

THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION: HOW VALUE RELATIVISM  
CAUSED THE EROSION OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY AND  
CULTURAL IDENTITY

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A Thesis

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Public Administration

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by

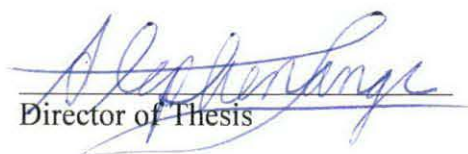
Michael D. Alley

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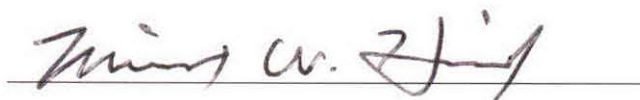
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Master's Committee:  \_\_\_\_\_, Chair

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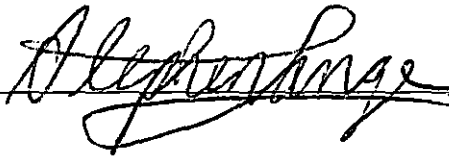
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CAUSED THE EROSION OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY AND  
CULTURAL IDENTITY

Michael D. Alley, MPA  
Morehead State University, 2010

Director of Thesis:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexander Payne", written over a horizontal line.

Modern philosophers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Heidegger fundamentally transformed Western thought, which prepared the way for the contemporary embrace of value relativism. Unlike the classical philosophers of the past, such as Plato and Aristotle, who believed in objective moral truth and sought to answer the fundamental questions of mankind, many contemporary thinkers have dismissed objective moral truth and have embraced the idea that those things that cannot be proven empirically hold no validity whatsoever because they are merely subjective value judgments, relative to an individual's opinions or feelings, culture, or history. The rejection of the possibility

of objective moral truth has undermined the core principles that are the very foundation of Western culture. As the philosophical debate over the fundamental questions has withered, value relativism has come to be widely accepted; ultimately, this has caused a decline in morality in the West, as well as a loss of identity and purpose.

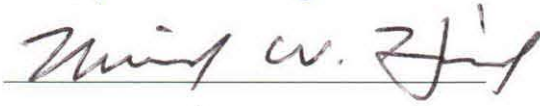
The problem with value relativism is that it holds that there are no universally true answers to the great questions of mankind and that there is no natural order to the world that can be discovered by human reason to provide a model for human existence. The idea that there is no good, no evil, no noble, no base, no virtue, no justice, and ultimately, no truth about anything that is fundamentally important has led to the decline of Western Civilization. Relativism robs people of any real sense of purpose in life: if there is no truth in the world outside of science because all values are relative and all opinions are equal, what aspiration can human beings have? If life has no real meaning, no real purpose, and no real direction, then what is the point?

The alternative to value relativism is that answers to life's fundamental questions arise from inductive reasoning with conclusions based on relevant evidence and experience. Moral judgments are not merely subjective, unconnected to facts, or irrational, but are important things about which knowledge can be gained. The wide acceptance of relativism has caused the Western philosophical spirit to evaporate. The ancient philosophers believed that, although extremely difficult, true knowledge of the fundamental questions of mankind is attainable. What is most important is not complete knowledge of the absolute standards of right and wrong, but rather

knowledge of what the fundamental questions are—which ones they are and why they are fundamental, for it is the pursuit of answers to these questions that has been part of the essential character of the West. The West once believed in certain values and principles, and these things acted to give the West its identity, its purpose, and its direction. As the core principles of the West degenerate, Westerners no longer know who they are or what they should fight for which acts to undermine the preservation of the West. If America and the West in general, do not find a way to repeal the negative effects that value relativism has caused and reassert its founding values and guiding principles, it will be extremely difficult to stop the West from declining into the abyss.

Accepted by:

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## The Decline of the West

### *Erosion of Western Identity*

The majority of people believe that the West has been, and still is to this day, progressing and advancing. From the violent monarchies of the past, liberal democracy has prevailed and with it, freedom, enlightenment, and human rights have flourished. Racism, slavery, and religious oppression have been replaced with multiculturalism, diversity, tolerance, acceptance, and openness of all sorts. Yet others believe that Western civilization has been and is still to this day in a state of decline. Many argue that something is fundamentally wrong in the West.

The problem with the West is that it now has great difficulty recognizing what it values. Many could go as far as suggesting that the West no longer values anything, or at a minimum, does not believe in anything of intrinsic value that can be defended rationally upon indisputable principles. If Western values are no longer authoritative for us, then what is important to the West? As Samuel Huntington argues, the identity of the West, and in particular, the American national identity, has eroded (Huntington 2005, 6). The American people who achieved independence in the late eighteenth century shared a common culture and were committed to the principles in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and other founding documents. Key elements of that culture included the English language, Christianity, religious commitment, English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, the

rights of individuals, and a strong work ethic. America's national identity was based on arts, literature, music, language, morality, religious beliefs, social and political values, and assumptions as to what is right and wrong, which were deeply rooted in the Anglo-Protestant culture (Huntington, 2005, 14).

The settlers and Founding Fathers created the American creed with its principles of liberty, equality, democracy, representative government, private property, and human rights (Huntington 2005, 41). The Anglo-Protestant culture of the settlers survived for 300 years as the paramount defining element of American identity. When there was a massive influx of immigrants from Europe in the early twentieth century, these immigrants assimilated into the American creed and identity. They adopted the American way of life and embraced the American dream that through hard work and determination, they could succeed.

In *Federalist* #2, John Jay, one of the Founding Fathers, argued that cohesion of the American people was vital for the survival of the regime they had created (Rossiter 2003, 31). It strengthened the nation to have a united people, sharing the same values, the same ancestry, the same beliefs, the same customs, and the same religion. However, since World War II, the cohesion of the American people, along with the American creed and identity, has been in decline. The celebration of diversity has replaced the emphasis on what Americans had in common (Huntington 2005, 47). In the late twentieth century, multiculturalists and spokesmen for ethnic and racial minorities said Americanization was a form of repression. In the 60's and 70's the primacy of national identity came under attack. Massive new numbers of



immigrants were able to maintain close ties with their country of origin, sustaining dual loyalties, dual nationalities, and often dual citizenship. Subnational racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural identities took on new importance. Immigrants no longer became “Americanized,” they no longer assimilated into the American way of life to the degree they had before. Americans were once one nation of individuals with equal rights, who shared the Anglo-Protestant core culture, and were dedicated to the liberal-democratic principles of the American creed. However, in the 60’s, powerful movements began to challenge the salience of American identity. America was no longer seen as a nation of individuals who share a common culture, but rather as a conglomerate of different races and ethnicities. Group membership began to become more important than a shared national identity. Ultimately, Huntington argued that multiculturalism replaced the unity that made America so strong (Huntington 2005, 59). He argued that by strengthening racial and ethnic identities, America’s cultural and creedal identity was weakened. He argued that multiculturalism in essence is opposed to the monocultural hegemony of Eurocentric values; it is in complete opposition to the Eurocentric concept of American democratic principles, culture, and identity. Huntington goes as far as to say that it is “nothing more than an anti-Western ideology” (Huntington 2005, 59). Extreme multiculturalism is a direct result of the West’s overall rejection of objective moral truth and its overwhelming embrace of value relativism, especially cultural relativism. Cultural relativists argue that because values are a product of one’s particular culture, the West has no right to

impose its cultural values onto another culture and instead, the West should be accepting and tolerant of the values of all cultures.

Multiculturalists advance several propositions. They argue that America is composed of many different ethnic and racial groups, that each has its own culture, and that the white Anglo culture has suppressed these cultures for far too long (Huntington 2005, 61). They argue that it is the duty of government and private institutions to liberate minorities. They argue that a critical factor in promoting multiculturalism is the classroom: instead of focusing on primarily Western history, schools should take a multicultural approach to education. Furthermore, they believe that by transforming the West into a multicultural entity, it will act to bring the world together.

In addition, extensive international involvements of American business, academic, professional, media, nonprofit, and political elites lowered the salience of national identity (Huntington 2005, 143). Such entities began to define themselves, their interests, and their identities in terms of transnational and global institutions, networks, and causes. Globalization involved a huge expansion in the international interactions among individuals, corporations, governments, and nongovernmental organizations. Because of this, intellectual, political, and economic elites no longer embraced nationalism, but rather transnational identity. They began seeing themselves as “global citizens,” or citizens of the world. The global involvements of the transnational economic elites erode their sense of belonging to a national

community. Prominent intellectuals and scholars have attacked nationalism, warned of the dangers of inculcating national pride and patriotism, and argued that national identity is undesirable in today's multicultural world. This is in complete opposition to the elites of the early twentieth century who sought to unify America. For example, large corporations, such as Ford, helped to assimilate and "Americanize" immigrants and helped them to fit into the American way of life (Huntington 2005, 160).

The end of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the end of communism left America with no enemy for the first time in its history and with no clear "other" against which to define itself (Huntington 2005, 257). This has had drastic consequences for American identity: a foggy sense of national interests, a decreasing willingness to sacrifice for one's country, a dwindling trust in government, and a softening of moral commitment. In the absence of an external enemy, individual self-interest trumps national commitment. Huntington argued that this is what caused the Roman republic to collapse into caesarism. When a nation's enemy is vanquished and it no longer poses a threat to the nation's very existence, a nation's sense of identity can be lost (Huntington 2005, 260).

According to Huntington, Americans must recommit themselves to the Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions, and values that for three and a half centuries have been embraced by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the source of their liberty, unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership. The rejection

of the American identity in favor of relativistic multiculturalism and diversity for its own sake, acts to keep us apart, which ultimately makes America weaker.

With the exception of the Western world, people are turning to religion for comfort, guidance, solace, and identity (Huntington 2005, 81). However, in the West, religion has played a decreasing role in public, social, and private life. In June 2002, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco decided 2-1 that the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance were a violation of separation of church and state. This sparked vigorous controversy on an issue central to America's identity. Supporters said that the U.S. is a secular country and that the First Amendment prohibited government support of religion. Critics said the phrase was consonant with the views of the framers of the Constitution. The Court's decision sharply posed the issue of whether America is a secular or religious nation. Today, Americans are still a highly religious people even though there has been a decline in church attendance over the last few decades. In 2003, 92% of Americans said they believed in God (Huntington 2005, 83). This is not the case in Europe. Christianity, which is central to Western culture, has been steadily declining in Europe. This has had significant consequences for the West, specifically, when talking about the rise of radical Islam and terrorism in the world. The real and potential enemies of the West are religiously driven. In all parts of the world, except in Western Europe, there has been a resurgence of faith. The twenty-first century is beginning as an age of religion, which will increase religious conflicts around the world. Radical Islamic organizations believe they are fighting a holy war against

Jews and Christians. However, apart from America, the West no longer has the stomach for this type of conflict in part perhaps because it has lost its Christian faith. It is impossible for the West to fight a war of this magnitude if its people no longer embrace the very ideas that form the foundation of their being (Huntington 2005, 100).

