their feral conspiracy must be defeated and destroyed. What Yockey offers us, apart from that, is shocking: an authoritarian and absolute government under a new line of Caesars, personal liberty restricted by the need for solidarity, discipline in all matters of political importance, an economy controlled and regulated by the Caesars and a society that coheres by virtue of an ethos that will, if necessary, be ruthlessly enforced. And such domestic peace as we may know can be attained only by recognizing the West’s “Inner Imperative of Absolute Imperialism.”

Salutary Experience

That is why a reading of Imperium is a salutary experience for thoughtful American conservatives today. It forces us, to reexamine the realities of the situation before us, and to decide to what extent our objectives are still possible. For most of us, I am certain, there will be no question of changing in any way our conception of what is desirable. The problem will be that of deciding which, if any, of our specific objectives we should abandon because they can no longer be attained. If we abandon any, we shall do so in the spirit of men who, on a crippled ship, jettison some or all of the cargo because otherwise they would have no chance of bringing the ship and themselves to port. We shall do so for the reasons that impel a man to abandon his most valuable possessions in a burning house in order to save his wife and children.

Historical Question

We are confronted by an historical question which each of us must solve for himself. No man was ever more devoted to the concept of a republican and rational government than Cicero: in the end, he gave his life for it. But had Cicero, at any point in his career, been able to foresee as inevitable that long series of national calamities that eventually brought the Roman world under the superficially disguised but absolute despotism of Caesar’s heir and more ruthless successor, would Cicero have changed his policy and worked to hasten, rather than avert, the end of the republic? The Romans of the next century whose sentiments are brilliantly expressed in Lucan’s sonorous and threnodic epic, had not yet lost their understanding of republican principles, but they bitterly regretted that their ancestors had not recognized and accepted in time what Yockey calls “the Inner Imperative of Absolute Imperialism.” The question, then, is whether what Cicero did not foresee was really inevitable (as Yockey believes) or could it have been averted by the exercise of human prudence and courage in the hours of decision? Or did the fatality lie precisely in the composition of the Roman people, because they had, by Cicero’s time, so deteriorated that they were no longer willing to pay the economic and social price of liberty and were therefore incapable of permitting the exercise of the prudence and courage necessary to preserve it?

The American conservative today is essentially in Cicero’s position — which is not, perhaps, astonishing, since Cicero, more than any other man, by his thought and example, inspired our Constitution. Our immediate and urgent problem, though complicated by some factors peculiar to the modern world, is essentially the one that Cicero and his honorable contemporaries faced: What is it now possible for us to salvage and preserve? And what must we be prepared to sacrifice in order to save what can be saved?

Great Value

The great value of Imperium is that it forces us to reconsider our position realistically. We cannot afford the least sentimentality or illusion; we must not equate words with deeds; we dare not mistake wishes for possibilities. Our situation is too desperate. We must understand that we, the civilized men of the West, are a minority in this world — a small minority hated with an abiding and implacable rancor by the vast and teeming barbarism that surrounds us and by the Neanderthals in our midst. We exist today only through the power of the technology of which we are the sole creators. And Yockey is indubitably right when he reminds us that “technical superiority is helpless in the last analysis unless it is accompanied by superiority of will-power, of the will-to-conquer.” The issue is simply the survival of the West. It is by no means certain — in my opinion, it is not even likely — that to survive we shall have to resign ourselves to the loss of all or even most of what Yockey would have us resign to the Caesars. But if Imperium shocks us into a realization of how precarious are our chances of survival, and of how hard we shall have to fight for everything that we save, it will mark an epoch in our history.

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Source: The American Mercury, June 1966