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Western Civilization and Time

The Book's Concept & Synopsis

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

The main idea of the book.....	2
Summary	4
Introduction	5
Chapter I Western Civilization and Speed.....	5
Chapter II Increasing Value of Time.....	6
Chapter III Death Taboo.....	7
Chapter IV Towards Being Without End	8
Chapter V Death in Retreat	8
Chapter VI Victories Over Time. XX Century.....	9
Chapter VII Time And Being in the Future.....	10
Chapter VIII Origins of the West	10

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, patiently, persistently, one step at a time. Neither technology nor science set this course, though 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. This value is time. No one denies that time has value. We place this value high on the list of our priorities. But since we constantly experience and talk about this value, it has become a banal truth. So banal that it seems not deserving of a deeper reflection.

Meanwhile, the time as value is increasingly influencing the direction in which technology and science are developing, e.g. 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 our civilization on a path that leads to questioning the eternal inevitability of death.

Does the statistical analysis confirm that the allocation of our resources is interrelated to the increasing 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 death itself as a phenomenon to be challenged? These are the questions of this book. We'll start with simple things. We shall tell what Western civilization is and take a look at its very characteristic feature - the increasing speed of performance.

Firstly we'll show what causes the constant acceleration in Western civilization. Because we perceive the said acceleration as a compulsion to be and act ever faster, we shall try to understand how it affects our perception of the world and our hierarchies of values. We shouldn't forget, however, that people are different and this compulsion is not equally strong to everyone. Looking at these issues, we'll see that the increasing speed of civilization results in the increased 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 increased value of time manifests itself both in haste but also in the desire to be young as long as possible. Because only when young we can race successfully. Oldness is slow. And we must be fast to be competitive. Of course, this syndrome does not impact everyone the same, but the cult of youth surrounds us. We have created it ourselves. The compulsion to Be Faster has created the compulsion to Be Young. Advertising and industry are only a reflection of our expectations.

The growing value of time is not only the cult of youth. The progression of secularization for several hundred years has displaced God from our daily lives. Due to this, the hope for the eternal life fades, making the temporal life all the more important and valuable. Since the temporal life is all that is left, we want to have it for as long as possible.

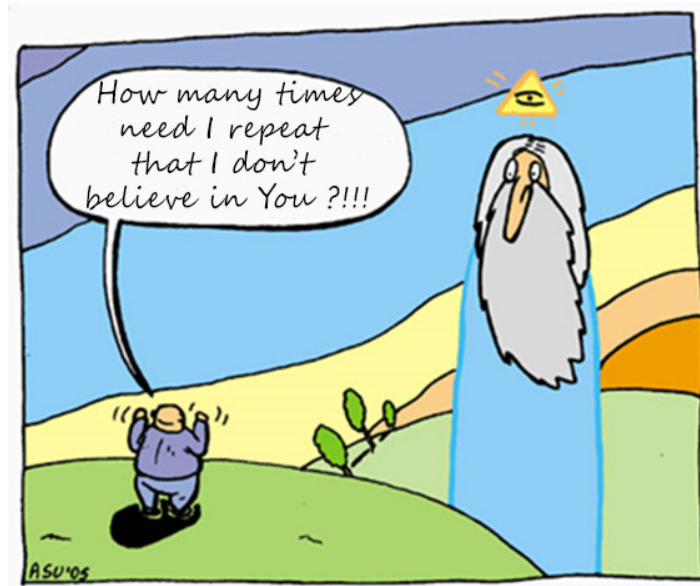
The growing value of time understood as the haste, the cult of youth and the desire to live longer and longer, created two basic civilization priorities - to Be Faster and to Live Longer. They are increasingly influencing where we allocate available natural and human resources as well as the resources of time we have as a society. This pressure to Be Faster and to Live Longer always demands something new and better: in the scope of improving health care, more effective healing, the extension of life and improved operation of various mechanisms and processes. But each accomplished change raises the next demand. Therefore it is the pressure that is reproducing itself and seems to have no end. More and more, it sets the direction for the development of economy, technology and science. There's a visible shifting of the resources to the development of priority areas of to Be Faster and to Live Longer.

