



## New Histories of the World: Spenglerian Optimism

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### **Abstract**

*The apparently pessimistic implications of Spenglerian analysis have often appealed to others who foresaw the end of Western civilization, but Spengler himself was less discouraged. Even if no great art, music or literature could be expected in these latter days, great engineering projects were possible, and to be admired. Nor was Western (“Faustian”) Culture and Civilization the only game in town: other Cultures, like the “Magian,” had been embedded and distorted by the dominant regimes, both Classical and Western, and could still be an inspiring presence. A similarly distorted Culture might still be growing in Russia. And even when all present Cultures were exhausted there would be hope of some new, unpredictable, emergence, for which I offer some imaginable examples drawn from contemporary fantasy, as well as the abiding presence of what Spengler usually thought “pre-cultural,” or “primitive” societies.*

### **Keywords**

*Decline; Engineering; Pseudomorphoses; Self; Primitives; Science Fiction; Animals; Time.*

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## **I. The Optimistic Pessimist**

Oswald Spengler seems chiefly to be remembered as a “pessimist,” who supposed that we are now living in a period of decline, where nothing great can be expected any more in art, music, literature or philosophy.

We are civilized, not Gothic or Rococo, people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of late life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles’ Athens but in Caesar’s Rome. Of great painting or great music there can no longer be, for Western people, any question. Their architectural possibilities have been exhausted these hundred years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: vol.1 Form and Actuality*, trans. C.F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1924), 40.

This is, at any rate, the message that Wittgenstein internalized,<sup>2</sup> as well as the most scholarly of twentieth-century SF writers, James Blish.<sup>3</sup> So also Kerouac.<sup>4</sup> This age of the (Western) world is dominated by the “Civilization” into which an earlier inspired “Culture” has descended, as earlier Cultures also descended in their time. We can no longer be united by a common animating spirit or inspiring image, but only by administrative convenience, and the power of successive war-lords, Caesars. Our future, the future of “Faustian” humanity, can only be a long-drawn-out decline into a culturally stagnant, caste-divided, irreligious, inconsequential order of “fellaheen” (a term drawn from the Arabic term for peasant farmers in Egypt).

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.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, the very notion rather appealed to many in the early days of the twentieth century, not entirely without cause, even if not with Spenglerian reasons. Why should anyone expect much better?

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
On dune and headland sinks the fire:  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!<sup>6</sup>

And a few years later Chesterton posed a similar question: “Can you tell me, in a world that is flagrant with the failure of civilisations, what there is particularly immortal about yours?”<sup>7</sup> Yeats was similarly inclined to expect an end to the present age of humanity.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity<sup>8</sup>

The notion has an even longer history: according to the ancient Classical and Hindu stories the four ages of the world – Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron – involve a long decline

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<sup>2</sup> See William J. DeAngelis, *Ludwig Wittgenstein - a Cultural Point of View: Philosophy in the Darkness of This Time* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> James Blish, “Probable Prolegomena to Ideareal History,” in *The Tale that Wags the God* (Illinois: Advent Publishing, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Michael D’Orso, “Man Out of Time: Kerouac, Spengler, and the “Faustian Soul,”” *Studies in American Fiction* vol. 11, no. 1 (1983): 19-30.

<sup>5</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: vol.2 World-historical Perspectives*, trans. C.F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1926), 170-171.

<sup>6</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “Recessional” (1897). [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46780/recessional](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46780/recessional).

<sup>7</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946 [1904]), 25.

<sup>8</sup> William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming” (1919). [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming).

for all humanity, and we are now living in the last, the Kali Yuga.<sup>9</sup> This will be succeeded, we may hope, by a new Golden Age, an abrupt revolution:

Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung  
Has come and gone, and the majestic roll  
Of circling centuries begins anew:  
Justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign,  
With a new breed of men sent down from heaven<sup>10</sup>

Without such a global intervention to reset the clock (as it were), humankind has no resource.

But the notion that *Spengler* was upset by this is overwrought. First (as I shall observe in more detail later), *our* Civilization is not all of humankind. Secondly, he believed himself rather to be redirecting his Western readers' energies. Even if we have exhausted the imaginative possibilities of our own "Faustian" Culture, we may still hope to achieve some great things. Even if that Faustian Culture were entirely moribund there may already be another more youthful Culture beginning to find its Springtime. Even if there were no present alternative, some wholly new beginning may be at hand. I shall explore all three optimistic predictions in what follows.

What achievements are still possible for us? The passage quoted above continues:

For a sound and vigorous generation that is filled with unlimited hopes, I fail to see that it is any disadvantage to discover betimes that some of these hopes must come to nothing. And if the hopes thus doomed should be those most dear, well, a man who is worth anything will not be dismayed. ... And I can only hope that men of the new generation may be moved by this book to devote themselves to technics [technology] instead of lyrics, the sea instead of the paintbrush, and politics instead of epistemology. Better they could not do.<sup>11</sup>

If we cannot expect great art, music, literature or high philosophy we may still appreciate many marvels of engineering and state-craft, to parallel the efforts made in Rome:

It would have been absurd in a Roman of intellectual eminence, who might as Consul or Praetor lead armies, organize provinces, build cities and roads, or even be the Princeps in Rome, to want to hatch out some new variant of post-Platonic school philosophy at Athens or Rhodes. Consequently no one did so. It was not in harmony with the tendency of the age, and therefore it only attracted third-class men of the kind that always advances as far as the *Zeitgeist* of the day before yesterday. It is a very grave question whether this stage has or has not set in for us already.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 13-19.

<sup>10</sup> Virgil, *The Eclogues* (37 B.C.E.), "4<sup>th</sup> Eclogue," <http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/eclogue.4.iv.html>

<sup>11</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 40-41. See also Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 507: "Our direction, willed and obligatory at once, is set for us within narrow limits, and on any other terms life is not worth the living. We have not the freedom to reach to this or to that, but the freedom to do the necessary or to do nothing." Cited sympathetically by David Engels, "Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 17. Engels offers a brief outline of Spengler's theory, and of the ways it has since been (mis)represented.

