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To cite this article: Gregory Morgan Swer (2019): Longing, Dread and Care: Spengler's Account of the Existential Structure of Human Experience, Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, DOI: [10.1080/00071773.2019.1633613](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2019.1633613)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2019.1633613>



Published online: 22 Jun 2019.



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ESSAY



Longing, Dread and Care: Spengler's Account of the Existential Structure of Human Experience

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ABSTRACT

In *The Decline of the West* Spengler puts forward a type of philosophical anthropology, an account of the structures of human experiential consciousness and a method of “physiognomic” analysis, which I argue has dimensions that can be understood as akin to existential phenomenology. Humanity, for Spengler, is witness to the creative flux of “Becoming” and constructs a world of phenomena bounded by death, underpinned by the two prime feelings of *dread* and *longing* and structured by the two forms of Destiny (Time) and Direction (Space). Human existence, Spengler argues, is future-directed and open in the sense that there is a certain degree of freedom in the ways in which humanity can actualize its existential possibilities. In the course of elaborating the existential implications of this future-orientation, Spengler introduces the concept of *care* (Sorge), the fundamental experiential structure.

KEYWORDS

Oswald Spengler; care; philosophical anthropology; existentialism; phenomenology

1. Introduction

Spengler is generally taken to have been a philosopher of history of sorts, or, to quote Toynbee, a “philosopher-hierophant”, who produced a highly speculative philosophical interpretation of world history. In *The Decline of the West* Spengler argues that world-history to date can be partitioned into the history of the growth and decline of eight (possibly nine) cultures.¹ Using a technique that Spengler terms comparative morphology, he claims to have discovered that the life-history of a culture is analogous to the life-history of an organism, and that, like organisms, all cultures have a natural lifespan and a series of developmental stages (birth, growth, maturity, death) through which they must pass.² So inevitable is the repetition of this pattern, that one who grasps the method of comparative morphology is able to determine in advance the future development of a culture-organism.

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¹ Spengler was somewhat undecided about the exact status of Russian culture. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, from here on referred to in the text as DW, followed by page numbers.

² It is debatable how literally Spengler wished the existence of his “culture-organisms” to be understood. Are cultures symbolically united and discrete periods of human history that can, for purposes of philosophical utility, be treated as if they were actually organisms, or are they to be taken as actually existing? Frye, on the other hand, thought that the distinction was of no importance for an appreciation of Spengler's thought. Frye, “The Decline of the West.”

Furthermore, despite the species of culture-organisms sharing certain structural similarities, they have no shared ancestor. Each culture for him is an independent development of spontaneous origin. Spengler thus dismisses the possibility of linear models of historical progress. He also denies the possibility of intercultural transmission. Cultures are “mutually incomprehensible. The members of one culture cannot understand the basic ideas of another, and when they think they are doing so, they are actually translating totally alien concepts into concepts they have developed on their own.”³ According to Spengler’s cultural isolation theory, culture is a “unified and largely autonomous phenomena.”⁴ Those seeking to discern the structure of history, the meaning behind the flux, must explore the internal development of a culture, not relations/interactions between cultures.

Each culture can be understood as a symbolic structure, erected around and dependent upon one master symbol, the Ur-symbol, from which all other culture-forms take their character. As each culture’s Ur-symbol is unique, the symbolic structure that it underpins is likewise unique. Consequently, the cultural forms of each culture-organism are peculiar to it alone, and are comprehensible only within the worldview of that particular culture. That said, each culture shares certain features with other cultures by virtue of their common organic nature. Each is structured by an Ur-symbol, of which all other symbolic forms are iterations, and each will inevitably pass through the various life-stages of the organism.⁵

What scholarly debate there is regarding Spengler’s philosophy tends to concern whether his philosophy of history is best understood as relativist or positivist in character. More specifically, whether Spengler argues that historical knowledge is necessarily perspectival and relative to a particular cultural worldview, or whether there are objective laws of historical development that can be empirically discerned and applied for predictive purposes.⁶

It is my intention in this paper to demonstrate that, despite *The Decline’s* typical classification as a work in the philosophy of history, the range of Spengler’s philosophical interests therein extended beyond the cyclical type of speculative philosophy of history with which he is associated. I hope to show that Spengler’s better-known historical views are but one aspect of a larger philosophical project. If one considers his analysis of the structures of human consciousness, one can see that much of his thought was pre-occupied with phenomenological and existential questions that go beyond the cyclical model of world-history for which he is best known.⁷

I argue that in this early work Spengler puts forward the outlines of a philosophical anthropology.⁸ By philosophical anthropology I refer to the intellectual movement that

³ Hughes 72–73.

⁴ Farrenkopf 41.

⁵ Spengler describes the Faustian Ur-symbol as movement through “pure and limitless space” (Spengler 183). In contrast to the prime symbols of other culture-organisms, the Faustian is singularly dynamic. Whilst other cultures, such as the Egyptian or Chinese, do have prime symbols that contain an idea of motion, they represent movement along a path between two fixed points. The Faustian, in contrast, represents endless movement towards the infinite. The Faustian Ur-symbol, along with its “derivatives”; Will, Force and Deed, give Faustian culture the dynamic trajectory that is inherent in its worldview and progressively expressed through its cultural forms (Spengler 337).

⁶ See Swer, “Timely Meditations?”

⁷ For an introduction see Hughes.

