

Jacek Kwasniewski

Western Civilization and Time

Summary

(draft translation, changes to make)

Introduction

Time is more and more valuable commodity now. We experience that value pursuing the fleeing dates, pursuing vanishing youth and finally pursuing our fading away life. This value has been building step by step throughout the history of the West. In a sense the whole history of the Occident is a process of converting the time into value. As a consequence the increasing value of time determines the allocation of civilization resources stronger and stronger, shapes our individual and collective priorities, set the long-term development path. This is what this book is about.

Chapter 1

Western Civilization and Speed

The analysis of the feedback mechanism which creates, duplicates and enhances the civilization pressure of speed. The pressure is generated on the macro level by the specific processes in highly developed modern economies. This macro pressure affects the micro level through changing our individual preferences, habits, interests and opinions. The stronger a given stratum of a society is succumb to that pressure, the more personal axiologies duplicate the pressure and enhance it.

Chapter 2

Increasing Value Of Time

Fast civilization rewards the behavior and personal characteristics that help adapt in a fast, stress induced environment, i.e. characteristics that are more typical of youth than age. Pragmatically rooted desire to Be-Young-Longer appears and becomes gradually the value in itself. In turn the radical secularization of the West has raised the value of our earthly life and modernization made it possible to make the other dream come true: to Be-Longer-Generally. Both Longer-type expectations shape our priorities stronger and stronger and contributes to further acceleration triggering specific resources allocation.

Chapter 3

Death Taboo

Articulation of our desire to Be-Longer-Generally has been postponed in XX century for some time because in the middle of the period the death taboo phenomenon reached its climax. The reason was the unique demographic revolution of the West in XX century. Fast increasing survival rates of youth in the first half of the century sharply contrasted with a lack of similar progress as to the elders, who were communicated not to hope as their life expectancy would not change as it was close to the limit imposed by the biology. The reaction to this highly frustrating message was the suppression of the entire

problem of death and dying from the collective consciousness. Simultaneously the massive investments in health care sector started. The postponed effects of these expenditures brought such gains in the elderly life expectancy in the second half of the century that death taboo as a defending measure against frustration started to die down.

Chapter 4

Towards Being Without End

Several fundamental consequences of the increasing value of time have been analyzed: 1/ significant shift in allocation of civilization resources to meet Longer-type priorities. Statistical analysis of the reallocation, covering XX century, has been presented, 2/ resulting from this shift discernible direction leading our civilization onto the path that transcends our earthly life because the desire and demand to Be-Ever-Longer is endless and issues a challenge to death, eternal hitherto inevitability of man, 3/ expectation and desire to prolong our youth and to live as long as possible is, in fact, the experiencing the time converted into the mythical structure, 4/ global tensions resulted from different speed and advancement of modernization and secularization in various cultures.

Chapter 5

Death in Retreat

The collision of our ambitions and recent feats in Being-Longer with death phenomenon has given rise to the specific cultural response. Increasingly death is viewed as an anomaly, aberration and disease. The longer we live the stronger is our feeling that the death of a child and ever older people is abnormal. Such an interpretation allows to reconcile the existence of death with our demand to live longer and longer and with our rising optimism as to the future. It also legitimizes further shifts in resources allocation. It changes as well our attitude towards death. Perceived as a disease it gradually ceased to be perceived as inevitability. As a disease it is subject to and requires intervention.

Chapter 6

Victories Over Time. XX Century

Being-Ever-Longer is a victory over Time. For this purpose Western civilization is attacking the problem of time itself and simultaneously attempting to make us more resistant to the passage of time. XX century physics has made time one of its leading problems. Since the theory of relativity has appeared the door was opened to serious studies on the possibility of manipulating Time and moving through it. In turn the successes of medicine and biological sciences are extending our life expectancy so much that we are nearing the moment where the main problem of the continued existence of our bodies will not be the combating further illnesses, but delaying or eliminating the aging process itself.

Chapter 7

Time And Being In The Future

The recent scientific and technological feats in medicine, pharmacology and biotechnology, in the area of treating illnesses and preventing aging, have been presented as well as some technologies in various experimental stages and the ones expected in the future. Some major debates on the potential social, cultural and other consequences and risks of these technologies were recapitulated. The most evident is the clash between transhumanist optimistic vision of the approaching era of posthumans and forecasts preaching doom and gloom. Particular attention were paid to the most promising way of lifespan extension and life enhancing – biotechnology. The evolution was shown of drugs based on recombinant DNA proteins, use of genetic engineering in embryo selection (PGD, PGH) and the present state of germ line gene therapy and modification.

Chapter 8

The Origins of the West

Time converted into the value determines significant resource allocation and gives to the secular Western society priorities transcending earthly life. To answer the question what decided such a shape of the present we need focus on the simultaneous and synchronized historical processes of modernization and secularization. The debate on the roots of European modernity in the World History studies has been presented as well as the elaborated author's thesis that Western modernization resulted from implanting into the European ecological and cultural niche the unique cultural innovation – Christianity.

Appendix

Theory of Civilization from the Viewpoint of Theory of Science

The analysis of the work “Western Civilization and Time” with the use of meta-theory of Imre Lakatos. The humanities (including theories of civilization) can meet the criteria of scientific knowledge, formulated in Lakatos' methodology of scientific research programmes, one of the most distinguished theories of science.

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