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Western Civilization and Time

The Concept & Book Synopsis

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The first version of the book was published on my site in 2008. From 2012 to 2014 the readers downloaded it forty six thousand times. I received a lot of comments and reviews.

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The book (version on-line and pdf) is on my home page:

<https://jacek.kwasniewski.org.pl/en/ksiazka-cywilizacja-zachodnia-i-czas/>

The main idea of the book

Western civilization challenges death. It does so with no fanfare, but patiently, persistently, step by step. Neither technology nor science set this course, although it would not have been possible without them. Our civilization has been directed on this path by the value that we generally recognize as a priority. Time is that value. No one denies that time has value. We place highly that value in our priorities. But that we constantly experience that value and talk about it, it has become a banal truth. So banal that it seems not deserving a deeper reflection.

Meanwhile, the time as value is increasingly influencing the direction in which technology and science are developing, to which parts of the economy we want to put more resources and to which less. All these decisions, driven by our preferences and values, direct civilization on a path that leads to questioning the eternal inevitability of death.

Does the statistics confirm that allocation of our resources are interrelated to the growing value of time? Why has time become such an important value? What is the basis for the amazing conclusion that Western civilization increasingly recognizes the very death as a phenomenon to be challenged? These are the questions of this book. We'll start with simple things. We will tell what the Western civilization is and take a look at its very characteristic feature - the increasing speed of action.

First we'll show what causes Western civilization constantly accelerating. Because we feel this acceleration as a compulsion to be and act ever faster, we will try to understand how it affects our perception of the world and to our hierarchies of values. We will not forget, however, that people are different and not everyone feels this compulsion equally strong. Looking at these issues, we'll see that the increasing speed of civilization transfers onto the increasing value of time. The more we are in a hurry, the more we value each hour. We experience that continually. If we look more closely, the growing value of time will prove to be not only the result of rapid civilization, but also the engine that drives it further. Time has become an independent (autotelic) value in our minds and hearts.

The increasing value of time is manifested not only in a hurry, but also in the desire to be young as long as possible. Because only young can race effectively. Oldness is slow. And we must be fast to be competitive. Of course, this syndrome does not impact equally strong, everybody, but cult of youth surrounds us. We created it ourselves. The compulsion to Be Faster created the compulsion to Be Young. Advertising and industry are only a reflection of our expectations.

The growing value of time is not only a cult of youth. Secularization, which has been going on for several hundred years, displaces God from our daily lives. With secularization, the hope of eternal life fades, which makes temporal time more important and valuable. Since the temporal time is the only one we have for sure, we want to have it for as long as possible.

The growing value of time understood as rush, cult of youth and the desire to live longer and longer, created two basic civilization priorities - to be Faster and to live Longer. They are

increasingly influencing where we allocate available natural and human resources as well as the resources of time we have as society. This pressure to be Faster and to live Longer still demands something new and better: improving health care, more effective healing, extending life and accelerating the operation of various mechanisms and processes. But each accomplished change raises another demand. So this is pressure that is reproducing itself and seems to have no end. It increasingly sets the direction for the development of economy, technology and science. Resources are clearly shifting to the development of priority areas to be Faster and to live Longer.

Over the past several decades, we have made such fundamental changes and accelerated their pace so much that it can be seen more and more clearly that further implementation of the priority Longer leads to the point where we directly challenge the death. This idea is gradually gaining in popularity. First appeared in futurology and is now more and more often present in scientific discussions. For example in transhumanism thought.

Shaping such a system of our values, combined with the growing possibilities of their satisfying makes us ask what was the source of this civilization mechanism. This way we come to the historical phenomenon of Europe, the so-called European miracle and to Christianity, significant driving force behind our civilization. We are trying to show Christianity as a factor that gave us such power and optimism that we now dare to challenge the death – to what we have always considered evil inescapable and inevitable.

The book ends here, but the answer itself is a next riddle, because it opens us to an even greater secret. Is Christianity a self-realizing civilization program we were given two thousand years ago? Or may be it is a mutation in our cultural genotype? Thanks to which a culturally mutated European in a historic blink of an eye created a world which with its power, immeasurable ambitions and optimism tends to repeat or continue in the temporal plan the work of creation which this religion speaks about.

After such an answer, do we have the right not to speak about God? Do we have the right to limit ourselves to talking only about religion? And to cover our eyes to Him, without whom this religion makes no sense? Of course we can do that. But won't we look like an atheist from a cartoon joke? God reveals himself once again and the nervous atheist exclaims: How many times need I repeat that I don't believe in You ?!!!