⁸ That Spengler has a philosophical anthropology has been argued before. See Farrenkopf, Kidd. However, this claim has been based upon the analysis of Spengler’s later philosophy, which bears scant resemblance to the theory of cultural cycles put forward in his early work and for which he is best known. I argue here that Spengler puts forward a philosophical anthropology in his *early* philosophy which has not hitherto been explored and which differs radically from that found in his later works.

blossomed in the 1920s and included such thinkers as Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner. Philosophical anthropology, broadly construed, was concerned with the analysis of the distinct conditions of existence of humanity as a species. Through the analysis of lived experience it sought to chart the ways in which humanity mediates its own nature, with particular emphasis on the capacities and limitations given by the social and natural environment, and the human capacity to transcend these limitations and create its own values. This movement drew upon sociology and the biological sciences in addition to hermeneutic, existential and phenomenological thought.⁹

Spengler's debt to the biological sciences, particularly the work of Goethe, has been well noted and yet the tendency to read Spengler as a biologically-inspired positivist ignores the extent to which his methods and concerns are proximate to those typically associated with existentialism and phenomenology.¹⁰ Spengler's work, I argue, represents a reaction against biologism, the effort to locate humanity within the deterministic biological order. His philosophical anthropology is intended to clarify those aspects of human existence that are peculiar to the human animal alone. In particular Spengler's philosophical anthropology grapples with what Fischer terms humanity's "double aspect", the radical incongruity between its experience of its own existence as a living subject and its ability to consider itself as just one material object amongst many.¹¹ This aspect of Spengler's thought, which I shall reconstruct in outline, has seldom been noted and has yet to be explored in any depth. However, it significantly alters our understanding of the nature and purpose of Spengler's philosophy. It suggests that the history of cultures, rather than being the purpose of Spengler's philosophy, might have been the medium for the application of his existential analysis. Viewing Spengler's philosophy in this way also allows one to consider his work in relation to other movements in twentieth century philosophy with which he is not typically associated. In this vein, this paper will detail the more phenomenological dimensions of Spengler's philosophical anthropology, namely his method of physiognomic "reduction" and his analysis of the life-world and its existential dimensions, namely the concept of *care* (*Sorge*) and its connection to futurity.

Spengler seeks to investigate the structures and conditions necessary for the possibility of human experience. In doing so he emphasizes the ways in which humanity reveals its world in a non-cognitive and non-theoretical way, through disclosure by feelings and moods. It is by virtue of these feelings, Spengler suggests, that humanity is able to have a world. In elaborating this account Spengler also considers the way in which these existential structures are related to the development of historical cultures, in that the culture-worlds both form and are formed by human activity. It is by means of this speculative anthropology that Spengler sets out the key existential features of his philosophical anthropology, the idea of basic existential structures grounded not in the ego but in concrete, historical forms of life, and the depiction of human existence as fundamentally structured by temporality, both in the modes of perception and of praxis. By grounding his account of these phenomenological features in the actuality of the history of cultures Spengler makes his account of the structures of human subjectivity central to his historical analysis.

⁹ See Rehberg.

¹⁰ On Spengler as a positivist see Gardiner or Collingwood, *The Idea of History*. On Spengler's debt to Goethe see Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, 59–61.

¹¹ Fischer views this as a typical feature of philosophical anthropology. Fischer 158.

Spengler's historicized "phenomenology" represents the attempt to introduce historical contingency into the analysis of consciousness and the structuring of the experiential world, with an emphasis on the foundations of consciousness in specific historical and practical contexts.¹² Spengler, it should be noted, at no point refers to his own work as phenomenological or indeed, makes any mention of phenomenology at all. He refers to his approach as "cultural morphology". Despite this, as will become apparent, the "physiognomic" methodology that Spengler's cultural morphology employs shares numerous features with other forms of the phenomenological method, as does Spengler's use of this method to analyse the structures of human experience. And Spengler's analysis of *care* indicates the ways in which temporality acts as an existential structure that mediates all other structures.

2. Spengler's Physiognomic Methodology

Spengler's cultural morphology provides an analysis of "world history", or "world-as-history" as he also calls it to emphasize its differentiation from the "world-as-nature", which he takes to be the dominant subject of philosophical analysis. He puts his cultural morphology forth as a necessary corrective to traditional forms of historico-philosophical analysis that, he argues, have uniformly taken their methods from the field of physics. Rather than meaningfully approach the phenomena of human historical existence with a desire to understand them as they are, "old-fashioned philosophy" (as Spengler calls it) imposes "connexions of cause and effect" and never stops to consider "the possibility of there being any other relation than this between the conscious human understanding and the world outside" (DW 7).¹³

To counter this Spengler suggests that we suspend these causal-mechanistic methodologies and their accompanying theoretical impositions. If, Spengler suggests, we cancel our pre-existing belief commitments to the nature of the world (whether they be philosophical, scientific, etc.), then we can encounter worldly phenomena as they appear to us in a pre-cognized manner, with "*detachment* from the objects considered" (DW 93). Spengler states that

Reason, system and comprehension kill as they 'cognize.' That which is cognized becomes a rigid object, capable of measurement and subdivision. Intuitive vision, on the other hand, vivifies and incorporates the details in a living inwardly-felt unity. (DW 102)

Intuitive vision for Spengler is essentially descriptive, and resists the naturalizing urge to present the experience of an entity in a manner designed to facilitate its causal analysis. Rather it enables one to encounter things in the world in the immediacy of the way in which they appear to us. He states that,

In opposition to all these arbitrary and narrow schemes, derived from tradition or personal choice, into which history is forced, I put forward the natural, the 'Copernican', form of the historical process which lies deep in the essence of that process and reveals itself only to an eye perfectly free from prepossessions. (DW 25)

Spengler's use of the word "natural" in this sentence refers to the world-around as it appears to us in and of itself, as opposed to within the systematising framework of the

¹² Gier states that in Spengler's philosophy "we have a life-world phenomenology in everything but name" Gier 97.

