

## OSWALD SPENGLER AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

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**Abstract.** *The creativity of Spengler and the ambiguity of his theory have caused and continue to cause profound interest, as well as fierce debates. Spengler introduced his cultural historical doctrine in the book “The Decline of the West”, in which he sought to reflect all the diversity of historical metamorphoses of humanity. His advanced concept of high cultures allowed him to approach the analysis of contemporary political processes from a historical perspective. “The Decline of the West” has already become an integral part of the European spiritual culture. This paper attempts to analyze Spengler’s philosophy of history. During the research, the authors have used the comparative-historical method, the methodology of philosophical hermeneutics, as well as the integrative anthropological approach.*

**Keywords:** *Oswald Spengler, “The Decline of the West”, culture, civilization, cultural types, high cultures.*

**Introduction.** The winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Mario Vargas Llosa notes that we live in an era devoid of culture or beliefs, and his statement makes sense [1]. His book “Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society” [5] declares that culture, at least that one that we imagined and used to understand, is now officially dead. Of course, it can survive in small social enclaves without affecting the mainstream, but everywhere it is replaced by a simple entertainment. Oswald Spengler, who almost a century ago informed humanity about the decline of the Western world, would agree with these ideas. Except for the 30-year break between 1945 and 1975, this decline has become so evident that even Huntington had to admit it. One of the brightest symptoms of the West’s loss of its former advantage was the disappointment of the westerners with political elites. For example, in 2013 the French magazine “Marianne” published a survey showing that only 25% of French people still trust their national politicians. This low score is in line with the survey conducted in 2012 by IFOP (Institut français d’opinion publique). It shows that only 25% of respondents still believe in the capitalist system [7].

The current migration crisis has aggravated this situation, and there is an impression that the Western world is on the verge of collapse [2; 3; 6; 12; 13].

Almost one hundred years after the publication of Spengler's book "The Decline of the West", there are many discussions about this decline. That inspires us to read the book of the famous German thinker once again.

**Analysis of the studies and publications.** The creativity of Spengler and the ambiguity of his theory have caused and continue to cause profound interest, as well as fierce debates. A. Chumakov, K. Gajiyev, S. Kiselev, I. Vasilenko paid attention to Spengler as one of the founders of the cultural civilizational approach. Spengler's philosophy of history, his concept of high cultures was studied by S. Averintsev, E. Markaryan, Y. Davydov, and Y. Melvil. Spengler's political philosophy was analyzed by A. Patrushev, L. Lyuks, A. Rutkevich, A. Koktanek, E. Shtuts, J. Merlio, and others. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a new understanding of Spengler's concept and needs further researches.

**The purpose of the study.** This paper attempts to analyze Spengler's philosophy of history. During the research, the authors have used the comparative-historical method, the methodology of philosophical hermeneutics, as well as the integrative anthropological approach.

**Results.** A German representative of philosophy of life, a prominent philosopher of history Oswald Spengler introduced his cultural historical doctrine in the book "The Decline of the West", in which he sought to reflect all the diversity of historical metamorphoses of humanity. For Spengler, it was essential to proceed from the situation of non-reflective experience and to formulate a set of representations that reflect the life cycle of the common cultural and historical genesis. In his book, Spengler attempted to determine the historical future of humanity and to trace the fate of the Western culture, which, according to researcher's conception, was in the period of its completion. He tried to find out the logic of history, the features of individual life that underlie any historical process. According to Spengler, the decadence of the high European culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries provoked the First World War and the socialist revolution in Russia. The thinker interpreted these events as signs of the fall of the Western world, and European socialism was declared as the phase of a decline in culture, similar to Indian Buddhism and Roman Stoicism.