Furthermore, the rejection of religion has caused a decline in morality and standards in the West (Huntington 2005, 96). The rejection of religion in the West has certainly led to moral decay. The tolerance of sexual behavior previously considered unacceptable, teenage pregnancy, single-parent families, increasing divorce rates, high levels of crime, drug abuse, pornography, and violence in the media are all things that point to moral decay. In addition, the rise of people living on welfare is also evidence of the rejection of the Anglo-Protestant culture that embraced a strong work ethic. It promoted the idea that through hard work and self reliance, people will be rewarded (Steyn 2008, 100). However, the West has become a socialized culture. Evidence suggests that America is turning away from the capitalistic system and, more than ever, is becoming increasingly open to European socialism.

America, and the West as a whole, was once a place that believed in moral objectivity. It was guided by values and moral principles that were held to be rationally defensible. However, through value relativism and the rejection of objective moral truth, the West no longer embraces the very things that make us Western in the first place. Ultimately, the West has lost its identity. People no longer

know what it means to be Western. When the people of the West no longer know who they are or what they believe in, this acts to undermine the preservation of the West and acts to strengthen the enemies of the West. Enemies of the West are not confused about who they are or what they believe in. They believe so strongly in their views that they will sacrifice their lives to promote them. But because the West no longer knows what it believes in, or possibly, because it no longer believes in anything, it cannot adequately defend itself from those that wish to destroy it. If people no longer know what they believe in, or do not believe in anything, they will not fight for anything. This is exactly why Western identity must be restored. If the West has any hope of surviving, it must rediscover and embrace the very things that make it Western in the first place. As Huntington argues, if the West rediscovers its identity and there is a unification of the people, only then does the West have a chance to survive (Huntington 2005, 248).

### *Western Dominance Fading*

Cultural identity is important and meaningful for people. Huntington argues that cultural identities are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world (Huntington 2003, 20). He believes that the clashing of civilizations has now become the greatest threat to world peace. Since the Cold War, the most important distinctions among people were no longer ideological, political, or economic, as was the case before, but became cultural. People began to

define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions.

For over 400 years, the nation states of the West – Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, the U.S., and others constituted a multipolar international system within Western civilization that interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other (Huntington 2003, 21). At the same time, Western nations expanded, conquered, colonized, and decisively influenced every other civilization. Through its superior weaponry and tactics, the West was able to spread its ideas, values, and religious beliefs. However, as Huntington argues, this did not create a universal Westernization of the globe. There was not a cultural coming together of values, beliefs, practices, institutions, etc. by peoples throughout the world.

Popular culture of the West has certainly been spread to other civilizations, but the world has not become universally Western (Huntington 2003, 41). People of other cultures may now wear jeans, drink Pepsi, and listen to rap music, but they are still distinct civilizations with different beliefs. It is inaccurate to assume that just because non-Westerners buy and consume Western goods that this is making them Westernized. Because the central elements of any culture or civilization are rooted in its religious beliefs, if the world has become universally Western, then it must be true that the World has embraced a universal religion. However, this is certainly not the case at all. It is not Christianity that has increased in the world; it is Islam that has grown.

The idea that increased interaction among peoples through trade, investment, tourism, media, and electronic communication has created a common world culture is wrong (Huntington 2003, 58). Huntington argues that increased interaction among cultures has actually promoted tension, not peace. Modernization has not led to a Western universal civilization. Instead, he argued that modernization, in places such as the Muslim world, has caused further rejection of Western culture. The Muslim world feels increasingly threatened by the West and seeks to reassert and strengthen its own culture. Although the Muslim world has for the most part rejected modernization, other non-Western cultures, such as those in Asia, have embraced modernization (Huntington 2003, 59). However, modernization in Asia has not caused Asians to lose their cultural identities; modernization has actually acted to strengthen them. Through the global economy, Asia is strengthening its economic and military position in the world and can now better promote its own cultural beliefs while rejecting Western culture. As Asia exemplifies, modernization does not mean Westernization. Non-Westerners have been able to modernize without abandoning their own cultural credence. Ultimately, modernization has strengthened non-Western cultures, and so has reduced the power of the West comparatively. Although the world is becoming more modern, it has also become less Western.

The overwhelming dominance of the West has been declining. The West's share of political, economic, and military power is going down relative to that of other civilizations. Slow economic growth after the Cold War, stagnating populations, unemployment, huge government deficits, declining work ethic, low



savings rates, and social disintegration all point to the West's decline (Huntington 2003, 83). Economic power is rapidly shifting to East Asia, and military and political power is starting to follow. India is on the verge of economic takeoff, and the Islamic world is growing increasingly hostile to the West. It seems that the world is fed up with Western dominance. Furthermore, the West's self-confidence and will to dominate is fading rapidly. China will likely emerge to challenge the West for global influence.

At the peak of its territorial expansion in 1920, the West directly ruled about half of the Earth (Huntington 2003, 85). By 1993, this territorial control was cut in half. Minus the settler-populated lands in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, the West is back to its original European core. In contrast, the territory of independent Islamic societies rose from 1.8 million square miles in 1920, to over 11 million square miles in 1993. Westerners now constitute a steadily decreasing minority of the world's population. In addition, the Western share of the global economic product peaked in the 1920's and has been declining since World War II. In contrast, East Asia has been undergoing an economic boom. Furthermore, in the 1920's, the West's military capability was staggering. The West ruled quantitatively in terms of manpower, weapons, equipment, and resources; it ruled technologically in terms of having the most sophisticated weaponry; it ruled organizationally in terms of having the most highly skilled soldiers; and it ruled societally in terms of the ability and willingness of a society to apply military force effectively for things that it

believes in. Now, in all four dimensions, the West has been declining. However, non-Western civilizations, like East Asia, have greatly improved their military capabilities in all dimensions.

Huntington argues that the West will remain the most powerful civilization well into the early decades of the twenty-first century but that the age of Western dominance is coming to an end. The reason behind this is that there is growing power of non-Western civilizations and a revival of cultures throughout the world. As non-Western societies enhance their economic, military, and political capacity, they will trumpet the virtues of their own values, institutions, and culture. As Western power declines, the ability of the West to impose Western ideas on the world will decline.

Asia's economic growth along with Islam's population growth both pose an immense threat to Western sustainability (Huntington 2003, 90). Asia is likely to have seven of the ten largest economies by 2020, or about 40% of global economic product. Wealth has long been an indicator for moral and cultural superiority. Asians no longer want to imitate the West, but want to express their own cultures. They have a desire to return to their cultural roots and authenticity. Asians view the West as being self-indulgent and individualistic; they see the West's high crime rate, inferior education, and disrespect for authority as symptoms of its moral decline. They believe that their cultural values of order, discipline, hard work, and collectivism are far superior to the values that the West now embraces (Huntington 2003, 93).

While Asians became increasingly assertive as a result of economic development, Muslims have always turned to Islam as a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power, and hope. The Muslim world believes that Islam is the solution to Western decadence (Huntington 2003, 96). The Muslim world, with its overpopulation and high fertility rates, poses a significant threat to the West and its low fertility rates. The youth provide recruits for radical Islamic organizations and political movements. They, above all, want to be a part of something that they feel is important and vital for the survival of their culture. They see the West declining in power, morality, and prestige and seek to do anything to reassert their own cultural beliefs while rejecting those of the West. So according to Huntington, with the rise of the Asian economy, and the rise of Islam, there will be a resurgence of non-Western power and culture and the clash of the peoples of non-Western civilizations with the West and with each other (Huntington 2003, 97).

Huntington argues that global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines. Peoples and countries with similar cultures are coming together, while peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart (Huntington 2003, 156). Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by culture and civilization. During the Cold War era, people defined themselves by answering the question of "which side are we on?" This has now been replaced with the question of "Who are we?," which illustrates that people are beginning to define their identity in terms of culture, not ideology. Those that

share similar ancestry, religion, language, and values are coming together, while disconnecting themselves from those who are culturally different.

After the collapse of communism, the West believed that democratic liberalism would triumph throughout the world. There was a belief that the non-Western world would commit themselves to Western values of democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights, individualism, and the rule of law. However, this has certainly not been the case. In fact, the complete opposite has been true. Non-Western countries have been rejecting Western values and promoting their own (Huntington 2003, 184). East Asian societies are well on their way to equaling the West economically and Islamic countries have enough potential soldiers to dwarf the West in terms of manpower. Both economic and military expansion is essential for non-Westerners to break away from Western dominance.

As Huntington argues, it is critical for the survival of the West to maintain military superiority, promote Western values, and to protect the cultural, social, and ethnic integrity of the West by restricting the numbers of non-Westerners admitted as immigrants or refugees (Huntington 2003, 190). Unfortunately, the West seems incapable of doing any, let alone all of these things. Non-Western civilizations, especially in East-Asia, are becoming more economically powerful and are enhancing their military capabilities. In Islamic regions, because of their large populations, they are capable of creating large armies and are attempting to get more sophisticated weaponry. In contrast, since the Cold War, the West has been less focused on

defense spending and national security and more focused on supporting its socialized welfare state. Furthermore, the West's efforts to stop the proliferation of weapons have been met, and will likely continue to be met, with limited success.

In promoting values, the West is also lacking. Again, we only know who we are when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against. But again, the fundamental problem of the West is that it has a difficult time knowing what the West is, what it values, or what it should defend. The rejection of the possibility of objective moral truth and the overwhelming acceptance of value relativism has clouded the West's identity. In contrast, most non-Western cultures have a clear sense of identity, know what they believe in, are willing to die for what they believe in, and are gaining momentum both economically and militarily. Furthermore, non-Western cultures see that the West has lost its identity and this is making them more eager than ever to promote their own cultural identities. As the West becomes more atheistic, materialistic, decadent, immoral, and loses touch of the fundamental values and beliefs that have guided Western life since its birth, non-Western cultures are doing the opposite. Non-Western civilizations are reinforcing the values and beliefs of their own cultures. Furthermore, because the non-Western world sees the decline of morality in the West, they are now asserting their cultural superiority over the West.

Like others who have studied the decline of the West, Roger Scruton believed that identity is crucial for a culture. When a culture's identity is lost, it results in an

uncertainty of its purpose. The West was so strong because people began conceiving themselves as a community of neighbors sharing language, customs, territory, and a common interest in defense (Scruton 2003, 21). America in particular, was strong because its people were very patriotic. One could argue that it was the sense of identity, purpose, and patriotism that was the vital force in building America. The lifeblood of America, as Tocqueville stated, was its citizens coming together, being sociable, being neighbors, and having a sense of belonging. Western borders have been decided by the courage, discipline, and self-sacrifice that stemmed from civic patriotism (Scruton 2003, 26). A public-spirited person gives time, energy, and resources for the benefit of the country. Good citizens remain attached to and dependent upon an ancestral “we.”

One of the difficulties facing the West is that this type of virtue is rapidly decreasing (Scruton 2003, 61). Patriotic sacrifice has been dwindling in the West. Citizenship and civic virtue has been the goal and aspiration of Western political systems. People were bound by their duties to their fellow citizens and these duties sprang from a peculiar experience of membership. Citizens are first and foremost members of a society of strangers, committed to the defense of their common territory and maintenance of law that applies there. Loyalty is based on a sense of a common home. But today, the West appears to be more divided than ever. Due to relativistic multiculturalism, in America for example, there now appears to be more of a focus on race, ethnicity, and gender differences, rather than on being American. Again,

America was once a place that was viewed as a nation of different races and ethnicities that shared a common culture and creed.