¹³ This is a characteristically phenomenological complaint.

world-as-nature. Spengler states that, “Nature is the shape in which the man of higher Cultures synthesizes and interprets the immediate impressions of his senses” (DW 8). A natural view in this sense is one that presents itself to the viewer who has learned to suspend their theoretical prepossessions and employ intuitive vision. It is the world as it is immediately perceived. The above quotation also displays the way in which Spengler’s physiognomic method moves from the initial suspension of theoretical presumptions about the “nature” of the object of study, to a second level of analysis, dependent on the preceding level, in which he then seeks to move from the appearance of the object to the universal “essence”, the structures of (inter)subjective consciousness that “transcend” the object as it appears to us.¹⁴

The physiognomic method outlined above relates to Spengler cultural morphology and analysis of world-history as follows. In his historical study Spengler will hold in abeyance all standard historical notions (about linear cultural development, Western cultural superiority, the foundational influence of the thought of the Ancients, etc.), and philosophical theories (nature as governed by cause and effect, the *a priori* nature of geometry and arithmetic, etc.). And having done so, he will seek in the turmoil of the rise and fall of great cultures to uncover the structures, or “forms” as Spengler tends to call them, that underlie and enable both human experience *tout court* (including historical experience) and the existence and nature of cultural entities. As Spengler puts it, he intends “to explore carefully the inner structure of the organic units through and in which world-history fulfils itself, to separate the morphologically necessary from the accidental” (DW 105). Spengler’s “cultural morphology” can then be understood as the search for the basic, culture-specific, forms of world-history, or as Spengler (following Goethe) terms them - *Urphenomena*. Gier suggests that these forms operate in Spengler’s philosophy in a manner equivalent to that of the *eide* in Husserlian phenomenology, in that they represent essential structures that underpin the perception of individual objects within a culture-world.¹⁵

It is important to note that for Spengler these essences are located in the concrete existence of a particular culture. Spengler states that,

Infinitely more important than the answers are the *questions* - the choice of them, the inner form of them. For it is the *particular* way in which a macrocosm presents itself to the understanding man of a *particular* Culture that determines *a priori* the whole necessity of asking them, and the way in which they are asked. (DW 364)

In other words, it is the way in which the world appears to us as pre-given, as preceding all theoretical formulation, that is paramount. For, as Spengler suggests here, it is this cultural *a priori* that determines in advance the nature of any theoretical investigation of a culture-world. The essences that Spengler seeks to uncover with the second level of his physiognomic methodology are not cognitive structures located in the transcendental ego, as they are for Husserl, but are to be found in the material, historical world of a culture.

Having put out of play all naturalistic assumptions about the world, and with them all methods and theoretical assumptions of natural science, particularly causalism, Spengler attempts to access the essential structures of experience through immediate experience of

¹⁴ The term “universal” is meant to indicate that the essence is universal for all members of the particular culture that possesses that essence, rather than to indicate that the essence is universal in the sense of transcending the horizon of a culture-world.

¹⁵ Gier 96.

the phenomenal world. The world-historical truths that Spengler wishes to convey are not, on his account, to be divulged by such conventional means as proof and argumentation. Indeed, given his objection to the application of the methods of the natural sciences to human existence, world-historical truths could never be conveyed in such a way. Rather Spengler seeks to persuade the reader by leading them to truths that reveal themselves as such, to the appropriately attuned, with the flash of intuitive immediacy.

The structures of human experience that Spengler outlines here are to be directly intuited, ideas that upon concentrated self-reflection we discover that we knew already and which strike us now with the force of certainty. They are not to be “cognized, grasped, dissected in laws and equations and finally reduced to system” but “intuitively seen, inwardly experienced, grasped as a form or symbol and finally rendered in poetical and artistic conceptions” (DW 56). Herf captures the essence of Spengler’s outlook here, saying that for Spengler, “Conceptual understanding measures, divides, and thus ‘kills’ the object it comprehends, whereas intuition fills the perceived object with soul and feeling.”¹⁶ This anti-nomological trend in Spengler’s thought would clearly militate against any attempt at a positivistic analysis of history, and against a positivist interpretation of his own philosophy of history. It should also be noted how Spengler’s opposition to causal analysis and stress on intuition in historical investigation connect directly to his phenomenological outlook. Historical understanding, like any other form of understanding, requires that the object of study be permitted to appear as it appears to us. Thus, an experience must be encountered as an experience, rather than a fact, and the living as the living, rather than as a static object. It is intuitive apperception that enables the phenomenon to appear to us as it does, or did, in our lived experience. Conceptual understanding, on the other hand, would render the phenomena in its own terms. Intuition, for Spengler, enables direct contact with phenomenal reality, whilst conceptual understanding transforms as it translates.

In the course of his world-historical investigations Spengler identifies 8 distinct cultures (or culture-organisms, to use his terminology): The Indian, Classical, Egyptian, Chinese, Babylonian, Mexican, Arabian, Western/Faustian. Beneath and behind the diversity and transience of different cultural ideas, artifacts and activities, Spengler argues that one can detect a structural repetition in the forms and development of each culture, marked transitions in the style of thought and expression. And beneath and behind this repetition of cultural forms, Spengler locates his prime phenomenon, that of the cultural Ur-symbol. According to Spengler each culture, in its thought and action, in all its cultural expressions, is inextricably attached to a unique prime symbol. For the Classical it is “the near, strictly limited, self-contained Body”, for the Western “infinitely wide and infinitely profound three-dimensional Space”, for the Arabian “the world as a Cavern”, and so on (DW 174).

These prime symbols are the poles around which all that takes place in a culture revolves, they shape every human experience and every human expression. Spengler states that

the prime symbol does not actualise itself, it is operative through the form-sense of every man, every community, age and epoch and dictates the style of every life-expression. It is inherent in the form of the state, the religious myths and cults, the ethical ideals, the forms of painting and music and poetry, the fundamental notions of each science. (DW 175)

¹⁶ Herf 53.

