



Libertarians and the Last Traders of Carthage

There is a type of man who appears at the decline of every civilization.

This figure is already familiar to us. He is cultivated, yet disconnected from any ancestral tradition. He is intelligent, but lacks wisdom. His conversation revolves around freedom, contracts, commerce, incentives, and other practical matters, while ignoring religious causes and long-standing cultural myths. To him, society is, at its core, a marketplace. This figure is a common archetype. Today's libertarians often imagine themselves as men of the future, yet in many respects they represent one of history's most recurring archetypes. We are not speaking of revolutionaries, pioneers, or founding fathers. This archetype is neither a builder of civilizations nor a conqueror. Rather, he emerges much later after the foundations of a seemingly enduring society have already been created.



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The Spenglerian idea of Western decline is proving to be less of a textbook theory and more of a recurring pattern. First articulated by German philosopher Oswald Spengler in his work *The Decline of the West*, the concept of civilizational development emerged as a model of historical analysis through which one can better understand the rise and fall of distinct civilizations. Much like how a living organism passes through recognizable stages of growth, maturity, and decline, Spengler posited that societies develop in a very similar manner. Over generations, a once primitive society develops into a vibrant culture and gradually matures into a larger, sophisticated version of itself. Unfortunately, as with all living things, it also must die. Civilizations cannot avoid the process of decline any more than individuals can avoid aging.

It is still politically controversial to accept the idea of inevitable civilizational decline. However, history provides plenty of evidence. It is important to note that a society and a culture are only as good and functional as the individuals who constitute them. As individuals, we personally experience decline, and so does the society we inhabit. As with the aging process, civilizational decline is accompanied by telltale signs of deterioration and loss. It is subtle at first, and can even be easily overlooked by the uncritical eye. However, for those of us who focus closely on such matters, specific indicators are difficult to miss.

From Carthage to Silicon Valley

Understanding and applying the Spenglerian model of civilizational decline is essential to understanding political development and effectiveness in the modern West. In other words, remembering the science of civilizational morphology and recognizing recurring patterns of decline is



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about as practical as recognizing the signs of maturation and decay in the natural human life cycle. For instance, recognizing that certain ideological movements, beliefs, and even policies accelerate the process of deterioration and degeneration is about as useful as accepting the view that a prolonged negative emotional state contributes to physiological deterioration, notably increased oxidative stress.

The arrival of a particular social archetype as a dominant cultural influence marks the start of a phase of civilizational deterioration many often miss, and we have many examples to draw from. The Carthaginian merchant elites are a perfect expression of this archetype. This group was the dominant commercial and political class of ancient Carthage, the jewel of North Africa. It was a major maritime power in the ancient Mediterranean and one of the most affluent cities in classical antiquity. While a formidable rival to Rome, Carthage's power was not expressed through military strength alone, but rather through its success in trade and advanced agricultural systems. Despite its cultural prowess, Carthage fell. Roman forces eventually besieged and destroyed the city.

There are various interpretations of why and how Carthage fell, many of which are today considered "outdated" accounts influenced by the Roman stereotype of a "libertine" Carthaginian society overcome by greed and degeneracy. However, it is not unfair to say that Carthaginian elites were no strangers to overconsumption. Besides the city being historically known as a mercantile powerhouse, the rapid extraction of environmental resources in Carthage is a key historical example of its consumption pattern, most noticeably the extreme pattern of deforestation that occurred in that time period.

In the aftermath of Alexander the Great's campaigns, cities such as Alexandria developed into cosmopolitan hubs characterized by a heavily multicultural population. Philosophical skepticism and a loosening attachment to traditional tribal customs and identities typified the *Zeitgeist* of the period. Resulting from this were the Cynics, Epicureans, and certain Sophist traditions that had flourished as deracinated philosophical schools of thought. Analogous intellectual movements would reappear in different cultural settings years later. More frequent occurrences of this archetype; skeptical, cosmopolitan, detached, and practical, can be found during phases of civilizational development marked by urbanization.

The Republic of Venice was primarily organized around its commercial trade networks and the financial resources derived from them. Arriving already encumbered by wealth, the Venetian oligarchy maintained a Mediterranean empire through maritime commerce and some religious legitimacy. For the most part, the aspirations of this class were oriented toward the advancement of trade and commerce rather than traditional modes of expansion, such as conquest. Here is where historical expression of the aforementioned archetype becomes more consolidated. This character, appearing at the start of decline, is pragmatic, transactional, and detached from a collective understanding of national or tribal identity and ancestral custom.