Over the past several decades, we have made such fundamental changes and accelerated their pace so much, it may 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. It first appeared in futurology and is now more and more often present in scientific discussions. For example, in transhumanism thought.

Such a system of our values, combined with the growing possibilities of their fulfilment, makes us ask what was the source of this civilization mechanism. This leads us to the historical phenomenon of Europe, the so-called European miracle and Christianity, the 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 – the very thing we have always considered the inescapable and inevitable evil.

The book ends here, but its conclusion is the next riddle itself. It opens us to an even greater secret. Is Christianity a self-fulfilling civilization program that we were offered two thousand years ago? Or maybe it is a mutation in our cultural genotype? Thanks to this, culturally mutated Europeans, in a historic blink of an eye created the world which, with its power, immeasurable ambitions and optimism, tends to repeat or continue in the temporal plane 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? 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 manifests in front of him for the umpteenth time and the nervous atheist exclaims: "How many times need I repeat that I do not believe in You!"



Summary

Introduction

Time is an increasingly important value. The value we experience while we chase deadlines, chase our lost youth and finally when we research our lives that went by. We gradually build the value of time. In a sense, the whole of Western history is the process of transforming time into value. It is what this book is all about. How the time has and continues to change into a precious value, what was the cause, what are the effects and what may be ahead of us in the future.

A look at history through the filter of the transformation of time into a value (axiologization of time), gives a systematic overview of logically related countless facts, phenomena and problems. Even the very list of chapters and studying of the following summary show, which - seemingly distant - problem areas are interrelated when 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 how to measure it.

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.

When analysing the acceleration in the macro scale, we present its economic sources. We need to name here the principles of a private market economy combined with the West's unique ability to transform the social property into the productive capital. This ability to mobilize productive capital is fairly recent (19th century), thanks to the agreeing on a uniform definition of property rights throughout Western civilization and due to 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. We have contrasted the Western ability to create productive capital with the situation in the Third World economies, where assets often do not become capital (i.e. so-called dead capital).

To examine the acceleration of civilization from the perspective of an individual, we have identified a BNF (Better-New-Faster) set of values, through which civilization pressure of 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 examine 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 system of values 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 a scarce and highly valued resource. The economy has made it subject to market rules. Time as a resource may be rationally managed. Controlling it is a new form of power.

We present examples of time resource management and examples of products where a sale or purchase is a 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.

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

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

The first of these expectations is the desire to be young for 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, well adapt to changes, who like newness and do not avoid risk. These behaviour and personality traits are more common among young people. Among older people, they subside. 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 originally pragmatic expectation into an self-reliant (autotelic) value, detached from pragmatic, instrumental roots. The desire to be young for 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 life. It gained value as a result of the "eschatological reduction" caused by the secularization process (historical overview between the 11th and 19th

centuries presented in the chapter). Secularization weakened our conviction of "transcendent continuation" after death. Since 17th century new sciences, including astronomy, have radically dwindled the man's position in the universe. The human ceased to be the centre of the universe. The degradation of man in the hierarchy of beings and the weakened perspectives of eternal life added meaning and value to temporal life. Unlike uncertain afterlife, we certainly possess mortal life – the only one. Who knows if not the only one. That's why its value raised.

We present a list of conditions, the fulfilment of which have relatively recently transformed this increase in the value of earthly life into a widely and increasingly strongly 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 self-reliant, autotelic values, stimulating very significant allocation processes, described further in Chapter IV.

