Spengler, Oswald (1880–1936)

Spengler was a prominent historian in the Weimar Republic. From 1908 to 1911 he worked as a high school teacher in Hamburg. Thereafter he worked as an independent author in Munich. His *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918, 1922) provided an important impetus for cultural analysis in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. Drawing upon the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), he developed a conception of cultural development in cyclical categories of cultural blossom, maturity and decline (a loss of cultural energies and creative powers). He divided the cultures of the world into eight major civilizations: Egyptian, Babylonian, Chinese, Indian, Classical, Arabian, Western (*Abendland*) and Mexican. Spengler described the *Abendland*, or the West, as Faustian (*faustisch*, from Goethe’s *Faust*), a continual striving after new knowledge, experience and deeper understanding. Spengler saw Russia as a threat on the horizon and viewed Prussia and its socialism as the bearer of the tradition of the West. Arnold J. Toynbee further developed many of Spengler’s conceptions of universal history.

Bibliography: John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of decline: Spengler on world history and politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2001).

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