<sup>12</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 40-41.

The judgement, we might now say, was mistaken: some not-entirely-third-rate Romans managed both the “political” and the “intellectual” crafts, from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius to Boethius. And even those philosophers — part of the Roman *oikoumene* even if not “Roman” in themselves — who devoted themselves to writing *commentaries* on the great ones of their past had much to contribute to succeeding ages. Those commentaries may now be treated merely “scholastically,” as the end of Classical inspiration, but they may in their beginnings be much like Rabbinic commentary on the Torah, and other *Magian* projects<sup>13</sup> — meditations on the divine Word:<sup>14</sup> a point to which I shall return. We may also, perhaps, allow ourselves a little hope that not all twentieth-century philosophers, artists, writers, composers were “third-class,” even if their goal, openly or unconsciously, was perhaps to draw a line on all imaginative endeavour in the “Faustian” or “Western” tradition. Great composers, artists, writers and philosophers are always rare: it need not surprise us, if it is true, that there were none, or none that appealed to Spengler, in his day! But the chief point for Spengler was that admirable work was possible even for a “civilized” humanity, as long as we did not expect to repeat or recreate or rival the achievements of an earlier age.

The sculpture of Phidias is Spengler’s constant instance of the fullness of Classical culture — the point where it enters the rigidity of Civilization — as Bach and Handel are his instances of the same stage in Western Culture: “Hence Polycletus and Phidias align themselves with Bach and Handel.... And with this full plastic and full music the two Cultures reach their respective ends.”<sup>15</sup>

“We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization, instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in a Phidias or a Mozart time.”<sup>16</sup> There are other things for us to do (as Wittgenstein also suspected).

It were far better to become a colonist or an engineer, to do something, no matter what, that is true and real, than to chew over once more the old dried-up themes under cover of an alleged ‘new wave of philosophic thought’ — far better to construct an aero-engine than a new theory of apperception that is not wanted. ... I would sooner have the fine mind-begotten forms of a fast steamer, a steel structure, a precision-lathe, the subtlety and elegance of many chemical and optical processes, than all the pickings and stealings of present-day “arts and crafts,” architecture and painting included. I prefer one Roman aqueduct to all Roman temples and statues.<sup>17</sup>

Spengler’s visionary account of the likely End of (Western) Days has often appealed to other thinkers and politicians, but may still be largely unbelievable, exactly, by Western thinkers. “Westerners” are likely to believe that human persons — or at least all educated, intelligent Westerners — are wholly independent agents, that they control their own thoughts and actions. Anyone can always make her own mind up, and any thought or vision can be expressed at any time, regardless of what others may have thought or done. How then can Spengler plausibly insist that no-one now can create great works of art, or reason her way to

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<sup>13</sup> “Magian” is Spengler’s term for a culture contemporaneous with the Classical, with a distinct atmosphere: the essence of that Culture emerges only gradually in his account, and can’t be easily defined.

<sup>14</sup> See Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 247.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Callan, “W. B. Yeats’s Learned Theban: Oswald Spengler,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 4/3 (1975): 597. Citing Spengler *Decline*, vol.1, 284.

<sup>16</sup> Spengler *Decline*, vol.1, 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

any new conclusion? For that very reason — that we are independent minds — we are entitled now to criticise or condemn our ancestors for failing to see the obvious or do what is clearly right. Their only excuses must be ignorance or inattention. Aristotle could have seen — maybe he *must* have seen — that slavery was obviously unjust, that the lights in the sky were really distant suns, and that human beings were lately evolved primates. Now that we know better, and are free to speak our minds, we can always be understood as speaking truth. Of course, this very conviction that we are independent and original beings is itself a symptom of late Western Culture, a secular reinterpretation of an original “religious” view, that all human beings are responsible for their own eternal future, and must expect to stand alone, or only with God’s help, against demonic powers. People reared in a different Culture will usually find this notion, that we are each at once original and destined for success, both absurd and self-deceiving. Whatever any of us may think or do will almost always be what any person of the same place, class and period would find it natural and obvious to think or do. The few really “original” agents are likely to find no audience for their thoughts, and may not even understand their own words well (as no-one else will either). Beliefs about what it is right to do or think are as changeable as the fashion in hats and dresses. And all such changes, momentous as they seem, will probably be within an historically determined track. But there is a further point to consider: Spengler did not suppose that the future was now fixed for all humanity, only that the possibilities of the “Faustian” or “Western” Culture were exhausted. Complacent theorists might be satisfied with their conviction, that we have reached “the end of history” or that our present knowledge of physical reality is both complete and certain. The claim itself epitomizes Spengler’s “Civilized” humanity — and is regularly refuted. We cannot know what new spirit or image will awaken to entrance and animate humanity, what “rough beast,” in Yeats’s terms, is “slouching toward Bethlehem to be born” (whether for good or ill), nor even what new thought will reconstruct our own science or our society. Wittgenstein spoke in clearly Spenglerian terms at the very moment where DeAngelis supposed him to be surpassing Spengler:

When we think of the world’s future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.<sup>18</sup>

As Spengler said, “all building of majestic card-houses on the foundation of “it should be, it shall be” is mere trifling.”<sup>19</sup> The possibility of a new day’s unexpected dawning is intrinsic to Spengler’s vision of great Cultures, emerging from the sleep of “ever-childish humanity”:

A Culture is born in the moment when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of ever-childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless, a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring. It blooms on the soil of an exactly-definable landscape, to which plant-wise it remains bound. It dies when this soul has actualized the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples,

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<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, ed. G.H.von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 5e. See also DeAngelis, *Ludwig Wittgenstein - a Cultural Point of View: Philosophy in the Darkness of This Time*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 37.

languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences, and reverts into the proto-soul.<sup>20</sup>

That new birth cannot be imagined before-hand, and neither need it occur far away from existing Cultures and Civilizations. It may be happening already — some new way of conceiving ourselves, the universe and everything that will be as different from the dominant Western mode as the Magian from the Apollinian. We need not suppose, like Virgil, that humankind is a single thing, to be redeemed from the Iron Age by divine fiat. A better hope is already here, and our successors, if Spenglerian, may look back on our days and see the first beginnings of another form of humanity, momentarily (perhaps) confined by the dominance of the old.