It is extremely difficult to preserve Western culture when it has lost its identity. If a culture no longer knows what it believes in or what it stands for, it cannot adequately defend itself from those who seek nothing less than the destruction of it. A significant factor in causing the decline of the West is value relativism.

## II

### Deeper Root of the Problem

#### *Liberal Education Under Attack*

Western civilization is deeply rooted in liberal education. Many would argue that it was Socrates that founded liberal education in ancient Greece about 2500 years ago. Liberal education attempts to liberate people's minds, allow the development of new ideas and new opinions, and free people from their own ignorance and prejudices. "Liberal education is a sustained and open-minded examination of the deepest questions of human existence, an examination that is meant to free us of our prejudices in such matters" (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 5). Socrates claimed that the unexamined life was one not worth living. He believed that people should carefully examine all those opinions which serve as the foundation for the way in which they live. He argued that most notions that most people hold are not freely chosen, but are rather forced onto them from whatever opinions dominate the world at that present time. The problem with this is that these opinions are often false, and because people do not like to question the fundamental opinions that touch the very core of their being, they prefer to live a life of ignorance. Ultimately, Socrates argued that, with effort, one can free oneself from mere prejudice and opinion, examine the world for oneself, and replace one's opinions with true knowledge.

In Book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates emphasizes the importance of enlightenment in the allegory of the cave, which has become one of the most famous



metaphors in Western philosophy and has had a significant influence on Western civilization. In the allegory of the cave, Socrates depicts a scene in which a group of prisoners have been living in an underground cave since birth (Bloom 1991, 193). The entrance is very long and sunlight does not reach into the depths of the cave. The prisoners are bound by their legs and necks and are restrained in such a way that they cannot move freely or even look behind them, but are forced to look directly at the wall in front of them. The only source of light inside the cave is from a fire that is burning from behind. Behind the fire is a partial wall in which puppet-handlers manipulate objects to cast shadows on the wall in front of the prisoners. The prisoners spend their lives watching these shadows, and because these shadows are the only things that the prisoners see, they believe that these shadows are the only real things in the world. When the prisoners talk to one another about these images, they name them and when they hear sounds from the puppet-handlers, they believe that the shadows are making these noises.

Then, one of the prisoners is released from his bonds. The prisoner is able to stand up, turn around, and see the fire that is burning behind him. Looking at the light of the fire is very painful and confusing to him (Bloom, 1991, 194). Not only is this the first time that the prisoner's eyes have seen direct light, but he has never seen anything other than the shadows on the wall. After his eyes focus and his disorientation subsides, he is able to look at the statues. He realizes that the statues are more real than the shadows. He learns how the light of the fire casts shadows of

these statues and reflects images on the wall. He understands that these shadows are just copies of real objects.

The prisoner is then dragged out of the cave. Force is needed to get the prisoner out of the cave because the outside world frightens him and he would never leave willingly (Bloom 1991, 194). He has lived his entire life in the cave and the cave is all that he knows. Once outside of the cave, the bright light from the sun blinds him. His eyes are not yet adjusted and focused, but he begins to see real objects. For the first time, as blurry as they may be to him, he sees real trees, real flowers, and real animals. The prisoner realizes that the statues in the cave were simply copies of these even more real things. After his eyes completely adjust to the light, he is able to look directly at the sun. He learns that the sun is the cause for everything he sees around him. He understands that the sun produces light which is responsible for all life.

The cave analogy is meant to show the importance of developing one's intellect. The goal of liberal education is meant to drag everyone as far away from their caves as possible. Essentially, everyone is born into a cave. A child's brain is like a sponge, soaking up information from the world around him. The child's family, the school he will eventually attend, and the regime in which he lives in act as information sources. These sources provide citizens with opinions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, and all of the accepted views of his society. The cave represents a veil to reason and understanding. The problem with embracing the accepted views of one's society is that these opinions may not be correct. Everything

that a person has been taught, the very things that touch the core of their being, may in fact be incorrect. Ultimately, Socrates argued that people should not blindly accept the views of one's society just because those views are widely accepted. He argued that people must acknowledge the prejudices of their society and of their own personal prejudices, attempt to break away from them, and investigate the world on their own using reason and deliberation. Rather than looking at mere images and reflections on a wall, one must strive to grasp true knowledge. People must escape their caves, free their minds and pursue knowledge, and make prudential judgments about the fundamental questions for themselves.

The allegory of the cave suggests that human beings live their lives on the basis of opinions about what is right and wrong and just and unjust. However, in most cases these opinions have not been carefully examined by the individual. In so far as most people do not investigate these fundamental questions for themselves, they are prisoners to the dominant ideas and opinions of their time (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 15). Liberal education is vital for people to escape their caves and to become free thinkers.

Unfortunately, liberal education has been under attack for some time now. The fundamental philosophical questions that once formed the basis of liberal education are considered to be unimportant in the modern world (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 18). Opponents of the classical philosophical way of teaching argue that philosophical discussions of themes such as right and wrong, good and bad, and justice and injustice are unimportant because no truth can be

gained from such investigations. They argue that ideas of what is right, what is just, and what is good are merely subjective opinions. They argue that anything that cannot be scientifically proven holds no truth whatsoever. They believe that discussions of such things are pointless and take time away from students who could better spend their time doing more productive things, such as preparing students for their future employment. But a proper education should not simply prepare students for employment; it should prepare students to live well no matter what they do. It should challenge students to identify and examine the fundamental questions in hopes that this pursuit will make them noble, good, and thoughtful human beings. Since the days of the great ancient philosophers, there has been a growing rejection of objective moral truth and an increasing acceptance of value relativism in contradiction to liberal education, which has had a significant impact on Western Civilization, and as will be shown, has contributed greatly to its decline.

### *Value Relativism*

The greatest threat to liberal education is one of the university's greatest exports: value relativism (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 18). Value relativism has certainly caused the erosion of liberal education and intellectualism in the West. "Value relativism is a doctrine that holds that all judgments of value are subjective in the sense that they are relative to the time, culture, or personality of the subject who makes them" (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 20). Value relativism embraces the notion that there are no universally true answers to the great

questions of mankind, which significantly differs from the views held by classical philosophers. The idea is that there is no good, no evil, no noble, no base, no virtue, no justice, and ultimately, no truth about anything that is fundamentally important.

There are different variations of value relativism. Perspectivism holds that there is no such thing as objective moral truth because moral truth is relative to each individual (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 21). Perspectivists believe that everyone has their own unique perspective on things, moral judgments are relative to each individual, and one cannot possibly prove that any opinion is superior to another's opinion. They argue that because there is no universal conception of any moral principles, what one person believes to be justice, beauty, or honor, will not be the same for all individuals. They argue that all opinions of morality are equal because no one opinion is any better or any worse than any other opinion.

Emotivism is based on the notion that facts are things that can be empirically tested, whereas opinions and value judgments are purely based on emotions of what people feel to be true (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 24). Emotivism makes the distinction between judgments of fact and judgments of value, known as the fact-value distinction. Emotivists argue that facts are things that can be empirically tested, proven, and validated by the scientific method. In contrast, they argue that values, because they cannot be scientifically tested and proven true, have no validity. They argue that because values come from people's emotions, they are merely subjective judgments, whereas facts are objective because they are not based on emotions, but rather come from solid empirical evidence.

Cultural relativism holds that value judgments are based on the views of society or culture that one lives in. It argues that because the values of one culture may not be the values of another culture, and because values are relative to particular cultures, values can have no objective validity (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 30). Culture relativists argue that value judgments are based on our own cultural experience, which is infused into each individual through his own enculturation. Furthermore, because they argue that values are different from one society to another, they reject the idea that there are any universal values, and argue that if there are, we have no way to gain knowledge of them. They argue that because values are products of one particular culture, one should not impose his cultural values onto another culture. As a result, cultural relativists reject the West's ambitions of spreading its cultural values throughout the world.

Historical relativism, or historicism, like cultural relativism, reflects on the great diversity of opinion in the world (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 35). Both are based on the idea that all thought is a product of environment. However, for historicism, diversity of opinion does not come from culture, but from history. Historical relativism holds that human beings cannot be understood apart from their historical context. Specifically, historicists believe that there is no natural order to the world that can be discovered by human reason and provide a permanent model for human existence. They argue that each period in history has its own truths that are valid for that particular period, but not for all time.

Even more disastrous to a civilization than value relativism, is nihilism. Nihilism is the belief in nothing. Nihilists believe that there is no meaning to life, that there is no God, no morality, and no principles to guide social, economic, or political life (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 39). They argue that all notions of right and wrong, good and evil, and the like, are artificial products developed by man. Although value relativism is not nihilism, it does share with nihilism in the belief that objective moral truth does not exist. In essence, relativism is in between the Socratic view (the search for truth) and the nihilist view (there is no truth). As will be illustrated, many believe that once relativism is embraced by a civilization, the next progression in thought is that of nihilism. When a civilization embraces nihilism its intellectual and philosophical spirit dies, which in turn causes the civilization to die. This claim will be examined further when discussing Spengler's *The Decline of the West*.

Value relativism is lethal to liberal democracy. Liberal education is the quest for answers to life's great questions. Relativism, however, makes that quest pointless (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 40). Perspectivism and emotivism tell us that truth is relative to the individual. Cultural and historical relativism tell us that truth is relative to our culture or our age. From the classical perspective, though, value relativism is simply a justification for people to stick to their existing prejudices. Essentially, relativism allows us to dismiss what we do not like on the grounds that there is no truth and yet, at the same time, to cling to whichever views we do like. By doing this, people are essentially kept in their caves and allow their

prejudices and assumptions to prevail over reason because value relativism will not let them escape in the first place. So, although relativists deny moral objectivity and argue that there is no proper way to live, they still have certain views that they hold about life, but these views are not constructed through reason.

The reason why relativism is so destructive to a civilization is because it forces people back down into their caves (Malcolmson, Myers, and O'Connell 1996, 41). It advocates that there is no truth in the world outside of science, all values are relative, and all opinions are equal. It robs people of any real sense of purpose in life. By not attempting to explore the fundamental questions of mankind, people have essentially become enslaved in their own caves.

The rejection of objective moral truth, has acted to undermine the core principles that have formed the basis of Western civilization and gave the West its identity. Leo Strauss argued that relativism has called into question the possibility of any natural right, including the modern natural right doctrines that have legitimized the American regime (Strauss 1965, 2). Core principles, such as justice, which have guided American life since its birth, have been attacked by relativists who argue that moral judgments are purely subjective and irrelevant to modern society. The West was once a place that believed in the possibility of discovering and living by universally true principles.