It is the cultural essence that shapes all cultural forms and their contents. And thus, the history of these cultures for Spengler is “not a bewildering chaos of interacting causes and effects but the symbolic unfolding of a deeper metaphysical reality.”¹⁷

This “deeper metaphysical reality” that Farrenkopf refers to is, I suggest, Spengler’s cultural *a priori*. It is the pre-given form that enables the formation and historical development of a culture-world and that is expressed in all the culture’s activities, material and ideational. It is that which gives the history of each culture its cohesion and meaning. Note also that Spengler clearly indicates here that science is to be viewed as *fundamentally* contingent upon the cultural *a priori*, upon the pre-reflective and pre-scientific structure of the Ur-symbol.¹⁸

Spengler’s philosophy employs a methodology that he terms physiognomic. Spengler’s employment of this method is apparent *throughout* his philosophy, and can be detected in his analysis of any field of human activity, from mathematics to music. This method, I have suggested, has numerous similarities with phenomenology, both with regards to its operation and objective. Spengler’s physiognomic method has two stages. The first suspends prejudgments about the actuality of the world and its contents, and the second investigates the forms that structure our experience. Following Gier, I suggest that the first level of the physiognomic method is analogous to the Husserlian *epoché*, and the second to the phenomenological reduction.¹⁹ Spengler’s use of these phenomenological methods is, I argue, *fundamental* to his historical analysis of the essential forms of culture-organisms.²⁰ The dependence of his philosophical analysis of history on such methods also has clear implications for any attempt to portray his philosophy of history as positivistic.

3. Spengler’s Structures of Experiential Consciousness

It should be kept in mind throughout the account of Spengler’s philosophical anthropology given here that Spengler’s account is not meant to detail either a universal or necessary pattern of conscious development. The development of the structures of consciousness occurs, on Spengler’s account, in the formation of a culture. As each culture is structurally distinct from the other, there can be no universal pattern for the development of the structures of consciousness. Furthermore, the time and location at which cultures form are themselves entirely contingent. As Farrenkopf notes, for Spengler not only is the “rise of a given culture at a specific time and place ... more or less a random event. The very fact that human history transpires within a cultural framework, the emergence of the genus of culture itself, is accidental.”²¹

Spengler elaborates his conception of the Ur-symbol in those sections of *Decline* in which he sets out a type of phenomenological anthropology. Mankind, he claims, in a primitive (i.e. early cultural) state experiences itself as surrounded by a maze of

¹⁷ Farrenkopf 29–30.

¹⁸ For Spengler’s views on science see Swer, “The Decline of Western Science” and “Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics.”

¹⁹ Gier 95–96.

²⁰ One might object that Spengler’s philosophy lacks an account of the first-person structure of experience such as one typically finds in transcendental or existential phenomenology. Gier, however, has suggested that one can find in Spengler an anticipation of the body-ego of later phenomenology. Gier 97.

²¹ Farrenkopf 30.

(unstructured) impressions and the sensed alien forces (numen) that stand behind them. This gives rise to the prime feeling of what Spengler terms *world-fear*, an existential fear of the mysterious that lies beneath the world of appearance. Driven by this “world-fear” of the alien numen, humanity develops the means to name and number the contents of its perceptual field, by means of which the “mysterious is captured and made comprehensible” (DW 80). By doing so humanity learns to differentiate between the external sensory world and its affective inner life, and enters a stage of internal structural development that results in the formation of the inner world and the development of human consciousness.

Spengler puts forward a two-part model of human consciousness. Mankind is depicted as a conscious organism, whose waking consciousness (as opposed to a dreaming state) is always found to be marked by two “basic facts of consciousness” (DW 53). The first of these “facts” is *das Eigene*, and the second *das Fremde*, which Atkinson renders as *Proper* and *Alien* respectively. The “fact” or “element” that Spengler terms *alien* is always connected in some way to perception; “the outer world, the life of sensation” (DW 53). The *proper*, on the other hand, is always connected to feeling, “the inner life” (DW 53). Spengler, partly by way of explication of this relation, connects his proper/alien dyad to those of other philosophers, referring to “half-intuitive dichotomies such as ‘phenomena and things-in-themselves,’ ‘world-as-will and world-as-idea,’ ‘ego and non-ego’”, although he is quick to point out that “human powers of exact knowing are surely inadequate for the task” of articulating the relationship between these two aspects of consciousness (DW 53).

Note Spengler’s use of the term “half-intuitive” in connection to his list of philosophical renditions of the subject/object dichotomy as put forward by Kant, Schopenhauer and Fichte respectively. From the reference to Spengler’s concept of intuition, Spengler’s description of these dichotomies as half-intuitive suggests that these different philosophical schemes have *partially* captured the nature of consciousness. Or to be more accurate, they have partially captured how we experience consciousness. It is important to note that Spengler is making a point here about our immediate *experience* of consciousness. He makes no claim that this dichotomy between “ego and non-ego”, etc., or as he prefers to term it, between *proper* and *alien*, has *any* metaphysical grounding whatsoever. He observes that,

In all cases, though the atom of human-ness may be beyond the grasp of our powers of abstract conception, the very clear and definite *feeling* of this contrast - fundamental and diffused throughout consciousness - is the most elemental something that we reach. (DW 53)

In other words, the subject/object dichotomy is based upon a fundamental *feeling*, an affective disclosure of the reality of our lived experience as organized around two poles, not on some actually existing metaphysical division that can be cognized. Philosophical dichotomies such as those of Kant et al., Spengler implies, latch onto this fundamental feeling and in this sense accurately describe experiential reality. It is the further attribution of a metaphysical reality to this experiential division that Spengler objects to, and it is this that renders such accounts “half-intuitive”.²² Spengler’s portrayal of human consciousness as a polar duality that is in no way metaphysical, and the implied criticism of empiricist

²² This, I would argue, suggests that Spengler, possibly following Vaihinger, operates with a fictionalist interpretation of Kantian concepts such as the thing-in-itself. See Vaihinger.

and idealist conceptions of subject/object relations, finds echoes in the subsequent phenomenological philosophy of Ortega y Gasset, a qualified admirer of Spengler's *Decline*.²³

The two "basic facts" of *proper* and *alien* are in turn connected to two further fundamental aspects of human experiential consciousness, those of *soul* and *world*. *Soul*, in brief, represents "the possible" and *world*, "the actual" (DW 54). These two "facts", and their oppositional relationship, constitute for Spengler the "elementary structure of consciousness" (DW 54). One experiences reality in terms of an inner world, an "open", fluid world of potentiality, and an outer world, a "closed", fixed world of things-become. Human waking consciousness is, thus, always a "tension of contraries" (DW 54).