## II. Hidden Cultures

The first step in seeing how there may be more to hope for or expect even in our present situation is to consider how Spengler dealt with another Culture, contemporaneous with the Classical or “Apollinian” whose fate I described before. Classical humanity, he proposed, held the singular human form as its chief image, and had little interest in times past or yet to come. The real self was the corporeal self. Maybe something survived its death, but that was only a shadow, a breath, a partial memory. Anything beyond an easy journey or a living memory vanished into myth or fable. Even those “fathers of history,” Herodotus and Thucydides, relegated times only a few generations earlier to the realm of myth and folklore. Only recent history was worth examining.

After the destruction of Athens by the Persians, all the older art-works were thrown on the dust heap (whence we are now extracting them), and we do not hear that anyone in Hellas ever troubled himself about the ruins of Mycenae or Phaistos for the purpose of ascertaining historical facts. Men read Homer but never thought of excavating the hill of Troy as Schliemann did; for what they wanted was myth, not history.<sup>21</sup>

Success lay in the exercise and enjoyment of physical ability, within the social context of a self-governing city (and its surrounding land). Classical humanity was also conscious of the continuing, intermittent, presence of immortal gods — which is to say, in effect, of recurrent, universal, passions that must be acknowledged, feared, conciliated, worshipped, all under the pre-eminent sway of Zeus. “A shadow’s dream (*skias onar*) is man, but when (a) god sheds a brightness, shining light is on earth and life is as sweet as honey.”<sup>22</sup> But even then, especially then, we are not to forget that we are only mortal. And even the great gods, with something like a universal sway, are to be worshipped in *local* forms. This is a broadly accurate sketch of the Classical Idea — but the Mediterranean basin was never exclusively occupied by merely Classical humans. Egyptian Culture and Civilization was a fascinating presence in the south, precisely because it was, by Classical standards, weird. Babylonian water-works, especially, were an inspiration to early Classical sages such as Thales. Phoenician merchants, and their colony city Carthage, were powerful in trade, and in later years, in war. Hebrews were acknowledged to be a “nation of philosophers” in their supposed commitment to a single,

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<sup>20</sup> Spengler *Decline* vol.1, 106. On other occasions, I should add, Spengler insists that *Magian* Culture at least is “non-territorial and geographically unlimited” (*Decline*, vol.2, 320), and so at odds, especially, with the territorial ambitions of Faustian Culture.

<sup>21</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Pindar, *Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes*, ed. and trans. William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1997), *Pythian Odes*, 8.95ff.

universal deity who required both moral and ceremonial purity. It is likely that Asoka's Buddhist missionaries infected at least some Mediterranean schools,<sup>23</sup> persuading Epicureans indeed that there was no single abiding self, but only (and sufficiently) a fluid swarm of atoms.<sup>24</sup> And some of the greatest of supposedly Classical philosophers were persuaded that they were not, after all, singular human bodies, but transmigrating souls of the same kind as the immortal gods. "I am a child of earth and starry heaven, but my race [*genos*] is of heaven alone," according to the Orphic Tablets.<sup>25</sup> All these differing humanities found themselves at odds with the dominant Classical motif, and some, at least, had their real being within a different Cultural entity whose life-history was distorted, or so Spengler thought, by the pressures of the dominant Classical culture. He was surely right to suggest that these foreign ideas were transformed in the minds of their audience, as Classical ideas are transformed by Western scholars,<sup>26</sup> but some peoples at least could hear them in their original meaning, as natives. Cultures and Civilizations are bounded neither by ethnic nor geographical limits, even if, as Spengler supposed, they are bound to a particular *landscape*: there may be many such landscapes within the same geographical area.<sup>27</sup> They are spirits, myths, images and ways of thinking and being that take shape within, and also mould, the human animals they animate. Spengler's expressed conviction that humans of one Culture have no real understanding of those of another Culture may be at odds with his own attempts, exactly, to intuit those other Cultures, and describe them sympathetically. The practical reality may be that we can sympathize but still find the others weird, and must expect to miss a lot of what they mean to their true "believers" (though "belief" is not quite the proper term). The reality is also that those "other Cultures" are not now far away, if they ever really were. We can agree that, for example, Mayan and Aztec Culture and Civilization developed in an entirely different land, with no significant contact with the Cultures of Africa and Eurasia until its violent end. But even Chinese Culture and Civilization was not wholly isolated: certainly not from India, and

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<sup>23</sup> Asoka of the Maurya dynasty reigned in India from 268 to 232 BC. After conquering much of the subcontinent, he repented his violence and was converted to Buddhism (or, for the more cynical commentator, used Buddhist doctrine and associated stories to help confirm his rule). See *Asoka and the Missions* drawing from the *Edicts of Asoka*, inscribed on pillars throughout that King's domain: "The Seer Mahārakkhita went to the locality of the [Greeks] and preached the Kālākārāma Discourse in the midst of the people. One hundred and seventy thousand breathing beings attained Path and Fruit, and ten thousand went forth." Ānandajoti Bhikkhu (trans.), *Asoka and the Missions (from Extended Mahāvamsa V, XII-XV, XV/III-XX)*, ed. G.P.Malalasekera (Oxford: Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1988 [1937]), 46.