However, the rejection of that is the same as saying that it is impossible to differentiate between just and unjust, good and bad, and right and wrong (Strauss 1965, 3). Because there is now an inability to acquire any genuine knowledge of



what is intrinsically good or right, it compels us to be tolerant of every opinion about good or right, or to recognize all preferences or all civilizations as equally respectable. The classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle believed in natural right. They believed that there were standards in nature for the correct way to live, even if they were difficult to discover and retained a degree of uncertainty. They believed that true knowledge of the fundamental questions of mankind could be gained. However, it is not so much knowledge of the absolute standards of right and wrong that is important, but knowledge of what the fundamental questions are—which ones they are and why they are fundamental. It is the pursuit of answers to these fundamental questions that has been part of the essential character of the West. The classical thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, whose ideas had a significant impact on Western civilization, believed that absolute truths did exist, even if difficult to ascertain, and that people should strive to live virtuously, which could only be achieved by expanding one's intellect and being philosophical. By expanding one's intellect and contemplating such matters, people are able to grasp knowledge of what is good, what is virtuous, and what is the best way to live.

Western civilization has been drifting away from promoting such enlightenment. The fundamental questions of mankind are no longer viewed as important as they once were. Instead of contemplating the very things that touch the core of our humanity, these things are routinely ignored. Essentially, people have not emerged from their caves and their minds are closed.

Value relativism is the opposite of natural right. Value relativists argue that nature does not provide a standard for the correct way to live and that no knowledge can be gained from studying these questions because they are merely subjective, relative to an individual, a time in history, or a particular culture. They argue that there are no universally true answers to the great questions of mankind and that there is no natural order to the world that can be discovered by human reason to provide a model for human existence. But if there are no universal norms, or universal principles that can guide human beings, one can see how this will lead to significant problems for a civilization. If all ideas of value are merely relative, then there cannot be any universal standard to follow. There can be no clear standards of good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, or just and unjust. But men cannot live without the guidance that standards and principles provides them. When there is no standard in which to guide life, people become immoral. Moral decay in the West is exemplified by the rise in teenage pregnancy, single-parent families, increasing divorce rates, high levels of crime, drug abuse, pornography, violence in the media, perverse sexual behavior, adultery, lack of self-reliance and work ethic, materialism, decline in charitable giving, decline in social capital, atheism, and a myriad of other factors. Furthermore, relativism is destructive because it robs people of any real sense of purpose in life. If there is no truth in the world outside of science because all values are relative and all opinions are equal, what aspiration can human beings have? If life has no real meaning, no real purpose, and no real direction, then what's the point?

Relativism in the form of the fact-value distinction is an intellectual mistake of modern times and helped to produce a crisis for Western civilization (Craig 1994, 329). The assertion that there is no connection between facts and values is false. The fundamental questions such as what is right and wrong and good and bad can be the result of inductive reasoning based on the facts in so far as people make conclusions based on relevant evidence and experience (Craig 1994, 334). Moral judgments are not, then, subjective, unconnected to facts, or irrational. On questions of such things as justice and beauty, a variety of evidence can be looked at, there are certainly patterns that exist, and people can make rational decisions about such things. Valid arguments can be made about right and wrong, and one's judgment about these things need not be merely subjective. Similarly, there are certainly objective grounds for rationally preferring virtuous qualities such as justice and courage over qualities such as injustice and cowardice. However, because values are inductive, such opinions are always open to revision based on new evidence. This qualification makes moral certainty elusive, but it is the same qualification employed by natural science—new evidence may entail a revision of the inductive conclusions synthesized out of the facts and evidence to date.

Moral judgments are opinions, but opinions based on evidence and reasoning. Hence, they can be valid, while remaining open to refinement and reconsideration (Craig, 1994, 335). Opinions are reasonable or unreasonable based on the arguments and evidence one uses to support them. Anyone can state his opinion, but what makes it valid or not is whether he can present a coherent argument using reason and

evidence to justify his position. Everyone is free to hold his own opinions, but that fact does not make all opinions equally true.

The fundamental difficulty for modern liberal democracy, or the West as a whole, is that the quest to answer the fundamental questions of mankind has withered and the quest for objective moral truth has eroded. By not searching for the answers to these questions and by rejecting the possibility of objective moral truth, the West is losing a critical component of its character. As more and more people in the West embrace the notion that moral judgments are merely subjective, the pursuit to answer the fundamental questions is taken far less seriously and, as a result, the principles that originally laid the foundations for the West are being lost. Humankind has always asked these questions and it is our duty as intellectual beings to ponder and explore them. When people stop exploring the questions that touch the very core of their being, life becomes somewhat meaningless. The increasingly dogmatic acceptance of the view that values are not based on rational grounds effectively undermines our confidence in the principles that have guided Western life since its birth (Craig 1994, 329).

Alan Bloom was concerned with protecting the philosophical way of life for future generations. He was strongly against value relativism and the rejection of objective moral truth and believed that this fundamental change in thought had significantly contributed to the decline of the West. He argued that by accepting value relativism and rejecting objective moral truth, the West has lost a significant part of its fundamental character, which he argued has resulted in a decline in

morality in the West (Bloom 1990, 21). Prior to the Enlightenment, the West believed strongly in objective moral truth. Principles, such as justice, played a significant role in shaping Western identity. The West promoted justice because it believed it was of vital importance. However, the importance of principles, such as justice, has been eroding. The West believes that ideas of things such as justice are simply opinions, that no one opinion is correct, and all such moral judgments are relative and subjective. This has resulted in a decline of virtue in the West. Bloom argued that because the West has abandoned its moral principles, it has become morally decadent, as exemplified by its depraved obsession with many of the lowest of human bodily pleasures. Modern man is focused on personal gain and bodily pleasure, often achieved through immoral means, rather than aspiring to achieve the various forms of human greatness.

### III

#### Contemporary Embrace of Relativism

Leo Strauss, among others, argued that modern man no longer knows what he wants, who he is, and can no longer recognize the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, and virtue and vice (Strauss 1988, 172). Strauss claimed that the decline of the West came in what he called the “three waves of modernity.” He argued that thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, etc. changed the way that people thought of the world, breaking away from classical thought. Strauss argued that the first wave consisted of Machiavelli and Hobbes. He said that both Machiavelli and Hobbes caused a fundamental change in how people viewed nature. Their views essentially gave rise to the notion that people are intrinsically bad and that people are motivated primarily by self-interest and material comfort. This first wave also gave rise to the notion that allotted nature of individuals was fixed and that they could never overcome their wickedness. This is opposite of the teachings of classical philosophers, such as Plato who argued that people could attempt to improve their lives and strive for self-betterment through the continued effort to order their souls and through the pursuit of wisdom.

One can see how classical philosophers, such as Plato, believed that the individual soul was not fixed and that people could better themselves through education. For example, in Plato’s *Republic*, the goal is not primarily about how to create a perfectly just city; instead, it is a guidebook on how to live. Socrates’ city

was never intended to be an actual political reality; in fact, Socrates said himself it was highly unlikely that his city could ever come into being. Instead, Socrates believed that the regime in which he created in speech could more readily be achieved at the individual level. Socrates' city is perfect because wise men, who are ruled by their rational souls and use reason above everything else, rule the city. The guardians develop their rational souls through education. Ultimately, the *Republic* is about opening one's mind to the world beyond mere appearances, to the truth about reality. It shows the importance of using reason and becoming enlightened. It is about wisdom, learning, and properly training one's mind. It is not about how to create a perfect city, but rather it is about how an individual can live a happy and fulfilled life, which Socrates argues, could only be achieved when an individual develops and perfects his intellect and arranges his soul into a harmonious order. Educating one's mind, perfecting one's rational soul, and seeking truth, according to Socrates, should be the aim for all people so far as possible. The *Republic* is about living one's own life well, or at minimum, how one ought to live. By structuring one's soul properly, in which the rational part rules, a person will be virtuous, will have genuine knowledge of the Good, the Beautiful, and all other forms. To this extent, Plato believed that objective moral truth was possible, and that a person should strive to answer the fundamental questions and live accordingly in so far as possible. He argued that true knowledge is the ability to grasp the world of forms with one's intellect. It is this philosophical tradition of examining such fundamental questions as

these through the use of reason alone that forms an essential part of Western civilization and its once-vibrant intellectual life.

Unlike the classical thinkers, Machiavelli and Hobbes did not believe that human nature could be transformed. Machiavelli believed that people were generally wicked and must be controlled. Because people are intrinsically bad, he believed that rulers could use whatever means necessary to keep order (Mansfield 1998, 22). In fact, Machiavelli believed that virtue itself was not intrinsically good, which significantly broke away from what Socrates argued. For Machiavelli, conventional virtue is a quality that is praised by others, such as generosity, compassion, and piety. He argued that a ruler should not avoid vices, such as cruelty or dishonesty, so long as by doing so, it would benefit the state. He argued that virtues and vices should be conceived of as means to an end in which every action by a ruler must be considered in terms of its overall benefit to the state, rather than in terms of its intrinsic moral value. Specifically, he argued that virtue should only be used for its consequence, rather than for its intrinsic value, unlike Socrates' belief that virtue should be sought for its intrinsic value and for its consequence.

Machiavelli was the first philosopher to focus attention more on how mankind is rather than how they should be. He focused on how politics operates, not on how it should operate. He argued that because the real world is not perfect, it should not be treated as such (Mansfield 1998, 61). He argued that a ruler's goal is to maintain the regime, and he can use both virtue and vice interchangeably to make sure order is achieved.



Hobbes argued that the state of nature is a state of war (Tuck and Silverthorne 2008, 23). He argued that men are by nature equal and nature has given them a right to all things, which causes conflict. In the state of nature, each man can use his strength to reach any ends he pleases. Ultimately, in the state of nature, it is every man against every man. Natural law is based on the notion that each man has the right of self-preservation. Because constant war is not good for one's self-preservation, men enter into civil societies. Hobbes argued that natural law is the right reason about what one should do or not do in order for self-preservation. Men seek peace when it can be had, and go to war when they have to. Any contracts or agreements made in the state of nature are in vain. If someone does a service for another man, and that man does not pay him back, there is no civil law to hold the wrongdoer accountable. The only law in the state of nature is the law of nature. If a man does not repay another man, they may go to war with one another, but war goes against self-preservation and reason. To avoid war men should stand by their contracts and agreements. The first law of nature (self-preservation) instructs each and every man, as the necessary means of securing peace, to make reciprocal transfers. Men should not be inconsiderate to others, not show hatred or contempt, not attempt to be superior to anyone else, and not be unfair because all of these things lead to war. Ultimately, reason teaches that peace is good.

Hobbes argued that the natural laws (reason) are not enough to preserve peace (Tuck and Silverthorne 2008, 69). If the natural laws were enough to preserve peace, then there would be no need for civil societies. The practice of natural law is

necessary for the preservation of peace, and security is necessary for the practice of natural law. So, men come together and provide security to one another. But because each man has his own will, and these wills often conflict, every man must sacrifice his own will to the will of the group for the common good. In every commonwealth (civil society), the man or assembly to whose will individuals have subjected themselves is said to hold sovereign authority. Hobbes argued that the security of the commonwealth must be preserved through laws and penalties. Because security is the reason why men entered into civil societies and gave up their own will to the will of the commonwealth, maintaining security is vital for a commonwealth. Because each man has transferred his will to the will of the commonwealth, it is the duty of the sovereign power, whether it is one man or an assembly, to make laws and enforce them for the good of civil society.