Spengler's account of our experience of the world clearly has a temporal dimension in that the inner world of *soul* is the experiential dimension of the possible precisely because it is future-directed and concerns what Spengler terms the becoming, the "not yet". The outer world designated by the term *world* is likewise temporal. It concerns the past, the completed, the fixed and is in this sense closed. In Spengler's account of *soul* and *world* we also see again his rejection of dualistic portrayals of existence. Spengler states that

This elementary structure of consciousness [of *soul* and *world*], as a fact of immediate inner knowledge, is not susceptible of conceptual subdivision. Nor, indeed, are the two factors distinguishable at all except verbally and more or less artificially, since they are always associated, always intertwined, and present themselves as a unit, a totality. The epistemological starting-point of the born idealist and the born realist alike, the assumption that soul is to world (or world to soul, as the case may be) as foundation is to building, as primary to derivative, as 'cause' to 'effect,' has no basis whatever in the pure fact of consciousness ... (DW 54)

Inner and outer, subject and object, are not concepts for Spengler, nor metaphysical entities, whose properties one might itemize. Rather in the "pure fact of consciousness" they appear as existential givens, basic structures always already present in a culture's form of life. Furthermore, they are never found in isolation. When one considers *soul*, or the possible, the *world* is already implied, and vice versa. As Spengler points out, any distinction between the two is an artificial or fictitious one.²⁴ When we consider the "inside" of human experience we find it always contains the "outer" in that it is always directed towards it, and when we consider the "outer" we find that our perception of it is always contingent upon its meaning for us. In this sense Spengler prefigures the Heideggerian notion of Dasein's Being-in-the-world always preceding the theoretical division of reality into subject and object. And Spengler's position here also implies a rejection of any notion of an "ego", transcendental or otherwise. Nowhere in our lived experience, Spengler suggests, do we find an ego that presents itself to us as separate from body or objects. Rather we encounter our *soul* or the *proper* through our engagement with the *world* and the *alien*. The ego too is a conceptual prejudgment that must be suspended in the physiognomic method of analysis.

Mankind's comprehension and ordering of the external world is further structured by two key forms of intuition, Time (Destiny) and Space. Space, at the outset of the ordering/demarcating of the extension-world, is the more important of the two. Spengler states that

²³ See for instance Ortega y Gasset.

²⁴ Farrenkopf claims, in contrast, that "central to Spengler's philosophy is the ... thesis that reality is dualistic." See Farrenkopf 23. I would argue that Spengler's statements on subject/object dichotomies explicitly rule out interpretations that attribute a metaphysical dualism to his philosophy.

A deep identity unites the awakening of the *soul*, its birth into clear existence in the name of a Culture, with the sudden realization of distance and time, the *birth of its outer world* through the symbol of extension, and thenceforth this symbol is and remains the *prime symbol* [Ur-symbol] of that life, imparting to it its specific style and the historical form in which it progressively actualizes its inward possibilities. From the specific directedness is derived the specific prime-symbol of extension ... (DW 174)

The type of space-symbol developed here, according to Spengler, conditions the subsequent development of experiential structures. Consequently, there are two forms in which phenomena now appear to human waking consciousness, as things-becoming or things-become, depending on whether their appearance has been structured by the form of Destiny or the form of Space. And these forms in turn evoke the two fundamental emotional responses (what Spengler calls prime feelings) to the phenomenal world, which Spengler terms *longing* and *dread*. Spengler writes that

As soon as the primitive's astonished eye perceives the dawning world of *ordered* extension, and the *significant* emerges in great outlines from the welter of mere impressions, and the irrevocable parting of the outer world from his proper, his inner, world gives form and direction to his waking life, there arises in the soul - instantly conscious of its loneliness - the root-feeling of *longing* (Sehnsucht). It is this that urges 'becoming' towards its goal, that motives the fulfilment and actualizing of every inward possibility, that unfolds the idea of individual being. (DW 78)

Longing, for Spengler, represents the yearning of the inner (*proper*) to overcome the schism from the outer (*alien*), and to restore its lost unity. It directs waking consciousness to the external expression of inner life and the realization of the internal in the external world. It is focussed on becoming, the aspect of human consciousness that is presently aware of the endlessly creative, ceaseless flux of reality, of "Life" as Spengler calls it, and through it Time/Destiny. The prime feeling of *longing* directs human consciousness towards praxis in the culture-world in which it finds itself. It is this fundamental *longing*, Spengler seems to suggest, that gives the "inner" world of humanity its ever-present intentional directedness towards the "outer".

However, this awareness of time/becoming directs humanity's attention to the end point of becoming, i.e. the thing-become, and reminds humanity of the inevitability of its own mortality. This calls forth the second of Spengler's prime feelings, that of *dread*. "As all becoming moves towards a having-become wherein it *ends*, so the prime feeling of becoming - the longing - touches the prime feeling of having-become, the dread" (DW 79). Human consciousness, focussed on the actualizing of the possible (the present and the future), is eventually obliged to confront the outcome, the actualized. "That which has happened is thenceforth counted with the become and not with the becoming, with the stiffened and not the living, and belongs beyond recall to the past" (DW 95). The present no longer involves just the accomplishing of the possible, but the awareness of "a trickling-away" and "a passing" (DW 79). At that moment where the proper gratifies its longing for the alien, mankind is simultaneously reminded of the inevitability of its own demise. Spengler states,

Here is the root of our eternal dread of the irrevocable, the attained, the final - our dread of mortality, of the world itself as a thing-become, where death is set as a frontier like birth - our dread in the moment when the possible is actualised, the life is inwardly fulfilled and consciousness stands at its *goal*. (DW 79)

It is this duality in the nature of time, which marks the present as both a moment of joyful creativity and a grim *memento mori*, which reaffirms life whilst simultaneously petrifying it, which provokes the fundamental human affective states of *longing* and *dread*. Spengler refers to this ambivalence between desire and fear as the “*enigma of Time*” (DW 79).