<sup>24</sup> Other scholars have found similarities, or even historical connections, between Buddhist schools and Pyrrhonism. See Thomas McEvilley, "Pyrrhonism and Madhyamika," *Philosophy East and West* 32 (1982): 3-35.

<sup>25</sup> Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991 [1922]), 573, citing the *Petelia Tablet*. See further Edmonds "Children of Earth", On the context and likely meaning of the claim as one that "rejects the hierarchy of status embedded in the local context, where different families boast of their heroic lineage, in favor of another genealogy, one in which all such claims are dwarfed by the central importance of humanity's relation to the divine family" (113), see further R.G. Edmonds, "The Children of Earth and Starry Heaven: The Meaning and Function of the Formula in the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets," in *Orfeo y el orfismo: nuevas perspectivas*, ed. Alberto Bernabé, Francesc Casadesús y Marco Antonio Santamaría (Alicante : Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2010), 98-121.

<sup>26</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 55-60.

<sup>27</sup> Spengler may not agree: he suggests that any skeletal or facial similarities among the people of a particular region is a function of the landscape rather than of "race" or common descent. Immigrants to North America all end up, he says, looking like Americans (*Decline*, vol.2, 129). But the "landscape" may still not be simply the local region: it is rather the region as it is appreciated and developed by the humans of some particular Culture.



doubtfully even from Europe. Nowadays, and also in Spengler's day, the many different humanities are crowded together and must deal despite thinking very differently, and having distinct histories. Spengler's insight — for which, despite his manifold inaccuracies and exaggerations, he deserves continued thanks — was to see that there was no single, linear history of humanity, as though we had all “progressed,” or were all to “progress,” in tandem, from primitive, to ancient and medieval, and at last to properly “modern” times (“an incredibly jejune and meaningless scheme,” as Spengler said<sup>28</sup>), so that all the world was bound to conclude in an individualistic, mercenary, “naturalistic” and domineering mind-set which would be “obvious” to all. “The historian of the West has a quite other world-history before his eyes than that of the great Arabian and Chinese historians.”<sup>29</sup> For that very reason — that there is no one intelligible history of all humankind — the *collisions* and interpenetrations of distinct Cultures cannot themselves be rationalized or predicted. Even if the currently dominant world-order is founded on the “Faustian” experiment, it does not follow that all the world, or even all the “Western” world, is Faustian, any more than all the Mediterranean basin was unambiguously “Classical.”

The rival Culture that Spengler traced in the ancient “Classical” world he identified either as “Magian” or, in its fullest, constrained decline, Arabian. It never, so he suggested, entirely followed the familiar path that he identified in multiple other Cultures, because its member-cells were compelled to live among, and bend their assumptions to the more powerful and somewhat older Culture. The later Roman or Byzantine Empire, so he supposed, was Magian rather than Classical, and was predictably subsumed within the Islamic world. Byzantine, “Orthodox,” Christians might think themselves at odds with Muslim artists and theologians, but they were addressing the same problems, and experienced themselves and their neighbours as members of a divinely ordained and world-wide company rather than as citizens of any particular *polis*, or even subjects of a homogeneous empire. They trusted and expected their adoption, their elevation, to the world of the divine, and understood how to reason about matters they could not understand: algebraic calculation can continue without attributing absolute values to any of its terms, and miraculous transformations are to be expected. Their theological and philosophical debate drew on Neo-Platonic and Hermetic material which had been strangely out of place in the older Classical culture, revealing again how “Magian” some supposedly Classical thinkers and artists had been! “Early Christian art, together with every really living element in “late-Roman,” is in fact the springtime of the Arabian style.”<sup>30</sup>

Is the moral of this rapid sketch that there is, after all, no real advantage in distinguishing Cultures and Civilizations? Maybe there is instead a single, very complicated, history of humanity, and almost everyone can find herself torn or hesitating between many different ideas, ideals and ways of thinking? Conversely, there are many cases where the ideas and ideals of a singular population may seem very alien even to their closest cousins, speaking an identical language and using the same technology. Only the very naïve, we may suspect, really expect all “modern” humankind to end up as “Americans,” when even most Europeans (and also Canadians and Latin Americans) find the USA almost as odd as the classical Greeks found Egypt! Locating cultural fault-lines is not as easy as distinguishing Apollinian, Faustian, Magian, Confucian models. That there are such cultural divisions, though, is evident, and there is at least some profit in idealizing the principal observable breaks, and trying to guess how purer forms might develop, and whether there is a common theme or myth to be seen in art, literature, music, politics and philosophy for a particular Culture. Spengler may still be

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<sup>28</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 207.

right to suspect that all such major Cultures seem to follow a comparable track, loosely described as the transition from “Spring” all the way to “Winter,” as the chief idea or image or spirit of a Culture exhausts its possibilities and subsides first into an imperial order and then at last into the usual sleep of pre-Cultural humanity: “pre-Cultural” not because such peoples have no myths or animating spirits (since they plainly do), but only as lacking any historical sense of their own development and possible trajectory. We may suspect, with better information, that much of what Spengler called “pre-cultural” in his contemporary world is better considered, as sometimes he did, as “post-cultural,” the remnants of a “primitive Culture” formed in the meeting of tribes and wandering clans.<sup>31</sup> He was wrong to suppose that “primitive Culture” was merely chaotic, “neither an organism nor a sum of organisms.”<sup>32</sup> The First Australians, for example, may perhaps have been set in ancestral ways when European colonists arrived to disturb and damage their lives and land, but there is good reason to believe that there was once a living and pro-active Culture there, fulfilling the axioms of the Dreamtime,<sup>33</sup> and the different aspects of their lives show as much congruity as those of “higher” Cultures.<sup>34</sup> Similar stories can be plausibly told about other lands and supposedly “primitive” peoples.<sup>35</sup> That Spengler’s high Cultures only began to be a mere five thousand years ago, when humankind had been a widespread species for over ten times that period, is hardly likely, even if we ourselves have no written, readable record of the earlier times, or none that we are willing to acknowledge. There were cities and written records long before Babylon, and there can be Cultures with no distinctive cities, whose corporate memory is only oral.<sup>36</sup>

Much of what Spengler suggests can be handled simply as his identifying common characters in a human history over many generations, without any strong ontological commitment. It may be enough to say that certain *subjective* unities have their own history.