In the state of nature decisions on what is good and evil are up to each man (Tuck and Silverthorne 2008, 81). In contrast, in a civil society, decisions on what is good and evil and right and wrong belong to the sovereign power. Hobbes made it clear that a ruler must ensure that factions do not arise and that any seditious opinions are eliminated, for if they are not, it will cause the commonwealth to dissolve. He argued that a ruler must ensure the safety of his citizens, rule for the sake of the people not for sake of himself, and ensure that his citizens know the laws so they do not violate them.

In contrast to Machiavelli and Hobbes that argued that people were generally wicked and that the state of nature was the state of war, John Locke argued that

people were intrinsically good and that the state of nature was quite peaceful (Macpherson 1980, 9). For Locke, the state of nature was the state of perfect freedom. However, this freedom was not unlimited. In the state of nature people had to abide by the law of nature, which is reason, or self-preservation. The state of nature was also a state of equality. Again, this equality was not unlimited equality. Everyone in the state of nature was equal insofar as there was no natural subordination of one individual to another. Essentially, no one person is naturally better than anyone else with regard to the wielding of political power.

Hobbes made it very clear that he believed that the state of nature was the state of war. However, Locke argued that the state of nature was not the state of war but it was actually peaceful because people must abide by the law of nature, reason, which first of all dictates self-preservation (Macpherson 1980, 15). Ultimately, because people want to live and survive, they only fight when they are threatened. Because fighting is counterproductive to survival, men in the state of nature avoid conflict. However, although the state of nature is free, the state of nature is also full of fear. In the state of nature a strong person can use physical strength and force to subjugate a weaker person. The state of nature is dangerous, not efficient, and it is difficult to protect freedom and property. Because of this, Locke argued that people come together and enter into civil societies. People form a social contract by which they escape the state of nature and agree to give up some of their freedom for more security.

So, classical philosophers, such as Socrates, did not believe that people were intrinsically bad, as Machiavelli and Hobbes argued, or intrinsically good, as Locke argued. Instead, Socrates believed that people are good or bad depending on how they arrange their souls. By structuring one's soul properly, in which the rational part rules, a person will be virtuous. In contrast, if a person's soul is not arranged properly and his irrational soul rules, he will be bad.

The second wave consisted of Rousseau and Hegel. Both Rousseau and Hegel believed that freedom was important for the soul and that intrusions upon freedom were extremely harmful (Strauss 1988, 181). Here we see a significant difference between the first and second wave. The first wave consisting of the teachings of Machiavelli and Hobbes suggests that humans are wicked and that there is no hope in changing one's nature. As a result, the only way to maintain order is to control people with political institutions. In contrast, the second wave consisting of Rousseau and Hegel suggests that humans are generally good but that government in many ways acts to undermine personal freedom.

Rousseau, like Locke, argued that men were intrinsically good. He described men in the state of nature as relatively peaceful (Gourevitch 1997, 136). Like Locke, Rousseau argued that men in the state of nature only acted violently when their self-preservation was threatened. However, unlike Locke who believed men left the state of nature out of fear, Rousseau believed that men left the state of nature not out of fear, but through enlightenment and the development of language.

Because Hobbes and Machiavelli viewed people as being intrinsically wicked, they both promoted restrictive government. Machiavelli argued that a ruler could use whatever means necessary, virtue or vice, to maintain order. Hobbes argued that once people enter into civil societies and give up their own will to the will of the government, all opinions of what is good, just, and lawful is no longer up to the people, but up to the sovereign power. So, Hobbes did not believe that citizens should contemplate such things because it is not their duty, but solely the duty of those in power.

In contrast, because Locke and Rousseau believed that people were generally good, they advocated for freedom and warned against abusive and powerful government. John Locke did not believe in divine rule, or divine right, in which rulers were thought to get their power from God. Unlike Hobbes, who argued that when men enter into civil society they cannot question the authority of the sovereign power, Locke argued that if government fails to preserve individual freedom, then the people have the right to rebel against their sovereign power (Macpherson 1980, 80). He argued that because government is formed by the people through consent, the only legitimate form of government is a representative form of government. Locke's conviction of freedom is also evident from his belief in the separation of powers doctrine.

Rousseau argued that the origin of inequality was not from the state of nature, but from the creation of civil societies (Gourevitch 1997, 112). He argued that a man in nature is rugged and well equipped to handle the elements. He lives off the land

and knows nothing of excess. In contrast, civil man knows nothing of moderation, which leads him to be unhealthy. Because civil man lusts, and always seeks to fulfill his appetites, this creates inequality. In civil societies, men always want more than they need. Indulgence is not found in the state of nature, but is created by civil societies. In all, Rousseau explained that many of our ills are due to the excesses and passions of modern society. He stated that because there are only a few sources of illnesses in the state of nature, savage man is ultimately healthier than civil man. Furthermore, Rousseau argued that medicine does not make civil man any healthier, because in society, civil man inflicts upon himself more ills than medicine can provide remedies for.

Rousseau explained that his reasoning for emphasizing man's primitive condition is because it is necessary to understand the origins of inequality. He stated that there are natural inequalities that are found in nature, such as physical strength and ailments caused by old age, but that natural inequalities are not used for exploitation. Savage man uses his natural abilities for his own physical needs, not to maliciously exploit others. Rousseau argued that only until man becomes engulfed by societal pressures and becomes enlightened, does he begin to use his natural abilities at the expense of others. Essentially, he argued that natural inequalities increase as a result of civil inequality (Gourevitch 1997, 159). Civil man uses his natural abilities for his own personal advantage, which is usually at the expense of others.

In civil societies, man must create laws in order to keep in balance all of the ills that are created by the exploitation of natural inequality (Gourevitch 1997, 161). Laws in civil life are what keep order and peace. However, as civil life becomes more complex and integrated, more laws must be established to defend against the rapid increase of more ills. Thus, a specific chain of command is established. There are those that are in power who make the laws, those that ensure that the laws are upheld, and those that must abide by the laws or suffer dire consequences. Rousseau argued that civil man is less free than man in the state of nature because he is not in complete control of his life but is like a slave being dominated by his master.

As has been shown, modern political philosophers, such as Hobbes and Locke, and to some extent Rousseau, do not look at how one ought to live, but rather focus on how they believe people are, and then come up with arrangements they believe are beneficial. For Hobbes and Machiavelli, because they believed that people were intrinsically wicked, they promoted a restrictive form of government that has the ability to do whatever it needs to do to maintain order. In contrast, Locke and Rousseau, because they believed that people were intrinsically good, argued that government should not be as restrictive and that citizens should have certain freedoms. From this it is easy to see how contemporary thinkers differ significantly from classical thinkers. Socrates did not believe that people were intrinsically good or bad, but that people ultimately make this choice for themselves effectively through how they live. If a person allows the irrational part of his soul to control him then he

will become bad. If, on the other hand, a person uses reason, seeks to gain true knowledge, and allows his rational soul to flourish, then he will become good.

Lastly, Strauss argued that this philosophical chain of events ultimately leads to the third wave. The third wave consists of the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche argued that objective moral truth could not be proven to exist and that moral truth is nothing more than one's prejudices and assumptions (Strauss 1988, 224). Morality itself does not exist because objective moral truth does not exist. This wave gives rise to the philosophical doctrine of nihilism, the belief that existence is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value. Nihilists argue that there are no moral values with which to uphold a rule or logically prefer one action over another. For example, a moral nihilist would have to say that killing someone, for whatever reason, is not inherently right or wrong or good or bad, or that it is only bad in our eyes, given our culture or the time in which we live, but it is not simply wrong.

Unlike the classical philosophers that believed in objective moral truth, Nietzsche argued that objective moral truth could not be proven to exist. Nietzsche claimed that objective moral truth is nothing more than one's prejudices and assumptions (Kaufmann 1966, 13). Because we are driven by our Will to Power, people want their prejudices and assumptions to dominate all others so that their will becomes truth. He argued that the Will to Power is such a strong force that freewill does not even exist. Because our will commands us in a particular way, he argued



that our actions are under the influence of unconscious drives that compel us in certain directions.

Martin Heidegger argued that history, because it was a random process, did not provide humans with any universal principles that can guide human actions (Malcolmson 1996, 36). He argued that each period in history has its own truths, and because truths are only valid for people living in that particular period, the best people can do is to embrace the truths of their society. However, this is essentially the same thing as people being unable to escape their caves. By embracing morals, not because they are necessarily based on truth, but rather because they are accepted at that current time, is counterproductive to enlightenment. Instead, people must come out of their caves and attempt to investigate the world for themselves. More importantly, people must recognize that all judgments of value are not merely relative to history, but that moral truth can be gained.

As has been illustrated, classical philosophers spent their energy asking the questions of how one should live, how to make the best regime, and what the good life is. In the West today, the philosophical debate of how people should live, how the best regime can be created, and what the good life is, have in large part been neglected and a meaningful discussion of the fundamental questions has withered. The thought of modern thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Heidegger caused a significant change in the West and their thought prepared the way for the contemporary embrace of value relativism. Classical political philosophy remained open to an ongoing examination of the human soul and

its possibilities, believing that it could lead to authoritative guidance in how to live our lives. In contrast, the writings of some key modern political philosophers tend to close off this investigation by asserting that human nature is simply good or bad and cannot be transformed through education or at least habituation.

Strauss argued that the last wave of modernity which would further enhance a civilization's decline was nihilism. So, is the West heading toward nihilism? All evidence suggests that the West has indeed become more nihilistic. As was argued from the outset, the West does not even know what it values. The West no longer holds anything to be of intrinsic value, that is, it believes nothing can be defended rationally upon indisputable principles. Value relativism has caused Western values to no longer be authoritative. The belief that morals are merely in "the eye of the beholder," is dangerous because in essence, any action could be justified because morals could be said to be subjective and relative to an individual, society, or culture. One can certainly see the implications that this type of thinking would have on a society. No action could be confirmed as being moral or immoral or just or unjust because these are mere value judgments that are relative to certain individuals. Morality would no longer have significance, and as a result, people would no longer strive to be moral. Because there has been an erosion of the pursuit of objective moral truth, ideas of right and wrong and just and unjust have been clouded. What has resulted is nothing less than a decline in morality in the West. Things that were once strongly opposed because people believed them to be immoral are now being tolerated and accepted. If there are no moral truths, and all judgments of value are

subjective, then nothing becomes valuable which results in everything being equal, or having the same value. So in essence, any action, no matter how just or unjust, moral or immoral, is equal. This is why value relativism and the rejection of the possibility of objective moral truth are both extremely destructive to Western civilization.

## IV

### Decline of the West's Philosophical Spirit

#### *Decline of Regimes in the Republic*

When intellectual activity, especially philosophy, fades, creativity ends, stagnation within a culture arises, and the culture begins to die. The loss of a serious intellectual pursuit of the fundamental questions is a significant contributing factor to the West's decline. Value relativism and the rejection of the possibility of objective moral truth is an intellectual and philosophical mistake. The closing of minds is also what Socrates said would cause the decline of his city in speech. Socrates argued that his city, and corresponding perfect man, would inevitably decline and degenerate over time for this very reason (Bloom 1991, 223).