The Dutch Golden Age produced perhaps one the clearest early-modern examples of the detached and cosmopolitan archetype. In the early 1600s, the Dutch Republic ranked among the leading commercial powers in Europe, easily maintaining an intimidating presence in the world of art, finance, and international trade through the development of major shipping routes. It is well understood that the Dutch social status was determined by income rather than title alone, with the urban merchant class dominating much of Dutch society at this time. It was also during this period that the Protestant movement had started to divide, leading to the subtle decline of religious influence. Over the years, the Dutch elite had gradually lost their commercial power to rising competition from England and France.

As the decline of these civilizations unfolds, varying symptoms and signs of the process become



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manifest: new ideological movements, new consumption patterns, and notable philosophical figures and representatives of a new elite structure. All demonstrate the lifestyle of a pragmatic individual who slowly becomes removed from their national purpose and identity. This brings us to the present situation. Mid-20th century libertarianism emerged as a distinct intellectual movement in the postwar West. It took form amid Cold War-era anti-statism as concerns grew about the very real dangers of centralized authority, collectivism, and economic planning. Critiques of the Keynesian economic orthodoxy inspired great thinkers associated with the Austrian School of Economics, most notably Friedrich Hayek, who spoke against central planning. Libertarianism developed as a philosophical shift toward the ideal of individualism in modern political thought.

This emphasis on autonomy and agency coalesced into a more defined libertarian tradition, later developed further by figures such as Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand. In fact, figures such as Ayn Rand serve as perfect examples of the aforementioned archetype. Biting at the heels of Positivism, adherents of this philosophical movement sought to defend what we now regard as the principal examples of political virtue. However, some would argue that the consequences of this position are the ignored benefits of tradition, national identity, honor, and obligation.

The modern emphasis on agentic autonomy, pragmatism, and economic liberty so well encapsulated in the optimism of modernity would eventually take a sour turn. Following the turbulence of postmodern cultural decline, the fixation on materialism, rationality, and even transhumanism would soon take shape. Modern harbingers of this decline are well expressed by notable individuals from Silicon Valley: a known technocracy defined by borderless aims, digital nomadism, and economic globalism. Elon Musk, Marc Andreessen, Peter Theil, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and even Curtis Yarvin are all key examples. These are the people who exemplify the archetype we have spent historically analyzing up until now, the walking signs of Western decline.

How do Silicon Valley technology professionals differ from the commercial elites of the Venetian Republic, the affluent Dutch merchant class, or even the wealthy Carthaginian elite? Across these historical settings, one can observe a recurring type: a ruling or influential stratum organized primarily around commerce, exchange, and the optimization of networks, rather than territorial conquest led directly from a unified national and cultural purpose.

The Libertarian Dilemma of Decline

It is important to understand that the ideals of agency, self-sufficiency, and economic independence alone are not cultural vices, but virtues. However, it is also imperative to know that a culture must strike a balance if it wishes to survive accelerated decay. Civilizations need *both* archetypes to flourish: They require the purposeful warrior *and* the detached merchant. Unrestrained collectivism and militarism inhibits meaningful cultural and artistic development, while unchecked commercialism erodes national cohesion and purpose. In isolation, both deteriorate a functional society.

There are many archetypes that make up a civilization, each one marking the phase of civilization, development. The pioneer furthers expansion and discovery. The warrior intuitively understands that lineage, glory, and continuity is a sacred practice. The peasant understands the impact of seasonal cyclicalness, progression, and the importance of inheritance. The priest and specialist resemble the significance of institutional order and conformity needed for a self-sustaining empire. The merchant understands exchange. To the merchant, the national border is yet another barrier to his objective. The modern libertarian *still* believes he is freeing mankind from the illusory aspects of custom and cultural rigidity. However, what he may actually be doing is dissolving all non-economic aspects of meaning.



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Most awful, this position negates the existence of the collective unconscious from which *the archetype* comes from so as not to identify its own occurrence. This causes spiritual exhaustion.

It is important to understand that libertarianism should *not* rely solely on this detached and an atheistic view of national obligation, religious purpose, and custom. As a civilization becomes continually uprooted from its foundational and identifiable elements, it falls into a predictable demise. The original principles espoused by the libertarian worldview — individualism, limited government, and spontaneous order — do not lead to a collapse themselves. The spiritual exhaustion many libertarians fall prey to is normally the byproduct of cultural dissolution and ignorance of identity. One must assume, then, that *it* is possible to maintain the ideology of the merchant *and* warrior. Perhaps we are reaching a point where the importance of preserving both the warrior and merchant are becoming accepted, but time will tell.



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