Chapter III Death Taboo

Secularization has progressed over the past centuries and raised the value of our earthly time. In the first half of the 20th century, we noted an unprecedented increase in life expectancy. However, this was not followed by the massive articulation of expectations for longer life or demands that it would happen. Such 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 which occurred in the first half of the 20th century. There was a great rise in life expectancy (+45%) of younger generations and at the same time no improvement (only +3%) in this respect towards the elderly (2/3 of the population). Instead, there was "scientific" pessimism concerning the future improvement of their life expectancy, because scientists' general opinion was that life expectancy of elders was close to the limit imposed by the biology. The elders saw the young stopped dying, yet 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 a 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 who have gained (relatively) more than the young. This weakens frustration and gradually, though slowly, extinguishes the phenomenon of the 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, which results in the specific perceptible direction of development of Western civilization. Secondly, 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 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 to Be 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. To a large degree, this reflects social preferences and values. Their combined effect consists of the most significant reallocation of civilization resources to be observed since the mid-twentieth century. An increasing portion of the Gross National Product (GNP) is and shall be allocated to the implementation of the preferences to Be Longer.

Later in the chapter, we indicated that the expectations to Live-Ever- Longer and Stay-Ever-Younger 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-Ever-Longer, forecasts in this regard, and lack of imaginable limit 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 ever greater medical and technical achievements in the field of extending life with the eternal phenomenon of death. We pointed mental, psychological and moral changes that are more and more sustainable effect of these reactions.

The West's overall 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,

though not the old ones, is 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 longer life. It also changes the attitude towards death into active opposition and intensifies the willingness to fight this Eternal Inevitability.

This ongoing spiritual change is barely noticed but is becoming more common. It manifests itself objection towards death of older people, dying however below the growing average level. 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 compromise solutions to our pragmatic civilization and concern the ways of alleviating the anxiety of a dying man. In the secularized era, the man sees his life's end as a transition to 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. When Newton's physics' thesis that absolute time exists was replaced by the theory of relativity, it prepared the ground for serious study of the possibility and ways of moving through time. Although technologies that may 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 discussed the successes in 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 factors was managed to contain and reverse, as evidenced by the presented statistical data.

Lastly, we drew attention to a new and dangerous phenomenon related to the state of health of Western societies - physical inactivity and obesity. It has reached epidemic proportions,

causing such dangerous health effects and grim survival chances that it may destroy the positive effects of fighting cardiovascular diseases and cancer.

Chapter VII Time And Being in the Future

(discussion concerns the planned, revised version)

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

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

We paid special attention to discussing the most promising way to extend life span - to biotechnology. We have presented the successive generations of drugs based on genetically modified proteins. We demonstrated the applications of genetic engineering techniques in embryo selection (PGD and PGH) and the progress 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 used wider. We have shown opposing beliefs on the chances of introducing these technologies. Among others, we have presented the transhumanism movement. Its representatives welcome the possibility and the pace of introducing fundamental hereditary changes to our genotypes.

At the end of the chapter, we presented the hypothesis about the possible weakening and even demise of desire to live longer and longer. This may happen after a very significant increase in life expectancy (e.g. 400 years or more). Then, perhaps we will lose the desire and need to keep our own identity in our lifespan. Perhaps dramatically longer life in an ever-faster civilization will eliminate the need to identify with ourselves from hundreds of years ago.

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 the top priority value. A process duplicated nowhere else. The European success came into effect

thanks to the 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 these characteristics made it susceptible to the influence of Christianity. We presented pro-modernization axiology of this religion, including the Judaic invention of linear time associated with Christian eschatology, Christian metaphysics, the idea of rational and predictable God, the 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 paid 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.

We may compare Christianity to specific 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. The Church also ensured the strong expression of this mutation throughout the whole European body.

In the chapter, we have shown the mutation acted as a catalyst in this particular European niche. It reprogrammed the European, imprinting him with a new picture of the world, new values, new ambitions, new dreams, goals and fears. Thus culturally mutated European man created a civilization with material power, immeasurable ambitions and optimism which had no equal in the history.

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.