To understand the process of the decline of the Western culture, Spengler first investigates what culture actually is; how it relates to history, life, soul, nature, and spirit; in which forms it manifests itself and whether these forms are symbols and how they can be interpreted. For German thinker, cultures represent nature; the plants, animals, and humans are subordinated to its organic logic. That's why "birth – adolescence – youth – maturity – decline – decay" of cultures is not the expression of subjective assessments, but the objective definition of the organic state. Spengler represents the course of world history as the alternation of cultures – independent of each other historical organisms. Each culture represents a spiritual individuality, which, according to Spengler, is characterized by a specific spatial symbolism. Each culture produces its unique way of representing space, which is its prime symbol. This prime symbol is the basis of external forms and defines the whole spiritual cultural structure.

Based on different prime symbols, cultures become impenetrable to each other (although the cultures have the same morphological structure). The development of each culture is guided by its own destiny, which cannot be proved and explained rationally. For a correct understanding of the historical process, it

should be felt, experienced, and perceived intuitively. The specific content of a culture is determined by a particular soul, which defines the unity and unique originality of each culture.

There is no single world culture for Spengler, but there are different, independent from each other, cultural types:

- Egyptian;
- Indian;
- Babylonian;
- Chinese (Sinic);
- Classical (Greek/Roman);
- Mezoamerican (Mayan/Aztec);
- Magian (Byzantine-Arabic);
- Faustian/Western (European/American).

As a future culture, Spengler highlights Russian Siberian culture.

Each of these types has its own pace of development, its unique fate and period of existence within 1000-1500 years. All these types are a special form of life, all of them have certain phases: they are born, bloom, fade and disappear – that means they undergo the stages of childhood, youth, manhood, and death. Any culture experiences the age periods of an individual: “Each has its childhood, youth, manhood, and old age” [11, p.173].

Spengler, as well as Danilevsky, challenged the established European-centered conception of world history, whose apologists believed that all nations should be brought to the level of contemporary European civilization. Spengler’s interpretation of history contributed to the understanding that the world history does not turn around a European observer anymore, and the higher cultures move like their planets in their orbits. Spengler O. was convinced of the uniqueness of each of the existing cultures, basing this thesis on the uniqueness of the soul of any given culture. Instead of monotonous world history, he proposed a mosaic consisting of a plurality of different, unrelated cultures that bloom on the background of their landscape. Separate cultures, like all living things, die sooner or later, and humanity as a whole is immortal. He compared the world culture with the wildly growing wildflowers.

Cultures are the higher type of organisms. In general, the term of high culture, the higher type organism is simultaneously a consequence of the higher plants’ Goethean analysis, as well as the legacy of Nietzsche’s concept of the “Overman”. Each culture imposes on its carriers a specific imprint – a mentality, therefore, cultures in all areas of spiritual creativity create their specific forms. According to Spengler, that’s impossible to speak about religion, art, science in general, because each culture has its unique forms, in which its soul is embodied. Each culture creates its special style in all areas of human spiritual and material activity. Thus how Spengler wrote about the existence of his philosophy in each culture, the philosophy, which is a part of the symbolic expression of this culture: “Each philosophy is an expression of its own time, and there are no two epochs that would have the same philosophical aspirations, as long as we are talking about true philosophy, rather than about some academic commonplaces, such as the form of judgment or category of senses. There is no difference whether the teaching is eternal or temporary, but whether this teaching is life-giving for a certain time or

stillborn. The eternity of thoughts is an illusion. The point is what kind of image the person finds" [11, p.82].

Unlike the plurality of his predecessors, Spengler contrasts such phenomena as culture and civilization, seeing that civilization is not progress, but regress. If the culture for him is the creative force of a mighty young soul, the civilization is the extinction of creative energy, the constancy, and firmness of forms and contents, the transition of the living inner to the dead outer [11]. Spengler O. says that the civilization is the completion, the result of the culture, each culture ends with its civilization. The decline of Europe is the inevitable destiny of the Western culture. The easiest way to understand civilization as a decadence of this culture is on examples of degeneration of other cultures.