Summary

Introduction

Time is an increasingly important value. We experience that value chasing deadlines, chasing escaping youth and finally, chasing escaping life. We built the value of time gradually. In a sense, the whole Western history is the process of transforming time into value. This is what this book is about. How the time has been changed into precious value and time value continues to increase, what were the causes of it, what are effects and what may be ahead of us in the future.

A look at history through the filter, which is the transformation of time into value (axiologization of time), gives an ordered image of logically related, countless facts, phenomena and problems. The very list of chapters here and reading the following summary shows what - seemingly distant - problem areas are interrelated if you look at them from this perspective.

Chapter I **Western Civilization and Speed**

In this chapter we analyze the specific phenomenon of modern Western civilization - its growing speed in many areas. We define the concept of civilization speed and indicate ways to measure this speed.

We also define the very concept of Western civilization by indicating its five dimensions: geographical location, historical heritage, elements of technopolis, value systems and the sphere of everyday life.

We show the acceleration of civilization from bird's-eye perspective glancing at the entire economy and from below, from the perspective of the individual.

By analyzing macro acceleration, we present its economic sources. They are the principles of a private market economy combined with the West's unique ability to transform social property into productive capital. This ability to mobilize productive capital arose relatively recently (XIX century), thanks to the agreeing on a uniform definition of property rights throughout Western civilization and establishing uniform ways of managing them. We discuss the historical process that led to this unification and explain why unification accelerates the creation of productive capital. The Western ability to create productive capital has been contrasted with the situation in Third World economies, where assets often do not become capital (being so-called dead capital).

To examine the acceleration of civilization from the perspective of the individual, we identified a set of BNF (Better-New-Faster) values, through which civilization pressure Faster affects the individual. The BNF set is based on a system of incentives and demands towards the individual as a consumer, employee and producer. We show a feedback mechanism: civilization

pressure transforms the individual's value system, and thus his preferences, habits, interests and assessments. On the other hand, such a transformed value system reproduces and strengthens civilization pressure.

We also show a list of factors that differentiate sensitivity to civilization pressure in different countries, regions, social groups and areas of the economy.

Chapter II Increasing Value of Time

In the constantly accelerating Western civilization, time has become the resource scarce and highly valued. The economy has made it subject to market rules. Time resources can be rationally managed and control over them is a new form of power.

We show examples of time resource management and examples of products where trade means direct or indirect time trading. We show and explain the relationship between the degree of sensitivity to BNF (Better-New-Faster) values and the perceived attractiveness of these goods.

Value of economic time and speed of civilization processes are interdependent. Therefore, the increasing value of time can be measured by the growing amounts of resources earmarked to accelerate the various processes. We present the outline of such a measurement. Interdependence between value of time and civilization speed is measured by comparing growing computing speed of IT hardware with investments outlays in IT sector.

In the main part of the chapter we show the mechanism of arising in Western civilization of two mass expectations and demands related to the growing value of time. Both expectations are increasingly affecting the allocation (intended use) of civilization resources and thus become an increasingly important element of our civilization identity.

The first of these expectations is the desire to be young as long as possible. The sources of this desire are pragmatic. In fast civilization, economic time gains value. Such a civilization rewards people who act quickly, effectively, adapt well to changes, who like newnesses, and do not avoid risk. These are behaviors and personality traits more common among young people. In older people they weaken. So being young and energetic becomes a useful, pragmatic value. Big industry works so that we can meet the expectations of fast civilization. We present a process that has transformed this pragmatic expectation into an intrinsic (autotelic) value, detached from pragmatic, instrumental roots. The desire to be young as long as possible turns into a cult of youth, becoming an independent factor in accelerating civilization, stimulating specific allocation processes.

The second of these expectations is the desire to Live-As-Long-As-Possible. It is the result of the growing value of our temporal time. It gained value as a result of the "eschatological reduction" caused by the secularization process (a historical outline since the 11th to 19th centuries presented in the chapter). Secularization weakened our conviction of "transcendent continuation" after death. From XVII century new science, including astronomy, has radically

dwindled the position of man in the universe. A human ceased to be the centre of universe. The degradation of man in the hierarchy of beings and the weakened perspective of eternal life raised the meaning and value of mundane life because unlike uncertain afterlife this one was possessed for sure. As the only one. That's why its value raised.

We present a list of conditions, the fulfillment of which has relatively recently transformed this increase in value of earthly life into a widely and increasingly stronger articulated expectation and demand to Live As Long As Possible.

Both civilization priorities, to live as long as possible and to be young as long as possible, become autotelic values, stimulating very significant allocation processes, described further in Chapter IV.