In the *Republic*, Socrates explained that there were four forms of injustice in the city and man, and five arrangements of the city and five corresponding arrangements of private men. First, there is an aristocracy, followed by a timocracy, then an oligarchy, a democracy, and finally a tyranny. Socrates argued that each of these regimes and corresponding man was worse than the previous regime and man. Specifically, he argued that an aristocracy would decline into a timocracy, a timocracy would decline into an oligarchy, an oligarchy would decline into a democracy, and a democracy would decline into a tyranny. These five regimes are meant to show the inevitable decline and degeneration through which the just city and just man will inevitably go.

Socrates' perfectly-just city is an aristocracy, the best regime for producing justice. In an aristocracy, the city is ruled by philosopher-kings that are the wisest and most public-spirited. They know what is best for the city and are best suited to rule. In the corresponding man, the aristocratic man is most wise and just. An aristocratic man is ruled by the rational part of his soul. His soul is in perfect harmony and arranged in such a way that his rational part rules over the spirited and appetitive parts.

Socrates argues that the aristocracy will eventually degenerate into a timocracy. In the city, the regime is ruled by men that love honor above everything else (Bloom 1991, 224). In the corresponding man, the timocrat is ruled by the spirited part of his soul. Socrates argues that a timocracy comes into being when the ruling class in an aristocracy changes. The guardians of the aristocracy will inevitably make mistakes in selecting their predecessors and will choose rulers that do not have the correct natures to rule. Essentially, the wrong types of people become rulers, which leads to the degeneration of the city.

Factions will also arise in the city. One group, the unworthy and unfit rulers, will want to change things by moving away from the traditions, customs, and values of the city (Bloom 1991, 225). They will want to change things so that the guardians can have wealth and private property. Those that are truly fit to rule and have the correct natures to rule do not want to change the existing order of things. They reject any changes and want to preserve the old way of life. After battling amongst each other, Socrates said that there will eventually be some type of agreement between the

two groups. To please the unworthy guardians, the worthy guardians decide to distribute land and houses to be held privately, and enslave the producers as serfs. They will occupy themselves with war and with guarding against the serfs. The guardians will still not do any farming, manual labor, or any other money-making venture. Socrates said that although they will desire money, the love of victory and honor will be their ultimate goal. Because of this, they will not select wise successors, but will rather choose those that who love war and are excellent at it. Ultimately, the wrong type of people with the wrong type of natures will enter into positions of power, which will essentially destroy the aristocracy.

Similarly, the aristocratic man will decline into a timocratic man. A timocratic man is ruled by the spirited part of his soul (Bloom 1991, 226). Socrates argues that such a man is produced when he is the son of a good aristocratic man, but that he is tainted by his mother and her servants. His mother complains, saying that they are not wealthy enough. She says that her husband is not courageous because if he was, he would use his natural abilities to pursue wealth and achieve fame. Essentially, she pulls the child towards loving money. The child ends up being somewhere in between: a haughty-minded man who loves honor above everything else.

Next, the timocracy degenerates into an oligarchy. In the city, the love for money grows so much that the ruling class is consumed with the desire for wealth (Bloom 1991, 228). A city with an oligarchic regime is one that loves money above everything else. In the corresponding man, an oligarch is one that is ruled by his

necessary appetites, which is derived from the desiring part of his soul. A timocracy declines into an oligarchy when the love of money grows and two groups arise in the city, those that are wealthy and those that are poor. In an oligarchy, only the rich have power in government and the poor have absolutely no voice in politics and are treated unfairly. Choosing who is going to rule the city is based solely on wealth. Socrates then goes on to list several mistakes of this regime. First, it is no longer ruled by anyone who is fit to rule. Second, the city has no unification; there are two groups, the wealthy and poor, who constantly battle each other. Lastly, the city can no longer defend itself because the rulers are afraid to arm the people in fear that the people will revolt against them.

Socrates argued that a timocratic man degenerates into an oligarch when he is a timocrat's son, and his father loses his wealth in some type of accident (Bloom 1991, 230). The son becomes fearful of losing money and of being poor. The child desires to overcome his poverty and uses all of his natural abilities to make money. His soul no longer cares for honor, but only cares for money. The appetitive part of his soul is in command. The only thing that keeps him somewhat restrained is that he loves money so much that he does not want to do anything that would cause him to lose it. He is not likely to break the law or do anything illegal because of the fear of being caught and having his money taken acts to restrain him. He puts on an outward façade of being a good person, but he is internally flawed. He is very stingy, and only cares about bettering himself.

An oligarchy then degenerates into a democracy. In the city, a democratic regime is one in which is ruled by unnecessary appetites (Bloom 1991, 223). In the corresponding man, the democratic man is ruled by the appetitive part of his soul, more so than in the oligarch. An oligarchy declines into a democracy when the love for money has grown out of control and it is all that the rulers of the city care about. There is a lending of money at high interest rates which makes most people very poor. Eventually, the poor revolt against the rich. After the revolt, the poor create a new constitution which is structured in such a way that all men have an equal voice in politics so that political corruption will not happen again in the future. However, Socrates argued that the problem with a democratic regime is that people who should have no business in politics have political power and these people make unwise decisions that adversely affect the city. Because everyone is equal, there are no roles that anyone must follow. Essentially, in a democratic regime, people have the freedom to become anything they want. Again, Socrates argued that this is not good because people begin to occupy roles for which they are not naturally suited to occupy which causes the city to decline further. Additionally, the principle of specialization is gone once the city has declined into a democracy. Everyone's role is mixed and no one class has a definitive function in the city.

Before explaining how a democracy arises in the individual man, Socrates first illustrates the difference between necessary and unnecessary desires. Necessary desires are those that human beings cannot train to overcome, or things that people need for survival, such as food, water, and shelter (Bloom 1991, 236). In contrast,



unnecessary desires are those that human beings can train to overcome, such as luxuries. The oligarch is ruled by necessary desires, but his son desires all the best things in life and all of its luxuries. When he gets older he has no sense of moderation. He is wasteful and shameless. He has no goal in life but to spend money and live a lavish lifestyle.

Lastly, a democracy will inevitably decline into a tyranny. In the city, the freest regime (democracy) degenerates into the most enslaving regime (tyranny) (Bloom 1991, 240). Tyranny in the city is one that is ruled by unlawful appetites. In the individual man, the tyrant is ruled by the appetitive part of his soul, even more so than the democratic man. A democracy declines into a tyranny because all of the city's focus and attention is on freedom. Because of freedom, unfit people have positions of power and they make poor decisions that have disastrous effects on the city. Ultimately, freedom is democracy's downfall. Freedom spreads to every facet of life and anarchy results. There are more and more drones in the city. The drones are like parasites because they are unproductive citizens; they take everything from the city but never give anything back. These drones blame the rich for all of the problems of the city and they advocate for change. Then, a man that promises change arises and becomes a voice and a leader of the drones. This leader attacks the wealthy and gives to the poor. He becomes loved by the people. He eventually gets into power and controls the army and becomes unstoppable. Because he is ruled by his appetitive soul and has unlimited power, he uses all of his resources for his own

personal gain. He must constantly make war so that the people are distracted from what he is really doing. By the end, the city no longer has a hint of justice left.

The tyrannical man is the son of a democratic man. His father indulges his unnecessary desires, but he is not lawless (Bloom 1991, 253). The democratic man had a father that was an oligarch, so he was reared with some type of restraint. He allowed himself to make money and become rich, but he did not gain money unlawfully. However, his son becomes unlawful because he is corrupted by the drones of the city. He becomes a man that is driven by unlawful appetites. The tyrannical man is consumed by his desires. He will do anything to get more wealth and more power. He is completely unlawful and unjust. His appetitive soul is in full command and it drives him to do unspeakable things. The tyrannical man is actually in agony. The soul of a tyrannical man is enslaved by his own desires and pleasures. He is driven to steal, hurt, and even kill to get what the lowest part his soul desires. The tyrannical man is in pain and is extremely unhappy because he is consumed with erotic desires.

Socrates explains that the highest good that an aristocracy can achieve is virtue, the highest good that a timocracy can achieve is honor, the highest good that an oligarchy can achieve is wealth, the highest good that a democracy can achieve is freedom, and finally, the highest good that a tyranny can achieve is erotic love and pleasure (Bloom 1991, 270). Socrates argued that an aristocratic regime and corresponding aristocratic man are best. The aristocratic regime is governed by

leaders that are ruled by their rational soul, use reason, and are just. The aristocratic man is also ruled by his rational soul and is most just.

Again, Socrates' city in speech should not be taken literally because Socrates said himself that it was highly unlikely that the city he created could ever come into being. Instead, the *Republic* should be viewed on a personal level, or as a guidebook on how one ought to live. For Socrates, the best way for a human being to live is by using the rational part of their soul and gaining knowledge of the world. A man ruled by the rational part of his soul is most wise and knows how to best live his life. He strives for true knowledge and attempts to answer the fundamental questions of mankind. He recognizes that virtues are real and unchanging, and understands that these things are meaningful and should guide his life.

However, as Socrates argued, in every regime, there is an inevitable and unavoidable loss of intellectual or philosophical activity. Instead of men using the rational part of their souls and seeking knowledge, they close their minds and increasingly seek bodily pleasures. They begin to be ruled by their spirits and then the appetitive part of their souls. Instead of investigating the fundamental questions of mankind and ideas about how one ought to live, they instead focus all their time on figuring out how to fulfill their inner desires. Instead of being lovers of wisdom, they become lovers of money, power, and pleasure. As a result, there is a loss of traditions, customs, and morality. The core principles that made the foundation of a culture are criticized, ignored, and ultimately rejected. Things that were once judged

to be immoral become accepted over time because there is a rejection of those things that once formed the foundation of the culture.

By embracing value relativism and rejecting the possibility of objective moral truth, the West has also gone through an intellectual and philosophical decline similar to the decline of regimes in the *Republic*. Again, the fundamental questions such as what is right and wrong and good and bad are not invalid. Moral judgments are not irrational or subjective because they can be the result of inductive reasoning. By not searching for the answers to these questions and by rejecting the possibility of objective moral truth, the West is losing a critical component of its character. As more and more people in the West embrace the notion that moral judgments are merely subjective, the attempt to answer the fundamental questions is taken far less seriously and as a result the principles that originally laid the foundations for the West are being lost. The increasingly dogmatic acceptance of the view that values are not based on rational grounds effectively undermines our confidence in the principles that have guided Western life since its birth and has caused a decline in morality in the West (Craig 1994, 329).