That which distinguishes the people from the population, raises it up out of the population, and will one day let it find its level again in the population is always the inwardly lived experience of the “we.” The deeper this feeling is, the stronger is the *vis viva* of the people. ... They can change speech, name, race and land, but so long as their soul lasts, they can gather

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<sup>31</sup> See Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 33-35.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> See Ronald M. Berndt & Catherine H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians: aboriginal traditional life, past and present* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988), 227-292 ; Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: how Aborigines made Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 125-126, 135-136 .

<sup>34</sup> See Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 38: “The Australian natives, who rank intellectually as thorough primitives, possess a mathematical instinct (or, what comes to the same thing, a power of thinking in numbers which is not yet communicable by signs or words) that as regards the interpretation of pure space is far superior to that of the Greeks. Their discovery of the boomerang can only be attributed to their having a sure feeling for numbers of a class that we should refer to the higher geometry. Accordingly — we shall justify the adverb later — they possess an extraordinarily complicated ceremonial and, for expressing degrees of affinity, such fine shades of language as not even the higher Cultures themselves can show.”

<sup>35</sup> See Charles C. Mann, *1491: the Americas before Columbus* (London: Granta, 2005) ; Graham Connah, *African Civilizations: an archaeological perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Arnold Toynbee expanded the Spenglerian list of Cultures (with a rather different definition, simply as “intelligible fields of historical study” of a certain size and complexity), but he too neglected to consider the evidence for historical continuities and self-conscious development amongst what he thought were “primitive societies”, short-lived, merely local, and involving relatively few human individuals. See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934-61), vol.1, 147-9.

to themselves and transform human material of any and every provenance. The Roman name in Hannibal's day meant a people, in Trajan's time nothing more than a population.<sup>37</sup>

But it is as well to acknowledge that he did himself make exactly such a commitment, that the unifying spirit was not simply how a people felt about itself, but the reason that they did.

Intellectual associations are mere sums in the mathematical sense, varying by addition and subtraction, unless and until (as sometimes happens) a mere coincidence of opinion strikes so impressively as to reach the blood and so, suddenly, to create out of the sum a Being. In any political turning-point words may become fates and opinions passions. A chance crowd is herded together in the street and has *one* consciousness, *one* sensation, *one* language — until the short-lived soul flickers out and everyone goes his way again. ... The mightiest beings of this kind that we know are the higher Cultures, which are born in great spiritual upheavals, and in a thousand years of existence weld all aggregates of lower degree — nations, classes, towns, generations — into one unit.<sup>38</sup>

Locating the Magian spirit (whether as a way of speaking or as a real Being) amongst the Classical artists, statesmen and philosophers, as well as among the unrecorded masses of a human population, may require more insight and empathy than is common, but the enterprise is far advanced from Spengler's day. Rather than dismissing what we no longer feel to be right as obvious superstition and factual error, more recent studies of Hermetic and Neo-Platonic art and thought have attempted, exactly, to comprehend the underlying reasons both for the *philosophers'* ideas and for the common practices (including magical invocations, preservation of sacred relics, refusal of civic and familial duties, a new sort of art replacing statues with two-dimensional icons or geometries, exaltation of "saints" above the wealthy and well-connected) that displaced the older Classical mind-set.

A nation of the Magian type is the community of co-believers, the group of all those who know the right way to salvation and are inwardly linked to one another by the *ijma* [that is, the consensus of informed believers] of this belief. Men belonged to a Classical nation by virtue of the possession of citizenship, but to a Magian nation by virtue of a sacramental act.<sup>39</sup>

They were reaching out to a reality above and beyond the "political" and "imperial," above the manifold changes and chances of this mortal life — and following, in spirit, the strange injunction to "immortalize" themselves (as Aristotle advised: *Nicomachean Ethics* 10. 1177b31-4<sup>40</sup>), while giving a very different gloss to the notion of an immortal "*nous*" in each of us (different, that is, from the common interpretation offered by modern scholars convinced that Aristotle, being a reasonable man, must obviously have thought the same as they): *nous* is not merely or simply the exercise of theoretical reason in the contemplation of necessary truths, of morals or mathematics, but rather the realization of our original or destined being as gods — an idea certainly to be found among older poets and philosophers who passed as "Classical" thinkers, but not wholly grasped until a different sensibility took shape. We may,

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<sup>37</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 165.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>39</sup> "Faustian" nations, he went on to say are "dynastic units", in a uniquely *historical* Culture (Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 179-184).

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, ed. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 195.

not wholly wrongly, suspect that these new philosophers, Middle and Late Platonists, created their own past, reading the works of Plato to reinforce their new ideals. We should similarly remember that modern “Western” scholars may be doing exactly the same thing — routinely reducing Plato’s riddles, unwieldy arguments and unnerving myths to simple dialectical exercises about the uses of the verb “to be” (that is, *einai*). The arguments of Plato’s *Parmenides* are taken nowadays to be *dialectical* or *logical* exercises: to Neo-Platonists in the summer of Magian thought they were rather *spiritual* exercises. We conceive even our familiar selves quite differently.