Chapter III Death Taboo

Secularization that has progressed over the past centuries, has raised the value of our earthly time. And the first half of the 20th century brought an unprecedented increase in life expectancy. This was not followed, however, by massive articulation of expectations for longer life or demands that it happen. This articulation has been suppressed for several decades. This was due to the culmination of a peculiar phenomenon in the second half of the 20th century - the taboo of death.

In this chapter, we subject Western death taboo to detailed analysis. We find that the taboo of death, as a repression of the topic of dying and death, was a classic psychological defence mechanism against the state of mass existential frustration at the time.

We presented statistics of twentieth-century demographic processes in the area of Western civilization, which are the basis for inferring the frustration as the genesis of the phenomenon.

At the root of the taboo of death lies a specific phenomenon that occurred in the first half of the 20th century. There was a great rise in life expectation of younger generations (+45%) and at the same time no improvement (only 3%) in this respect towards the elderly (2/3 of the population) and the "scientific" pessimism as to their future life extension, because scientists' general opinion was that life expectancy of elders was close to the limit imposed by the biology. The elders saw that the young stopped dying but they had no chance for a longer life. The reaction to this highly frustrating message was the suppression of the topic of dying from the collective consciousness. Death became taboo.

The second half of the 20th century has been a radical change in health care policies and spending. The fight against diseases of adults and older people has become a priority. Postponed by several dozen years, the effects of these actions reversed the dynamics. In the last 30-40 years, it was elders that have gained more than the young (relatively). This weakens frustration and gradually, though slowly, extinguishes the phenomenon of death taboo.

Chapter IV Towards Being Without End

The chapter discusses the main consequences of increasing the value of time. These are several characteristic areas which attract more and more civilization resources what results in specific perceptible direction of development of Western civilization. Second, the widespread desire and demand that life to be getting longer created a myth that this desire is eternal. Thirdly, the different speed of the process of secularization and modernization in the West and in other cultural territories created very strong inter-civilization tensions.

We showed how to measure the growing value of worldly time. For this purpose, we used proxy data - a statistical analysis of the dynamics of expenditure on health care. These outlays reflect our preferences Longer. We presented statistical data for the period 1880-2000 and forecasts until 2075. They all show an almost exponential increase in spending on healthcare, which is associated with our preferences for extending life. This largely reflects social preferences and values. Their combined effect consists in the most significant reallocation of civilization resources that can be observed since the mid-twentieth century. An increasing portion of Gross National Product (GNP) is and will be allocated to the realization of the preferences to Be Longer

In the further part of the chapter we indicated that the expectations for increasingly longer life and for increasingly longer youthfulness meet the criteria of mythical perception of reality. The value of time, transformed into mythical structures, becomes an autonomous and very powerful factor of reproducing the civilization mechanism that created these expectations.

In conclusion, we have found that the ever-growing strength of the demands and desires to live longer-and-longer time, forecasts in this regard, and lack of imaginable boundary of these expectations allow us to see the direction of the development of Western civilization. It goes beyond the goals usually considered temporal. For just as the exponential function goes to infinity, although it does not reach this limit, so does Western civilization go towards its limit, also at infinity, except that it is infinity in terms of human time. That is immortality

Chapter V Death in Retreat

In the chapter, we present increasingly common cultural responses resulting from the collision of the eternal phenomenon of death with ever greater medical and technical achievements in the field of extending life. We pointed mental, psychological and moral changes that are more and more sustainable effect of these reactions.

The West's general response is the growing recognition of death as an aberration and anomaly. The longer we live on average, the more we feel the death of children and adults, but not old ones, as an abnormal phenomenon. This interpretation of death reconciles its existence with the demand of living ever longer and optimism about the future. It legitimizes the allocation of more and more resources to the struggle for a longer life. It also changes the

attitude towards death, into active opposition and intensifies the willingness to fight this Eternal Inevitability.

This spiritual change occurs barely noticed, but is becoming more common. It manifests itself in objection towards death of older people, dying however below the rising average. This objection is gradually preparing the Western man to accept the increasingly remarkable ideas of prolonging our temporal existence and growing demands in that area, as attainable and justified.

We also presented techniques for alleviating terminal stress. They are a compromise solution of our pragmatic civilization and concern the ways of alleviating the anxiety of a dying man. In the secularized era he sees his coming end as a transition to a fearful non-existence.

Chapter VI Victories Over Time. XX Century

In the chapter we showed what, in the second half of the 20th century, were the main directions for research and expenses aimed at extending our lives.

In the second half of the 20th century, the problem of time became one of the leading issues of modern physics. This is undoubtedly related to the growing sensitivity of Westerners to this aspect of reality. Since Newton's physics thesis that absolute time exists has been replaced by the theory of relativity, a field has been opened for serious study of the possibility and ways of moving through time. Although technologies that serve this purpose still seem impossible, the theoretical aspects of such travels have become the subject of serious theoretical studies.