Time, with its terminal connotations, comes to be viewed as an *alien* power, a cause of world-fear, to be named and thereby contained. This dread of mortality drives the development and embrace of the timeless causal worldview of mathematical Nature, which seemingly exists outside the transience of the temporal. And yet this world-as-nature remains contingent upon the world of becoming (life), of boundless and infinitely fecund flux, which perpetually threatens to undermine efforts to contain it in the mechanical worldview of Nature. Spengler states that,

Becoming has no number. We can count, measure, dissect only the lifeless and so much of the living as can be dissociated from livingness. Pure becoming, pure life, is in this sense incapable of being bounded. It lies beyond the domain of cause and effect, law and measure. (DW 95)

In addition to this, the existential security provided by the world-of-nature is itself problematic. The atemporal, static realm of Nature is a lifeless, deathly place. It is an ontological graveyard, a terminal world of things-become, which as it shields one from, also reinforces, the feeling of existential *dread*. Relief from the feelings of *longing* and *dread* is achieved through the actualizing of soul, the “*symbolizing of extension*, of space or of things” (DW 80). The prime feelings, mediated by the culture’s understanding of Destiny/Time and the Spatial Ur-symbol, are sublimated into transformative activity in the world-around, and given expression.

4. Care

Spengler’s philosophical anthropological account of the formation of the structures of experiential consciousness lays emphasis on the role played by non-cognitive modes of experience, particular affective ones, in disclosing a world. In addition to the prime feelings of *longing* and *dread*, Spengler also introduces another affective mode of experience in a culture-world that he terms *Sorge*, or *care*. Spengler refers to *care* as “*das Urgefühl*”, the “prime feeling” that “dominates the physiognomy of Western, as also that of Egyptian and that of Chinese history.”²⁵ He gives as an instance of this feeling the Mary-cult in Faustian Christianity and its emblem, “the Mother with the Child - the future - at her breast” (DW 136). Spengler further states that “the meaning of the child to the mother is the future, the continuation, namely, of her own life, and mother-love is, as it were, a welding of two discontinuous individual existences ...” (DW 137). The prime feeling of the West, Spengler suggests, is a feeling of *care* towards the future.

The sense of the fusion of the mother, that symbolizes past and present, and the child, that symbolizes present and future, through *care* has echoes of the *longing* of the individual

²⁵ Spengler 136. Atkinson renders “*das Urgefühl der Sorge*” as “the primitive feeling of Care [italics removed].” I have taken rare issue here with Atkinson’s usually faultless translation as the translation of “*Urgefühl*” as “primitive feeling” in the context of Spengler’s phenomenological anthropology raises the possibility of it being misattributed to a specific early stage of cultural development, either as a feeling common to primitive mankind or as a not yet developed emotional state. Spengler’s use of the prefix “Ur” here suggests strongly that it should be understood in an ontological sense as fundamental or originary, in much the same way as it operates in his term for the prime phenomenon, the Ur-symbol.

to overcome the primordial division of experiential consciousness into inner and outer worlds. Spengler also seems to suggest here that the formation of community and state in the Faustian West spring from and express this feeling. However, what is of more significance in the context of the role of the affects in Spengler's phenomenological anthropology is the duality present in his idea of *care* and what *care* tells us about Faustian culture specifically.

The word *care* (*Sorge*) in German has several senses. The first is equivalent to the English sense of the word *care*, as in to take care of, to tend to. The second, as Atkinson notes, "includes a certain specific, *ad hoc* apprehension, that in English is expressed by 'concern' or 'fear'" (DW 136). This duality of meaning is expressed in Spengler's use of the term as well. On the one hand, we find what Spengler calls "an unsurpassably intense Will to the future" (DW 137). The inhabitant of Faustian (and the Egyptian and Chinese) culture is perpetually future-oriented in that the expression of Faustian existence lies in the actualizing (in the future) of ideational possibilities held in the present. In this sense *care*, in contrast to Spengler's description of the Classical Greek and Indian worlds as "a picture of utterly care-less submission to the moment and its incidents", is a desire for the future and a sense of continuous movement towards it (DW 137). It is, as Spengler says of Egyptian *care*, the sense that the world is not the present, but contains the past and the future at same time (DW 12).

On the other hand, we find what Spengler terms the "characteristic eye-to-the-future" (*vorausschauende Gestaltung*), or anticipatory planning. It is a cautious and anxious watching of the horizon (DW 137). Spengler sketches the experience of this feeling as one "of loneliness, of care [*Sorge*], of a present that is related to a past and a future, of destiny as the dispensation governing the universe from within" (DW 246). For Spengler, the essential sense of futurity present in those cultures that exhibit the prime feeling of *care* is inextricably connected to an intimation of mortality. To experience the world as a process moving from a remembered past to an open future, whose outlines are already pre-sketched and awaited, brings with it an awareness of as oneself as a process of becoming that will irrevocably terminate at some point in the future. To return to Spengler's emblem of the nursing mother, maternal care of a child indicates an investment in an imagined future whilst at the same time reminding one that it is a future in which one will no longer be. This, I suggest, is the reason behind Spengler's claim that

The living is *killed* by being introduced into space, for space is dead and makes dead. With birth is given death, with the fulfilment the end. Something dies within the woman when she conceives ... (DW 123)

To make the potential present in actuality reinforces a sense of finitude and the awareness that all things-becoming in a world will ultimately be things-become. Spengler's account of the present being experienced as containing both the past and the future has similarities with Husserl's concepts of retention and protention, although his notion of *care* places emphasis on the way in which this feeling discloses the world in this three-dimensionally temporal manner. The presence in each moment of that which is either no longer or not yet present is a continuous reminder of their absence. The absence of the past is revealed by *care* as anxiety about finitude, and the absence of the future as care about the realization of future projects. Both aspects of *care* indicate the way in which our experience of the world is constituted by an existential concern with oneself.