### *Nietzsche and Spengler's Examination of Culture and History*

In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler exhaustively investigated the origin, decline, and future of the European-American Western civilization. Spengler argued that unlike classical and Indian civilizations that were unhistorical, Egyptian and Western man is very historical (Spengler 1991, 7). For the classical civilizations,

that is, the civilizations that existed before Greece and Rome, history never became an intimate part of their soul and they lacked a historical feeling. In contrast, Egyptian and Western man is very historical. Egyptians mummified their dead and carved symbols and dates into stone, which all acted to preserve their history. Western man is the collector of antiquities, coins, and manuscripts. Western man is very historically sensitive, viewing the distant past and scanning the distant prospect, living in his time, yet essentially not of it. In the classical world, we see nothing of this sort. Spengler argued that present-day man is consumed by time.

Spengler also argued that by learning about different courses taken by other civilizations, one can better understand his own culture and identity (Spengler 1991, 11). Spengler, like Hegel before him, subscribed to historical relativism. Specifically, he believed that the insights of one era are not valid in another time or culture. The values of one culture at one certain point in time are not the same values of another culture of a different point in time. He argued that things are only relative to a time or culture and that there are no external truths because every truth is just the expression of a certain time in history. What may have been true at one point in time may not have any validity in another point in time. More importantly, Spengler believed that it was the duty of each man to see what men of other cultures have created. He argued that what is significant is not whether past thinkers' insights are relevant today, but whether they were exceptionally relevant to their own time.

Spengler rejected the Euro-centric view of history (Spengler 1991, 13). He saw all cultures and times as equally important in the development of history. He

argued that each culture has its own image, passions, life, and death. Each culture has its own ideas and expressions. Each culture rises, ripens, decays, and dies. He argued that the problem with Western thinkers is that they have a world-view of history, meaning that they only care about history that they consider relevant and important and do not look at other cultures outside of their own. He argued not only that Western man is a very historical being, but that he is absorbed with his own culture's history, his own life, and his own time. Spengler argued that in order to understand history truly, one must free oneself from the limitations of his own culture's ideas. One must look at other cultures, other ideas, and look outside of what their own society says is important. Because Spengler was a relativist, historical data, in his mind, was an expression of a certain time and culture relative to that culture and time. He believed that people must study history free from their own prepossessions. But he argued that Western man does not do this. Western man views history as one-sided, superficially, prejudiced, and limited. Spengler argued that contemporary Western man has been too conscious of the classical age of ancient Greece and Rome and is completely influenced by the past (Spengler 1991, 22).

Spengler argued that the decline of the West comprises nothing less than the problem of civilization (Spengler 1991, 24). He believed that civilization is the fulfillment and end of a culture. Whereas a culture is inward and growing, a civilization is outward and expanding. He saw civilization as the destiny of every culture. He argued that civilizations are what cultures become when they are no longer creative and growing. Spengler argued that because modern man does not

create anything new, but rather focuses on the past, this has caused the decline of the Western world. Spengler argued that the Greeks and Romans were imaginative and active, but as their creativity degenerated, they declined into the Roman civilization. Essentially, he believed that the Roman civilization was the erosion of Greek and Roman culture. He argued that by the end of the Roman culture, people only cared about money, entertainment, were unspiritual, no longer philosophical, did not come up with any new ideas, lost their artistic ability, became brutal and unjust, and faded into nothingness. Spengler argued that Rome's expansive tendency led to its decline. Although Rome conquered much of the known world and expanded their empire, because they were so outwardly focused, and not inwardly focused as cultures are, the empire began to decline into a civilization.

Spengler asserted that in his time, which was the early nineteenth century, Western man no longer exhibited a culture, but a civilization (Spengler 1991, 30). He argued that modern man does not create any new ideas, but rather looks back at past thinkers and critiques their thought. Spengler argued that the last form of philosophy that the West will encounter is skepticism, which he argued was not really philosophy at all.

Spengler thought that a culture is born in the moment when a great soul awakens and something new and creative blooms in the soil (Spengler 1991, 74). Each culture has its childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. Each culture is created when it has new ideas of religion, art, politics, social life, economy, etc. Each culture arises within a specific geographical area and is defined by its internal coherence of

style in terms of what it values. Spengler argued that there are phases of rise and decline of every culture. In the spring, there is grand intuition, powerful cultural creation awakens, the concept of god and religion is created, arts are born, and politics arise. In the summer, there is a maturing consciousness, urban cities evolve, critical thought develops, there is a reformation of religion, art expands, and differing political ideas come into being. In autumn, the culture is at its height. In the winter, the culture begins to die because nothing new is created. Creative thought devolves, religion is replaced with materialism, there is a decline of abstract thinking, art becomes meaningless and is only a subject of fashion, skepticism replaces truth, and the culture dies.

Spengler argued that every thought, faith, and value dies when the spirit of the culture is extinguished (Spengler 1991, 90). As the ideas that once formed the lifeblood of the culture are no longer expanded, and nothing new is created, the culture turns to skepticism. Spengler believed that the decline of a culture is marked by the transvaluation of all values of that particular culture. There is a reevaluation and questioning of the culture's religious beliefs and values and these things are eventually rejected altogether. Spengler argued that only at the end of a culture do ideas become questioned or denied.

Spengler argued that the Western soul has exhausted its inner possibilities. Whereas classical men investigated the world and created new ways of thinking, contemporary thinkers create nothing new because they are only focused on critiquing past thought. Because the West stopped creating, it turned to skepticism



which has resulted in the West denying the very things that gave birth to its culture. Although Spengler took the position of a historical relativist, he did illustrate the importance of belief in absolute truths to a culture. The birth of a culture is achieved when new ideas of values, religion, and language are created. At the birth of every culture, there is a general belief in objective moral truths. However, as time passes, the culture no longer expands on these truths but rather reexamines them and eventually denies them altogether. When a culture no longer creates, it begins to decline and deteriorate.

Many of Spengler's ideas are derived from Nietzsche's critique of modernity and in particular his examination of culture and history. In "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," Nietzsche also illustrates the problem of history and what happens when a culture loses its cultural creativity. Nietzsche's main argument is that there can exist an excess of historical education that is counterproductive to life and culture. Unlike animals that live in the moment and do not think of the past, men cling to history (Breazeale 2007, 60). Although a man has the ability to forget the past at certain times, the past is always with him and will inevitably come back to his awareness. Nietzsche argued that the ability to forget the past is conducive to happiness. Because animals live unhistorically, insofar as they do not think of the past, they live in a type of ignorant bliss. Unlike animals that do not have the capability to be historical, man is an historical being. However, man, through forgetting, can be unhistorical at times. When one forgets, he is at that time living unhistorically.

Nietzsche argued that forgetting is essential to action (Breazeale 2007, 62). If one is always thinking of the past, he can never do any type of action. Nietzsche argued that the historical and unhistorical are equally necessary for the health of an individual and of a culture. One must be able to forget at the right time and one must also be able to remember at the right time. If one clings too tightly to the past, he will never be able to let go of the past and cannot do anything to enhance the present and future. In contrast, if one is completely unhistorical, history would have not taught him anything, which is equally bad.

Being historical has its benefits. By being historical one reflects, compares, distinguishes, and draws conclusions. However, Nietzsche argued that too much history is bad (Breazeale 2007, 62). He argued that the Germans of his day were so consumed with history that they lacked a culture of their own. He argued that modern man drags around with him all sorts of knowledge of the past and does nothing for the present or future. Because modern man clings to the past, he never creates anything new. Nietzsche argued that every historical event has taken place during times of being unhistorical because people can only act when they stop thinking. When man forgets the past, he becomes creative. The problem is that modern man's obsession with historical education has led to a decline of life and culture in the present. When people are young they are creative and act on their ideas and beliefs. However, through historical education, people lose faith in their ideas and action is suppressed. The ideas and beliefs of the past replace the creative new ideas and beliefs of

contemporary man. Western man no longer thinks on his own, but is completely inundated with the ideas and beliefs of those in the past.

Nietzsche argued that one should not be completely unhistorical or completely historical, but should rather be suprahistorical (Breazeale 2007, 66). Again, the completely unhistorical person ignores history altogether and is not able to derive some of the benefits that history provides. In contrast, the completely historical person is always thinking of the past and never acts on his own. He delves deeply into the study of history but can never act because he is too absorbed with the past. He reflects on the great civilizations of the past and realizes that great people with great minds once existed. Many of these people want to preserve and protect the past so they reject any new ideas. They have a tendency to believe that greatness already existed in the past and cannot possibly exist again. The problem with this belief is that they do not attempt to pursue new greatness that would benefit their present culture. Anything new and evolving is rejected and persecuted. They are so focused on history that they do nothing to generate anything new that may benefit society. They serve the past but do not serve the present and this paralyzes greatness. It hinders any attempt to try something new. Because they have resentment for the present, they are counterproductive to life and culture.

The suprahistorical man is different from the completely historical and completely unhistorical man. Nietzsche argued that a suprahistorical man has the ability to recognize when historical reflection must end and unhistorical action must take place (Breazeale 2007, 67). The suprahistorical man studies the past but knows

when to act. These people study the historical events that will enable them to improve the present and future. They employ history for the purpose of life.

Nietzsche argued that present-day men of action can use history to look back on past men of action and gain insight and inspiration from them. This helps them become stronger and leads to greatness. By using history wisely and gaining insight from previous great men of action, this helps current men of action to act and produce new history. By studying great men of the past, Nietzsche argued that it would encourage the great men of the present to act.

For Nietzsche, the task of the new age is to understand that history must itself resolve the problem of history. Instead of clinging to history and believing that the best has already come and gone, mankind must rather have awareness of the present and realize that greatness can still be achieved (Breazeale 2007, 71). Things that are new and original must not be hindered by history but should be promoted by it. One must look at the past and judge and interrogate it. We must look to great men of the past for strength, and in turn, know when to stop studying history and actually act on our own to make our present and future better. He argued that modern men may have knowledge of culture, but do not have a culture of their own, just a knowledge of past customs, arts, philosophies, religions, and discoveries. He argued that it should be the task of the great men of today to rise above the mediocrity, to believe in themselves, to stop being mere spectators, and ultimately to honor the present and attempt to make it better.

What can be taken from Nietzsche and Spengler in this regard, is that intellectual or philosophical activity is vital for the survival of a culture. When a culture loses its philosophical spirit it begins to decline. The rejection of the possibility of objective moral truth and the wide acceptance of value relativism is evidence that the West's philosophical spirit has indeed declined. The pursuit of objective moral truth, the fundamental questions, the very things that touch the very core of our being and has guided Western life since its creation are being rejected. One could argue that the West is now showing symptoms of being in Strauss' third wave, or what Spengler said would comprise of a culture's winter phase. The West has a very difficult time identifying what it now values. Principles that have been present since the birth of Western civilization and gave the West its identity, such as justice for example, have eroded and taken on less significance due to value relativism, which has caused morality in the West to decline.

### *Historical Comparison to the Fall of Rome*

One can see the effect of losing one's cultural identity and philosophical activity had on Rome. At its peak, the Roman Empire was a massive entity. The Romans had conquered much of the world and had spread their arts and language to the far reaches of the known world. Rome was the most civilized nation and it had a sense of public magnificence. The principles of social life, laws, agriculture, and science which had their roots in Athens, were flourishing in Rome. Its emperors were more or less virtuous and ruled their empire well. The Roman army was the most

powerful military in the world, its soldiers skillfully trained, well disciplined, and courageous. Its citizens had a sense of national honor, civic virtue, dignity, patriotism, and a love for the motherland (Gibbon 1998, 41).