We have presented methods of time analysis in theories of modern physics (block, relative, frozen time and controversies over its ontological status) and paradoxes resulting from the collision of the linear experience of time with theories that negate its linear nature.

The main part of the chapter discusses the successes of science, medical practice and prevention in the second half of the 20th century in overcoming the basic causes of death of mature and old people, i.e. cardiovascular diseases and cancer (2/3 of deaths). After a period of catastrophic increases in morbidity and deaths caused by these diseases, a breakthrough was made in 1960-2000. The upward trend in morbidity and deaths caused by these causes was managed to contain and reverse, as evidenced by the presented statistical data.

Finally, we indicated a new and dangerous phenomenon related to the state of health of Western societies - physical inactivity and obesity. It takes on epidemic proportions, which causes so dangerous health effects and grim survival chances that it can cancel out the positive effects of fighting cardiovascular and cancer diseases.

Chapter VII Time And Being in the Future

(discussion concerns the planned, revised version)

The chapter discusses the latest (2002-2008) achievements of science and technology (especially medicine, pharmacy and biotechnology) in the field of treating diseases and preventing the aging process. Experimental, planned and expected technologies and products in this area were also described, as well as discussions about possible consequences, including social and cultural that these products and technologies can evoke.

After crossing the line of 80-85 years of life expectancy, not the particular diseases but the very aging process becomes a major problem. The biological and biochemical aspects of the aging mechanism were shown, as well as the big concepts for longer life but only partly satisfied in the second half of the twentieth century: transplantation, implantology as well as biotechnology and genetic engineering.

Particular attention was paid to discussing the most promising way to extend life at present - biotechnology. We have presented next generations of drugs based on genetically modified proteins. We presented the applications of genetic engineering techniques for embryo selection (PGD and PGH) and the state of advancement and problems associated with genetic therapies and germline cell modification (sperm and eggs).

The techniques of human modification already available, based on designed and hereditary physical and personality traits, as well as techniques soon expected, trigger heated discussion on social, cultural, political and ethical consequences if would be used wider. We have shown opposing beliefs on the chances of introducing these technologies. Has been presented current of transhumanism, whose representatives very positively and optimistically assess the possibilities and pace of introducing deep hereditary changes to our genotypes.

At the end of the chapter we presented the hypothesis about the possible weakening and even extinction of the desire to live longer and longer. This may happen after a very significant increase in life expectancy (e.g. 400 years). Then perhaps we will lose the desire and need to keep our own identity in the stream of time of our lives, because longer and longer life in a constantly accelerating civilization will eliminate the need to identify with ourselves from before hundreds of years ago.

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Chapter VIII Origins of the West

(Chapter VIII will take the form of a book on the European phenomenon)

The emergence of modern Western civilization in its present shape, with its priorities and development direction has been determined by the process of transforming time into top priority value. That process has been nowhere else duplicated. The European success has been effected thanks to successful implantation into Europe, which was a specific ecological and cultural niche, a unique cultural invention - Christianity.

In the chapter, we developed this thesis. We showed important elements of the European niche (geographical location, topography, climate, geological activity, Greek, Roman and barbaric heritage) and the reasons why this characteristics made it susceptible to the influence of Christianity. We presented pro-modernization axiology of this religion, incl. Judaic invention of linear time associated with Christian eschatology, Christian metaphysics, the idea of rational and predictable God, sanctification of work. We also indicated areas transformed by these axiologies, including science, art, agriculture, technology, individual - society relations, political, self-government and corporate organizations. We devoted separate attention to the Church and its role in creating a new ideological space in Europe, through implanting into culture and society all components of Christianity, their intensive and organized promotion, teaching, dissemination and support with a system of transcendent and temporal rewards and punishments.

Christianity can be compared to a mutation introduced in the centuries II-X CE. to the then cultural genotype of Europe. Using the terminology of genetic engineering, the Church played the role of a vector through which Christianity penetrated and became a component of Europe's cultural DNA. Church also ensured strong expression of this mutation throughout the whole European body.

In the chapter we showed this mutation acted as a catalyst in a particular European niche. She reprogrammed the European, imprinted him out a new picture of the world, new values, new ambitions, new dreams, goals and fears. Such a culturally mutated European man in a historic blink of an eye created a civilization which has no equal in history with material power, immeasurable ambitions and optimism.

Organized Christianity has undergone radical secularization in this civilization process, but the secularized West seems to repeat in its temporal plan the eschatological promises of Christianity and is constantly looking for ways to implement them. Currently, the West seems to have particular hopes in the biotechnological continuation of Creation.