For Spengler, the civilization was a universal phenomenon, while the culture embodied the homeland and fireside. Spengler represented the power (political, economic, military, administrative, state, and legal) as the main sign of imperialism to the stage transformation of the culture into civilization. Therefore, the existence of Babylonian, Egyptian, Andean, Chinese, and Roman imperialism was undeniable for him.

Spengler emphasizes that the only way to understand the history indeed is to look at anything that happens today not from a particularly limited position (party, ideological, religious, moral), but from the timeless height, directing a look at the millennia. According to Spengler, one of the most important reasons why in the chaotic historical picture the right history structure was not taken was the inability to separate from each other mutually permeable complexes of forms of cultural and civilizational existence. The criticism of the present meets one of its most demanding tasks. The sign of this antagonism marks all essential conflicts of worldview, politics, art, knowledge, and senses. What is the future civilization's politics in contrast to the politics of yesterday's culture? In the ancient world it was rhetoric; in the West it is journalism, which is at the service of the abstract principle that expresses the power of civilization, namely money. In the period of civilization, everything is solved by a small number of people of outstanding intellect, and the huge mass of figures of the lower rank only supports the illusion of self-determined people in the lower stratum of society. The art and philosophy of civilization are not for the attitude of a rural or generally natural person, but exclusively for the resident of a large city, who follows his/her head only. Spengler emphasizes that we should not be misled by the illusion of the brilliant successes of civilization; imperialism is true civilization. The inevitable fate of the West lies in its emergence. The energy of a cultural person is directed inside, the energy of a civilized – outside. The modern world expansion is grand and majestic and is only a prelude to the future, which will eventually complete the history of the Western European humanity.

**Discussion.** Spengler's book "The Decline of the West" became widespread and received a rather controversial assessment of the analysis of culture and civilization, their opposition, and views on the fate of the Western culture [4; 9; 10]. Critics point out that the author has opposed parliamentary democracy and as an influential thinker contributed to the victory of the Rights and the defeat of the Weimar Republic. Critics also complain about the author's specific metaphorical language that complicates the "insertion" of the theory of historical cycles into the context of positive sciences. On the other hand, this metaphoricity is an expression of a creative imagination that is so important to go beyond the accumulated facts.

Spengler's position, his demonstrative rejection of the ideals of the past caused a lack of understanding and anger in academic circles; even Spengler's delusion of grandeur was attributed to him. The thinker himself, as if foreseeing an accusation of being anti-science for creating new myths, tried to escape from the scientific critique to another dimension noting in the preface that the one "who is busy with definitions, does not know the fate" [8]. Replacing strict scientific definitions with intuition, myths, and symbols, Spengler was able to assemble a dissimilar material into an integral structure, turning the reality into myths. For Spengler, there are no definitive historical truths, and the criteria of interpretation is not true or false, but superficially banal or deep. The opposition of culture as a creative principle and civilization that dies in technology, excess of intellectualism and rationality is very Spenglerian. However, with this opposition, Spengler contributed to the awareness of the crisis of Faustian culture, which became so obvious during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Spengler provided a prediction about the world political development; he also developed a methodological apparatus of modern political science. A significant contribution made by German philosopher in the field of study of such important political problems as the problem of the structure of the state, nations and national relations, war and peace, world politics and international relations. His advanced concept of high cultures allowed him to approach the analysis of modern political processes from a historical perspective. The book "The Decline of the West" has already become an integral part of the European spiritual culture.