Care then is how we experience entities in the culture-world, both things and other people, and this feeling of *care* is made manifest in the ways in which we deal with those entities. Reflection on this feeling reveals the fundamental character or essence of Faustian humanity as structured in a similar way, as suspended in every moment between the actuality of the has-become and the potentiality of the not-yet-become, and thus as essentially temporal. When Spengler introduces the affective disclosure of the world through the prime feelings of *longing* and *dread*, which are themselves aspects of *care*, in his philosophical anthropology he gives the impression that he is giving an account of structures of experience that are, if not universal, then at least common features of all cultures. However, I would suggest that Spengler's feeling of *care* can *only* apply to cultures like the Faustian. Spengler admits as much by limiting his discussion of *care* to three specific cultures. *Care* is a feeling that is only possible for a form of life that understands itself in temporal terms. Consequently, cultures that Spengler describes as a-historic, like the Indian and the Apollinian, could never feel the peril of historicity or know concern for futurity. I argue that, in that it is founded upon the feeling of *care*, Spengler's anthropological exploration of the genesis of the structures of experience should be understood as applying solely to Faustian culture. *Care*, in this case, is the prime feeling of the Faustian culture-world solely.²⁶

Spengler argues that the prime feeling of *care* is present in every aspect of Faustian culture. He once again expresses the nature and temporality of *care* through the emblem of the nursing mother. "[T]he nursing Mother points to the future", Spengler states, and also that, "care is the root-feeling of future, and all care is motherly" (DW 267). Pointing to the foundational priority of the feeling of *care* with regards to other experiential structures, he notes that, "all symbols of Time and Distance are also symbols of maternity" (DW 267). That is to say that all conceptions of time and space within Faustian culture express this root feeling of *care*, even those time and space conceptions of the natural sciences. This is possible because, for Spengler, *care* is the fundamental structure of Faustian culture's form of life and all Faustian symbolic constructions are ultimately contingent upon it whether one is cognizant of this relationship or not. Spengler asserts that, "care may be either affirmed or denied - one can live care-filled or care-free" (DW 267). One may be attentive to *care* and the existential dimensions of futurity and finitude, or one may be inattentive. "Similarly", Spengler states, "Time may be looked at in the light of eternity or in the light of the instant" (DW 267). Thus, even the sciences, for Spengler, express *care* even if they fail to recognize the fact or attend to it in a deficient or impoverished mode.

At a more general level, this possibility of different degrees of attentiveness to Faustian humanity's essential temporality has significant existential implications. *Care* is the prime feeling of Faustian culture, and acts as a pre-given existential structure. The possibility that exists of affirming or denying care, of living "care-filled or care-free" amounts to possessing an existential choice between living in a manner that acknowledges or denies Faustian humanity's essential temporality. It is a choice that Heidegger would characterize in *Being*

²⁶ My interpretation does appear to run contrary to Spengler's description of the Egyptian and Chinese cultures as cultures that exhibit *care*. However, I suggest, it is most unlikely that Spengler can have intended his description of these cultures to be historically or phenomenologically accurate given that they operate as fictional constructs in his world-history. His account of *care* in Faustian culture, however, is on my account to be understood as a phenomenologically accurate but culture-specific description.

and Time as between authentic and inauthentic. One affirms humanity's essential temporality, and with it death, the other denies it and hides from it by losing itself among the entities of the present. For Spengler, I shall argue, this choice between an authentic or inauthentic, or care-full or care-free, existence is central to his entire philosophical project. To live a care-full life is to choose to live in recognition of the existential possibilities and limitations of one's temporality, and to acknowledge that the choice of one's mode of existence must be an issue for it. To live a care-free life is to imagine that the present mode of existence represents the sum total of all possible modes of existence. Iggers in *The German Conception of History* locates Spengler in relation to other German historicist thinkers (such as Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger) that he terms "political Decisionists", those who held that values must arise from choices made freely within the bounds of concrete historical circumstances as opposed to rational ethics or impersonal norms.²⁷ If this is the case, then one may consider the choice between living authentically or inauthentically as *the* decision that Spengler's early philosophy is trying to address.²⁸

There is one further significant way in which humanity affectively discloses a culture-world that Spengler considers and he does so by means of his concept of the life-cycle of culture-organisms. Spengler claims that cultures pass through a "series of stages which must be traversed ... in an ordered and obligatory sequence" (DW 3). These stages, "youth, growth, maturity, decay" appear to correspond to various phases in the lifecycle of an organism (DW 26). Each stage when applied to cultures represents a certain stage in the development of the symbolic expression of the inhabitants of a culture. Though the description of the historical development of a culture in terms of organic stages is usually taken as an indication that Spengler was not being metaphorical when he suggested that cultures were like organisms, I propose an alternative interpretation.

Consider those sections of *Decline* where Spengler sketches the defining characteristics of each stage of a culture-organism. Early childhood, we are told, is "trembling" and "heavy with misgivings", "dim and confused, tentative" (DW 107). Youth has "restless courage", and is "self-forgetful" and "fervent" (DW 107, 206). Maturity is "more virile, austere, controlled, intense", "more assured" and "clearer". Also "deliberate, strict, measured, marvellous in its ease and self-confidence" (DW 107). Late maturity is "tender to the point of fragility, fragrant with the sweetness of later October days" and also "self-conscious" (DW 108, 206). It exhibits "sensitive longing and *presentiment of the end*. A perfectly clear intellect, joyous urbanity, the sorrow of a parting ..." (DW 207). Senescence is "weary, reluctant, cold" and has lost "its desire to be". It exhibits "semi-earnestness and doubtful genuineness" (DW 207).