Whereas the Faustian man is an “I” that in the last resort draws its own conclusions about the Infinite; whereas the Apollinian man, as one *soma* among many, represents only himself, the Magian man, with his spiritual kind of being, is only *a part of a pneumatic “We”* that, descending from above, is one and the same in all believers. As body and soul he belongs to himself alone, but something else, something alien and higher, dwells in him.<sup>41</sup>

Pagan and Christian Magians were agreed. According to Gregory Nazianzen we are “a part of God (*moiran theon*), and slipped down from above (*anothen rheusanta*),”<sup>42</sup> using almost exactly the same phrase as Plotinus (*moiras ekeithen ousas: Ennead V.1 [10].1*<sup>43</sup>). Faustian Christians have usually found this idea, of our *original* divinity, more problematic than that we have only the chance of being elevated to a higher state.

That the “natural” development of Magian Culture was, so Spengler suggests, distorted by growing up in the milieu of the Classical (an “historical pseudomorphosis”<sup>44</sup>) allows him to accept that the Magian time-line does not exactly follow the order which he purports to find in other developing and decaying Cultures. Although his initial claim is that our future can be broadly predicted, by analogy with the fate of other Cultures,<sup>45</sup> the prediction need never be exact. It may still be true that there are distinctive forms of human life and conscience, and that those forms do tend to flourish for a while and then decay, even if all such Cultures follow their own tracks as variously as any actual living creature: infants, adolescents, adults and the elderly are recognizable stages in a human life, but not all humans nor animals live through them all, nor in identical ways.

Spengler also identified another contemporary Culture that was, he thought, being distorted by the magnetic influence of the Western or Faustian form, namely one taking shape in the Orthodox lands of Russia and its peers.<sup>46</sup> It is to “*Dostoyevski’s* Christianity that the next thousand years will belong.”<sup>47</sup> The Soviet experiment, just beginning as he wrote, was both a defiant response to Westernization and an episode in that same Western history: the *ideal* that the Soviets served, of solidarity, of a people working together in the service of “Holy Russia,” perhaps had more continuing energy. The hope expressed in Russian Orthodox philosophy was for the rediscovery of the God-Man, Jesus, and of our communal redemption. Russia and its peers, at least, are perhaps less like Western, “Faustian,” nations than is our usual, Western, assumption. And there may still be time for that Culture to enjoy its late Summer and Autumn phases, whatever they may be, before its Winter sets in. Spengler hoped that in the coming millennium there would be a parallel development to the intellectual and spiritual

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<sup>41</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 235.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory Nazianzen *De Fuga* 2.17, cited by Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 533.

<sup>44</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 189-192.

<sup>45</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 192-196; 295.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

efflorescence of the early Christian church up to 500 AD, and that of the early medieval Western church, from 1000 till 1500.<sup>48</sup> The sadder alternative is that the peoples have lost all touch with their one-time animating spirit, and are to be ruled by nihilistic, criminal oligarchs as long as their Civilization lasts. Both possible predictions have some support in Spenglerian analysis: what actually will happen is undetermined: that is, it is up to people.

### III. New Beginnings

“Each Culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return.”<sup>49</sup> Speculations about the future beyond the expectable seasons of existing Cultures must, as Spengler declared, be futile.

As in the history of the Raptores or the Coniferae we cannot prophesy whether and when a new species will arise, so in that of Cultural history we cannot say whether and when a new Culture shall be.<sup>50</sup>

Only long afterwards could a future Spenglerian trace the shy beginnings of whatever Culture has come to life in a newly imagined landscape. But there is still room for fantasy, if only to help identify, by contrasts, the present minds of humanity. One familiar guess was coined by James Blish: the age of the “spindizzy,” a device founded on exact understanding of gravity that will enable whole human cities to fly from the Earth,<sup>51</sup> at once accomplishing part of the Faustian dream, and setting history on a new interstellar track. Unfortunately, only the first part of his tetralogy has any strong Spenglerian content. A.E. Van Vogt’s *Space Beagle* also rests on discovering Spenglerian seasons in a succession of alien life forms, and in the decaying social structure of the star-ship *Beagle* itself.<sup>52</sup> Neither fantasy addresses the problem of imagining what a really different human Culture might be like in principle — different from any that we or Spengler might already have intuited in known terrestrial life. Other speculative futurists have imagined how our successors might describe this present day: “the Age of the Feuilleton,”<sup>53</sup> or the “Age of Mouldwarp,”<sup>54</sup> or “the Late Christian Epoch.”<sup>55</sup> All such stories are at once implausible and perhaps productive. It is very likely that the following suggestion will itself turn out to be no more than a late Faustian fantasy, perhaps as Roman Stoicism was a doomed attempt, partly Classical and partly Magian in origin, to discover some new way of living as civic and imperial power decayed.

The Faustian dream, given expression in much contemporary SF including the works of Blish and Van Vogt, is of unlimited growth in power and knowledge, focused now in the ideal of the competent engineer: competent both in technical solutions and in political opposition to imagined oppressive and stagnant powers. Man — and it is of course masculine Man that is intended — will one day rule the worlds by “reason” (that is to say, technique), and the pretence of liberty. Some writers, like Olaf Stapledon, may suspect instead that such human triumphs will falter in the end, confronted by the blank unreason of the First Cause and Final Fate. The most fervently anti-humanist Faustian may realize that our deal, so to speak, is with deceptive devils.

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<sup>48</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 261.

<sup>49</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.2, 36.

<sup>51</sup> James Blish, *Cities in Flight* (New York: Overlook Press, 1970).

<sup>52</sup> A.E. Van Vogt, *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (New York: Orb books, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Hermann Hesse, *The Glass-Bead Game*, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 [1943]).

<sup>54</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The Plato Papers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> Robert Graves, *Seven Days in New Crete* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983 [1949]).

