



The Decline of the West (Volume 2): Perspectives of World-History

Oswald Spengler

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The Decline of the West Volume II: Perspectives of World-History

By Oswald Spengler

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Excerpt from Chapter I

Regard the flowers at eventide as, one after the other, they close in the setting sun. Strange is the feeling that then presses in upon you--a feeling of enigmatic fear in the presence of this blind dreamlike earth-bound existence. The dumb forest, the silent meadows, this bush, that twig, do not stir themselves, it is the wind that plays with them. Only the little gnat is free--he dances still in the evening light, he moves whither he will.

A plant is nothing on its own account. It forms a part of the landscape in which a chance made it take root. The twilight, the chill, the closing of every flower--these are not cause and effect, not danger and willed answer to danger. They are a single process of nature, which is accomplishing itself near, with, and in the plant. The individual is not free to look out for itself, will for itself, or choose for itself.

An animal, on the contrary, can choose. It is emancipated from the servitude of all the rest of the world. This midget swarm that dances on and on, that solitary bird still flying through the evening, the fox approaching furtively the nest--these are little worlds of their own within another great world. An animalcule in a drop of water, too tiny to be perceived by the human eye, though it lasts but a second and has but a corner of this drop as its field--nevertheless is free and independent in the face of the universe. The giant oak, upon one of whose leaves the droplet hangs, is not.

Servitude and freedom--this is in last and deepest analysis the differentia by which we distinguish vegetable

and animal existence. Yet only the plant is wholly and entirely what it is; in the being of the animal there is something dual. A vegetable is only a vegetable; an animal is a vegetable and something more besides. A herd that huddles together trembling...

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