Whenever Spengler describes the stages of cultural development he employs similar terms. The point here is that for all Spengler's occasional talk of the life-stages of a culture as "objective descriptions of organic states", which smacks of the biological scientism that so irked Collingwood, what he provides is in effect a phenomenological description of the life-feeling of a culture.²⁹ Youth, maturity, etc. are temporally successive developments in a culture's experience of *care*. Youth is confident and future-focussed,

²⁷ Iggers 243, 245.

²⁸ See Swer, "The Revolt Against Reason."

²⁹ Collingwood, "Oswald Spengler," 318-19.

and careless of its past. Senescence is fearful of the future, and dwells mournfully on the past. These are all ways, I argue, that we emotionally disclose our culture-world and our own temporality. As a result, I suggest, we should interpret Spengler's idea of the stages of the culture-organism not literally, as a necessary stage in the biological development of a collective organism, but phenomenologically, as modes of *care*. In other words, the life-stages of Spengler's culture-organism should not be understood quasi-scientifically as fixed stages in the biological development of a "super"-organism but rather should be understood as different modes of experience within Spengler's phenomenology of historical consciousness.³⁰

5. Conclusion

Though typically categorized as philosophy of history, I suggest that *The Decline of the West* should rather be considered as a work in philosophical anthropology. Throughout this work Spengler explores the structure and origins of human experiential consciousness, and the ways in which this consciousness constructs and interprets a world. The manner in which Spengler addresses these matters, and the conclusions he arrives at are, I argue, best understood as being phenomenological in character. That is to say, his philosophy focuses on the way in which humanity directly intuits and experiences the world, and seeks the structures that underlie such experience. It examines the way in which the world of perception both precedes and acts as a necessary precondition for the scientific conception of the world. It also argues that the conditions that make possible human experience are themselves variable and historically contingent.

The reason for this is that Spengler holds that not only does perceptual reality conform to human ideational structures, but that those structures are themselves rooted in a historically-specific cultural world. The forms of thought that structure experiential consciousness are neither unchanging nor found within the conscious subject, but are rather inter-subjective in nature and derive from particular forms of life and forms of language. Foremost amongst such forms is the cultural *a. priori* that Spengler terms the Ur-symbol. The Ur-symbol operates as a formal condition for the possibility of knowledge in that it determines the meaning of objects for the inhabitants of a cultural world, and is itself beyond validation or negation by those inhabitants. It is in this sense *necessary* for experiential consciousness whilst at the same time being, by virtue of its variation from culture to culture, historically *contingent*.

Spengler rejects a subject/object dualism and insists upon the unity of human consciousness with external reality. On Spengler's account, conscious thought is always

³⁰ Spengler's use of the concept of *care* as an existential structure that reveals the essential temporality of human existence is rather peculiar. His closest philosophical predecessors to employ the concept were Goethe and Kierkegaard. And yet for Goethe *care* denotes a solicitous concern with other individuals and political institutions, whilst for Kierkegaard it represents a subjective commitment to responsibility in moral action. There are elements of these positions in Spengler's use of concept, and yet the understanding of *care* as the fundamental existential structure and its connotations of finitude and futurity appear his own. Spengler's concept of *care*, at a superficial level, does appear to have similarities with that of Heidegger. For both philosophers *care* indicates that our fundamental way of relating to the world is not cognitive. And for both philosophers *care* reveals the essential temporality of human existence, and the way in which we disclose other entities and ourselves. Spengler's related concepts of *longing* and *dread* have affinities with certain Heideggerian concepts such as those of futurity and Being-towards-death. However, Spengler's (1918) *Decline of the West* precedes Heidegger's (1927) *Being and Time* by almost a decade and thus it is unlikely that Spengler could have derived his ideas from Heidegger. See Reich.

directed outwards (*longing*) towards an entity whose meaning is always already given by virtue of its relation to other entities within a particular culture. The sum total of these relations constitutes a world. Consequently, the meaning of any cultural entity, material or ideational, can only be grasped by means of an interpretative act whereby the entity is understood symbolically within its own world, that is its specific historico-cultural context. Thus, Spengler's phenomenological outlook is akin to a lifeworld phenomenology in the sense that it seeks the structures of consciousness in the forms of concrete historical existence.³¹

A reconstruction of what I have termed Spengler's philosophical anthropology must also take note of the more *existentialist* aspects of his outlook. Humanity, for Spengler, is witness to the creative flux of "Becoming" and constructs a world of phenomena bounded by death, underpinned by the two prime feelings of *dread* and *longing* and structured by the two forms of intuition of Destiny (Time) and Direction (Space). Human existence, for Spengler, is future-directed and open in the sense that there is a certain degree of freedom in the ways in which humanity can actualize its existential possibilities. However, for Spengler, human existence is a movement along a path at either end of which lies a confrontation with death and the inevitability of its own existential negation. Human consciousness within a culture-world begins, according to Spengler, with an existential confrontation with the danger of non-existence.

Spengler's account of the development of the experiential structures of human existence points to a duality in the nature of Time, between the becoming and the things-become. This duality evokes the two fundamental affective states of *longing* and *dread*, which in turn are aspects of the feeling of *care*. Reflection upon *care* reveals the temporality at the centre of human existence, and the way it structures both our disclosure of entities within a culture-world and our own self-disclosure.

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³¹ It should be noted that both Husserl and Heidegger historicise these conditions only in their later works, with Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences* and Heidegger's post-*Kehre* writings.

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