Now all my tales [so Lovecraft said] are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form — and the local human passions and conditions and standards — are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. These must be handled with unsparing realism, (not catch-penny romanticism) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown — the shadow-haunted Outside — we must remember to leave our humanity — and terrestrialism — at the threshold.<sup>56</sup>

Both the triumphalist and the Lovecraftian are Faustian in spirit, for both are enthralled by the infinite outside, both hope to transcend our present humanity. Classical thinkers may acknowledge how small our empires are in comparison with the cosmos, how short a time we have between catastrophes, but that only cements their attachment, exactly, to their little local concerns. Some supposed that human beings, like the earth itself, have been around “forever,” though little beyond proverbial wisdom has survived from earlier falls: this too only fixed their attention here.

Even if future generations should wish to hand down to those yet unborn the eulogies of every one of us which they received from their fathers, nevertheless the floods and conflagrations which necessarily happen on the earth at stated intervals would prevent us from gaining a glory which could even be long-enduring, much less eternal. But of what importance is it to you to be talked of by those who are born after you, when you were never mentioned by those who lived before you?<sup>57</sup>

Hindu thinkers drew stronger morals from the same idea — that there have been, and yet will be, unimaginably vast ages, that we live in the darkest sort of age, that all our empires are no greater than ants’ nests in a fractal cosmos. Their moral was to endure — or to escape from the world giant’s dream.<sup>58</sup>

So, what might be that “rough beast” which brings a different way of seeing? By Yeats’ account, the “New Thing” will be born from what the earlier age, our present own, rejected: “because we had worshipped a single god it would worship many or receive from Joachim de Flora’s Holy Spirit a multitudinous influx”<sup>59</sup> — which is why his “rough beast” cannot be definitely identified as either good or bad, creative or destructive. Its beginnings, if we are to accept a Spenglerian analysis, will be found in (effectively) anonymously composed popular literature paralleling the Homeric epics or the *Nibelungenlied*, which will express, will already

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<sup>56</sup> Howard Phillips Lovecraft, “Letter to Farnsworth Wright, 5 July 1927”: [www.hplovecraft.com/writings/quotes.aspx](http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/quotes.aspx) (accessed 4th July 2020). I have discussed Lovecraft’s thought in Stephen R.L. Clark, “Lovecraft and the Search for Meaning,” in *Proceedings of the Colin Wilson Conference*, ed. Colin Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), 10-45.

<sup>57</sup> Cicero, *On the Republic. On the Laws*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1928), 277 [Bk.6.21].

<sup>58</sup> See Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols*, 38-48.

<sup>59</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 393. On Joachim (1145-1202), see Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 19-20, 261.

have expressed, something of the tragic dream of life in a new key or mode. In the place of a central human figure facing into the infinite future, or hiding her eyes before it, we may expect a multiplicity of different figures, a forest or jungle or ocean-reef with many lives beside and around each other. In place of a drive to ascend into the heavens (in fear or triumph), we may expect rather a wish to nest, to nestle, among many other creatures of a constantly different sort. Multiple plant and animal forms will shift and change their natures, in the presence of the longest enduring living things — the bacterial and viral cloud that has made and forever repairs the air, the land and ocean. Its birth-pangs will affect, and be affected by, the cataclysms of climate change and the sixth extinction, as human imagination grapples with the end of Faustian, and all other presently existing Cultures and Civilizations. It may, in large part, be difficult for our successors to distinguish it from pre-cultural forms of the sort Spengler saw in supposedly “primitive” peoples, which I have suggested are more *cultured* than he thought. At the same time, it may depend on the last available technologies that Faustian humanity will have created, the genetic manipulation of plant and animal stocks that Freeman Dyson imagined.

Now, after some three billion years, the Darwinian era is over. The epoch of species competition came to an end about 10 thousand years ago when a single species, *Homo sapiens*, began to dominate and reorganize the biosphere. Since that time, cultural evolution has replaced biological evolution as the driving force of change. Cultural evolution is not Darwinian. Cultures spread by horizontal transfer of ideas more than by genetic inheritance. Cultural evolution is running a thousand times faster than Darwinian evolution, taking us into a new era of cultural interdependence that we call globalization. And now, in the last 30 years, *Homo sapiens* has revived the ancient pre-Darwinian practice of horizontal gene transfer, moving genes easily from microbes to plants and animals, blurring the boundaries between species. We are moving rapidly into the post-Darwinian era, when species will no longer exist, and the evolution of life will again be communal.<sup>60</sup>

Faustian humanity has been even more anthropocentric and triumphalist than other “high Cultures,” but alongside that insistent exaltation of humankind above all other living things there has also been a tradition of imagining talking beasts, whether these are merely moral fables about tricky foxes and domestic but courageous moles, or imaginative descriptions of whole “animal” societies. These stories have usually been classed as merely “children’s tales,” but for that very reason they lie at the base of much adult thought, when that is not being regulated by the official rule that “animals” are barely sentient.<sup>61</sup> In the coming ages, we may reasonably guess, there will be many versions even of humanity, as well as many “uplifted” versions of familiar beasts.<sup>62</sup> If the Faustian vision is expansive, the new Culture will instead be centripetal, gazing always towards the cultivated land inhabited by uplifted, altered and restored animal and human kinds. Their concept of history and of time’s passage is likely also

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<sup>60</sup> Freeman Dyson, “The Darwinian Interlude,” *Technology Review* (March 2005), [www.technologyreview.com/2006/02/16/229657/the-darwinian-interlude/](http://www.technologyreview.com/2006/02/16/229657/the-darwinian-interlude/) (Accessed 31 June 2020). On this and other technological possibilities, see Christopher J. Preston, *The Synthetic Age: outdesigning evolution, resurrecting species, and reengineering our world* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2019).