Gibbon argued that 96 AD to 180 AD was a time in which Rome was most prosperous. During this era, Rome was ruled by Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. This was a time of peace, happiness, and success. Rome was governed by absolute power, but under the guidance of the wisdom and virtue of its virtuous rulers (Gibbon 1998, 81). This was a time of moderate rulers and moderate policies and its citizens had a lot of freedom. However, after the death of Marcus Antonine, Rome began to decay. Specifically, Gibbon argued that the virtuous rule of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines was followed by the rule of oppressive and tyrannical successors, which led to Rome's fall. As Rome's public figures became corrupt, so too did the people. The fire of genius was extinguished and the military spirit evaporated. National honor became lost, patriotism declined, and there was no longer a sense of danger. The science of physics and astronomy which gained momentum and flourished began to decline. Philosophical activity faded and there were no new great discoveries (Gibbon 1998, 83).

Gibbon argued that Marcus Antonine, when naming his son Commodus as his successor, marked the start of the Empire's decline (Gibbon 1998, 74). This was the first time that a son had succeeded his father since Titus in 79 AD. Commodus was a cruel ruler. There was a conspiracy in which a senator sent an assassin to kill Commodus. The assassination was unsuccessful and it left Commodus hating and

fearing the senate. While Commodus enjoyed his luxurious lifestyle, his people were faced with poverty, famine, and disease. Commodus knew nothing of moderation and indulged in all of his appetites. The Roman people began to hate the emperor and civil war erupted. Commodus was eventually executed in his drunken sleep.

After Commodus' death, Rome faced a series of bad rulers (Gibbon 1998, 83). The emperors and senate members that followed Marcus Antonine were unjust, deceitful, and corrupt. There was a strain of nonstop conspiracies by emperors to kill senators, and senators conspiring to kill emperors. Emperors paid little attention to their people's concerns and only cared about spending extraordinary amounts of money to pay for their lavish lifestyle, which included the building of massive monuments. To pay for the extravagant lifestyle of the Roman public figures, citizens were taxed excessively. Bad ruler after bad ruler plagued Rome. Corruption, conspiracy, and fighting over who should rule led to Rome's demise.

After the death of Severus Alexander in 235 AD, there was nearly 50 years of disorder, civil wars, economic chaos, regional rebellions, and various external threats (Gibbon 1998, 131). The long wave of bad rulers left Rome in turmoil. Its economy was falling, its strength slipping, and far reaching provinces were left exposed to the barbarian invaders. By 260 AD, the population of Rome had been significantly reduced by invasions, rebellions, famine, and plague. During Rome's near collapse between 235 and 284, Rome was ruled by 20 to 25 emperors, most of which were unjust and left the empire in turmoil.

During this time, Roman religion also began to lose its luster. The successive wave of bad rulers led to a disregard for Roman religious traditions (Gibbon 1998, 122). The Romans, who were traditionally polytheists, began to become influenced by the monotheistic religion of Christianity. By 280, polytheism mythology faded and Christianity rose to prominence. Christians, who were once persecuted, began to be tolerated by Roman emperors. Because these bad rulers only cared about money, instead of preserving their traditional religion and keeping Christianity from rising, they instead allowed Christian churches to be erected and forced these churches to pay taxes.

In many regards, Gibbon argued that Christianity contributed to Rome's decline and fall. Ultimately, Gibbon believed that Christianity replaced the need for philosophy. He argued that prior to the rise and acceptance of Christianity in Rome, Roman life was primarily influenced by the teachings of the classical philosophers, and this became an essential character of Roman culture. However, Christianity fundamentally changed Roman culture because as Gibbon argued, it acted to undermine reason. Christianity represented a challenge to reason because religion itself relies heavily upon faith. The teachings of Christianity spoke of Jesus healing the sick miraculously, making the crippled walk and the blind see, and said that Jesus himself rose from the dead.

In addition, there became less of a concern with the here and now and more focus on the rewards of heaven in the afterlife. Gibbon argued that Christianity acted to set back progress. The Romans became pacifists, not wanting to go to war with



those that were hostile and posed a threat. He argued that Christianity sapped the fighting spirit out of Rome. Furthermore, fraud, envy, malice, abuse of power, and corruption became rampant in the church, just as it was in the Roman senate (Gibbon 1998, 338). Christianity became a powerful force in Rome and Constantine became the first Christian Roman Emperor in 306. Gibbon argued that Christianity, the religion of peace, would come to be the religion of war, massacre, and corruption.

While Rome became more and more weak, the Persians gained strength and were able to take back some of their land (Gibbon 1998, 487). The empire was being invaded by the Goths, and there no longer existed a heavily armed Roman infantry to withstand the barbarian cavalry. Rome lost several wars and was invaded several times as the empire crumbled. The Western Roman Empire met its end in 476; the Eastern Roman empire met its end in 1453. Rome was dealt a major blow from the Persian invasions of the east in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, immediately followed by Muslim conquests. Much of the rest of the western provinces were conquered by waves of Germanic invasions.

Although Gibbon argued that Christianity played a major role in Rome's decline, he also blamed the decline on the loss of civic virtue among Roman citizens. Because Roman rule had expanded to the vast reaches of the world, it relied on barbarian mercenaries to defend the Empire. These barbarians did not embrace Roman culture and eventually turned against Rome. Citizens, like rulers, lost their virtue, as well as their sense of identity, tradition, and culture. The prosperity of Rome also led to its decline. Citizens became weak, materialistic, and self-interested.

Justice, wisdom, and virtue all seemed to fade away. Emperors and senators lived extravagant lifestyles and indulged in all of their inner desires as their people suffered. Furthermore, their example provided a model for the masses without a strong countervailing constraint.

Like Rome, the West's philosophical spirit has been largely evaporated, as exemplified by the West's embrace of value relativism and its overall rejection of the possibility of objective moral truth. In addition, like Rome, the West has experienced a decline in morality. In the West, there has been an increase in antisocial behavior including crime, drug use, and violence (Huntington 2003, 303). There has also been family decay as illustrated by increased rates of divorce, illegitimacy, teenage pregnancy, and single parent families. Decline in social capital is also obvious as membership in voluntary associations have decreased. There has also been a general weakening of work ethic and a decreasing commitment to learning and intellectual activity manifested in the United States by lower levels of scholastic achievement. Corruption and scandals in government appear to be routine. Things that were once considered to be immoral are now being tolerated, accepted, and protected by law.

## Conclusion

The West was once a place that believed in the possibility of discovering and living by universally true principles. The classical political philosophers of ancient Greece sought to answer the fundamental questions of mankind. Plato and Aristotle philosophized about how people should live, what the good life is, and what virtue is. They made judgments about right and wrong and good and bad. However, modern political philosophy has transformed into something fundamentally different. Instead of looking to what human beings ought to be, how we should live, and what justice is, modern intellectuals have for the most part rejected the possibility of objective moral truth and disregard these fundamental questions altogether. For them, such questions are meaningless because they believe no truth can be gained from such inquiry. Specifically, modern thinkers argue that these things are purely subjective value judgments and relative to a person, a culture, or history. Furthermore, as has been illustrated, the thought of modern thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Heidegger was significantly different from the thought of classical philosophers and caused a fundamental change in thinking which prepared the way for the contemporary embrace of value relativism. Again, classical political philosophy remained open to an ongoing examination of the human soul and its possibilities, believing that it could lead to authoritative guidance in how to live our lives. In contrast, the writings of some key modern political philosophers tended to close off this investigation by asserting that human nature is simply good or bad and cannot be transformed through education or at least habituation.

Again, value relativism holds that there are no universally true answers to the great questions of mankind and that there is no natural order to the world that can be discovered by human reason to provide a model for human existence. The idea that there is no good, no evil, no noble, no base, no virtue, no justice, and ultimately, no truth about anything that is fundamentally important has led to the decline of Western Civilization. The reason why relativism is so destructive is because it robs people of any real sense of purpose in life.

The truth of the matter is that answers to life's fundamental questions are a result of inductive reasoning because people make conclusions based on relevant evidence and experience. Moral judgments are not merely subjective, unconnected to facts, or irrational, but they are important things in which knowledge can be gained. On questions of such things as justice, a variety of evidence can be looked at, there are certainly patterns that exist, and people can make rational decisions. In addition, there are certainly "objective" grounds for rationally preferring virtuous qualities such as justice and courage, over qualities such as injustice and cowardice.

By embracing moral relativism the West has essentially lost its moral strength. Because moral truth has been eroding, and judgments of value are now largely viewed as being primarily subjective, things that were once strongly opposed because they were considered immoral are now being tolerated and accepted. When there is no longer a moral standard in which to guide life, people become immoral.

The wide acceptance of relativism has caused the Western intellectual spirit to evaporate as well. The ancient philosophers believed that although extremely

difficult, true knowledge of the fundamental questions of mankind could be gained. But again, it is not so much knowledge of the absolute standards of right and wrong, but rather knowledge of what the fundamental questions are—which ones they are and why they are so important. It is the pursuit of answers to these questions that has been part of the essential character of the West. The philosophical debate of the fundamental questions has withered, however, and the West for the most part no longer believes that a discussion on such matters is meaningful.

For Socrates, the best way for a human being to live is by using his rational soul, using reason, and gaining knowledge of the world. A man ruled by his rational soul is most wise and knows how to best live his life. He strives for true knowledge and attempts to answer the fundamental questions of mankind. He recognizes that virtues are real and unchanging, and understands that these things are meaningful and should guide his life. However, as Socrates argued, in every culture, there is an inevitable and unavoidable loss of intellectualism. Instead of men using the rational part of their souls and seeking knowledge, there is a natural tendency to close their minds and seek bodily pleasures. They begin to be ruled by the appetitive part of their souls and instead of investigating the fundamental questions of mankind and ideas about how one ought to live, they instead focus all their time on figuring out how to fulfill their inner desires. Instead of being lovers of wisdom, they become lovers of money, power, and pleasure. As has been shown, the loss of intellectual activity and the closing of minds is what essentially caused the decline of not only Socrates' imaginary city, but of the Roman Empire and now of the West as well.

In addition to relativism causing moral decay, it has also acted to weaken the West's cultural identity. The West was once a place that believed in certain values, morals, ethics, and principles. These things acted to give the West its identity, a sense of purpose, and guided its people. As the core principles of the West degenerate, Westerners no longer know who they are or what they should fight for which acts to undermine the preservation of the West. Enemies of the West are not confused about who they are or what they believe in. Non-Westerners have a clear sense of cultural identity, know what they believe in, are willing to die for what they believe in, and are gaining momentum both economically and militarily.

If Western civilization is going to be saved, it must find a way to restore its identity by returning to its core values and beliefs. The negative effects that value relativism has caused must be reversed. The biggest threat to Western civilization is the West itself. Westerners must wake up and realize what is at stake before it's too late. We certainly have the means to do what it takes to preserve and defend Western culture and civilization, but the question is, do we have the will?

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