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## ОСВАЛЬД ШПЕНГЛЕР І ЙОГО ФІЛОСОФІЯ ІСТОРІЇ

Т. В. Данилова, В. Я. Юдіна

**Анотація.** Творчість О. Шпенглера, неоднозначність його теорії викликали і продовжують викликати глибоку зацікавленість дослідників і гострі дискусії. Культурно-історична доктрина німецького історіософа, представника філософії життя О. Шпенглера, викладена ним в творі «Присмерк Європи», прагнула відобразити все різноманіття історичних метаморфоз людства. Розроблена ним концепція високих культур дозволила О. Шпенглеру підходити до аналізу сучасних політичних процесів з позиції історичної перспективи. Сама ж книга «Присмерк Європи» вже давно сама стала невід'ємною складовою європейської духовної культури. У даній статті зроблено спробу проаналізувати філософію історії О. Шпенглера. У процесі дослідження було застосовано порівняльно-історичний метод, методологію філософської герменевтики, а також антропологічний інтегративний підхід.

**Ключові слова:** Освальд Шпенглер, «Присмерк Європи», культура, цивілізація, культурні типи, високі культури.

## ОСВАЛЬД ШПЕНГЛЕР И ЕГО ФИЛОСОФИЯ ИСТОРИИ

Т. В. Данилова, В. Я. Юдина

**Аннотация.** Творчество О. Шпенглера, неоднозначность его теории вызывали и продолжают вызывать глубокую заинтересованность исследователей и острые дискуссии. Культурно-историческая доктрина немецкого историософа, представителя философии жизни О. Шпенглера, изложенная им в сочинении «Закат Европы», стремилась отразить все многообразие исторических метаморфоз человечества. Разработанная им концепция высоких культур позволила О. Шпенглеру подходить к анализу современных политических процессов с позиции исторической перспективы. Сама же книга «Закат Европы» уже давно стала неотъемлемой составляющей европейской духовной культуры. В данной статье предпринята

*попытка проанализировать философию истории О. Шпенглера. В процессе исследования были использованы сравнительно-исторический метод, методология философской герменевтики, а также антропологический интегративный подход.*

***Ключевые слова:** Освальд Шпенглер, «Закат Европы», культура, цивилизация, культурные типы, высокие культуры.*

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## **ФІЛОСОФСЬКО-ЕТИЧНІ АСПЕКТИ СВОБОДИ ЯК ЗВІЛЬНЕНОЇ СВІДОМОСТІ**

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***Анотація.** Досліджується феномен свободи як найсуттєвіше визначення людини, умови її унікального буття. Проаналізовано свідомість у виявленні філософсько-антропологічних, етичних, аксіологічних, екзистенційних вимірів людського буття, в якій формуються ідеї культурного самовизначення особистості.*

***Ключові слова:** свобода, звільнення свідомості, свобода вибору, свобода дії, свобода волі, етика, мораль, відповідальність*

**Актуальність.** Свобода як ідея та ідеал, цінність і норматив, суспільна реалія і характеристика практичної життєдіяльності соціуму та окремого індивіда сьогодні набуває нового звучання. У контексті загальнофілософської теорії особливого сенсу та актуальності набуває проблема індивідуальної, особистісно-визначеної та здобутої свободи, а також вибір людиною свободи як форми і засобу самореалізації. Свобода завжди була й є однією з головних умов становлення особистості, найважливішою цінністю її буття. Людина, позбавлена свободи, не може повноцінно розвивати свою індивідуальність. Тому факти обмеження свободи слід не тільки констатувати, але й осмислювати з філософсько-етичних позицій. Науково встановлений факт обумовленості моральної свідомості і поведінки людей факторами їх біофізіологічної, психічної, соціальної життєдіяльності перетворює проблему взаємовідношення необхідності і свободи у моралі в питання: чи має суб'єкт діяльності об'єктивну можливість і суб'єктивну здатність обирати певну форму поведінки у певній ситуації? Моральна необхідність і свобода, їх взаємозв'язок у поведінці є специфікаціями необхідності і свободи взагалі. Практична діяльність людини, в тому числі і її моральний аспект, виявляє особливу природу їх взаємодії і взаємовпливів.

**Аналіз останніх досліджень і публікацій** Тематика свободи завжди приваблювала та приваблює дослідників, вона є центральною у філософсько-