<sup>61</sup> See Bruce Shaw, *The Animal Fable in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> On which possibility see David Brin, *Uplift: Sundiver* [1996], *Startide Rising* [1996], *Uplift War* [1996] (London: Orbit, 2012).

to be other than our terrestrial version, of whatever terrestrial Culture: they will live at once, like “primitives,” in an eternal present, and in the face of *cosmic* time and the impossibly distant stars. They will be living both across the terrestrial landscape and amongst the myriad small asteroids and moons in a partly-explored solar array — the final gift of Faustian humanity. Elves, hobbits, trolls and talking beasts will be the new environment, for good or ill.<sup>63</sup> The most famous SF versions of this future are to be found in the work of Clifford Simak,<sup>64</sup> and especially that of Cordwainer Smith,<sup>65</sup> in whose world-future recreated “humans” imagine themselves superior to the uplifted beasts, and are constantly proved wrong. There is only a hopeful hint in those works that there will one day be a fully “humane” Culture, free from cruelty and humanistic follies. Even before that hoped-for but uncertain end the Culture’s chief artistic contribution will lie, as Dyson suggested, in the creation of manifold life-forms, rivalling the extravagance of “nature.” What new versions of mathematics and philosophy those animated by this Culture will devise is of course unclear — except to suspect that both these disciplines will be more open, more contextual, than the present versions, but also less fixated on fictional infinities. Its primary architectural symbol, matching the Faustian Church spire and the Magian dome displayed in Ravenna and Byzantium,<sup>66</sup> will be another sort of dome: both terrestrial nests and hollowed asteroids floating in immensity, whose light and warmth are drawn from a fusion furnace in their centres, and so mirror the whole solar array, the *solar* dome, from the Oort Cloud down to the Sun itself. Or at least this will be true for the *better* domes: there is also the sad possibility that some will have decayed into slave colonies or slums of the kind imagined by Sterling<sup>67</sup> or McLoughlin.<sup>68</sup> The possible new life I am describing, in short, will not be clearly utopian, any more than the visions of other Cultures have ever been humanely and honestly embodied. The future remains open, even if Spengler is correct in reckoning that there are great Spirits that animate our lives, for good or ill.

The multiple possibilities of our future, and the presently unimagined Cultures that will come to birth, are not determined by any past endeavours (though they will, like other past Cultures, borrow themes and achievements in a different key). The technologically adept possibility I have sketched may be relegated to might-have-been if our present collapsing Civilization and its environment reach cataclysm too soon. In that possible future humanity, if we survive at all, will have to recreate the “primitive,” non-civic and maybe pre-literate, Cultures of our remoter ancestors and of contemporary “savages” saved from disastrous contact with well-meaning missionaries and explorers. Maybe there are some seeds even of that option in our current imaginings: witness the appeal of various forms of “naturism” or “paganism,” drawing on reconstructed or reimagined Celtic or Native American or other Aboriginal traditions.<sup>69</sup> Not all Western would-be-pagans are likely to be as well-schooled in survival as “savages,” but some may learn to be. And it seems likely that the same blurring of boundaries that Dyson prophesied will still hold true:

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<sup>63</sup> See Stephen R.L. Clark, “Elves, Hobbits, Trolls and Talking Beasts,” in *Creaturely Theology*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond & David Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), 151-67.

<sup>64</sup> Clifford C. Simak, *City* (New York: Ace Books, 1952).

<sup>65</sup> Cordwainer Smith, *The Rediscovery of Man*, ed. J.J. Pierce (London: Gollancz, 2003 [1975]). See also Carol McGuirk, “The Animal Downdeep: Cordwainer Smith’s Late Tales of the Underpeople,” *Science Fiction Studies* 37/3 (2010): 466-77.

<sup>66</sup> Spengler, *Decline*, vol.1, 211. See also Callan “Learned Theban,” 600.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix: Plus* (New York: Ace Books, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> John C. McLoughlin, *The Helix and the Sword* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>69</sup> See Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2013); Liz Williams, *Miracles of Our Own Making: a history of paganism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020).



Modern Western culture has long drawn a sharp distinction between human and animal, and female and male but, in pictures at least, the Palaeolithic did not. Furthermore, modern Westerners like to classify things by type, in a way that more traditional peoples do not: Jean Clottes has pointed out that those who have hunted the bison in recent centuries have not viewed it as a single category of animal but as one with many attributes. This way of looking at the world made it easier for Palaeolithic people to blur the boundaries between species as well as making the nature of a species itself multi-faceted: fantastic beasts, which mix the attributes of actual animals, are well represented in their imagery.<sup>70</sup>

They too may have a “dome” as their chief symbol, but in their case it will be the abiding dome of heaven, and their devotion will be to the simple hearths of their villages or huts. And they too will live amongst a wide variety of living creature, acknowledged as other tribes than merely human. Perhaps the “primitive,” merely terrestrial future will not be very different from the “advanced” solar society. Both will be very various, and both will find their strength from the common life centred on their different hearths. Both, we could say, will be versions of a possible “Hestian” Culture, named for the Classical goddess of the household’s hearth as well as the permanent flame in the common city temple, or a “Solar,” named for the sun (no longer perceived as “up aloft”, but as the root and centre of our system). The Solar version will fantasise (at least) about building a Dyson Sphere or some equivalent around the sun to capture all its output, and so forgetting the wider world outside.<sup>71</sup> The Hestian will not be troubled. Neither version will be utopian, but we may hope that they will be, at least, more commonsensical and even more compassionate in principle than the long Faustian endeavour, its hopeless drive to encompass the infinities.

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<sup>70</sup> Hutton *Pagan Britain*, 47, after Jean Clottes, “Recent Studies on Palaeolithic Art,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 6 (1996): 179– 89. See also Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>71</sup> See Freeman J. Dyson, “Search for Artificial Stellar Sources of Infra-Red Radiation,” *Science* 131/3414 (1960): 1667–1668. Dyson himself disclaimed responsibility for the original idea (*Disturbing the Universe*, 211), attributing it instead to Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker* (London: Gollancz, 1999 [1937]), 179.

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