

The Waning of American Power :

American Ethos on Trial

(アメリカの影響力衰退とアメリカ精神の試練)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 本論文はポール・ケネディーの『大国の興亡』、アラン・ブルームの『アメリカン・マインドの終焉』(以上は日本語訳で広く知られている)、E・D・ハーシュの『文化的読解力』(*Cultural Literacy*)を1987~88年の自国の影響力衰退についての米国内の反応として捉え、そのいくつかの側面を指摘したものである。ケネディーは他の彼の著書においても記述のパラダイムとして、「興亡」を使っているが、それはアウグスティヌス、ギボン、シュペングラーが用いたものであり、トインビーが使った「挑戦と対応」は「興亡」の根柢を捉えるためのパラダイムであると思われる。この背景には世界史の中心となったヨーロッパ文明がローマ帝国の後継者として次々に登場し、米国は西ローマ帝国、ソ連は東ローマ帝国の後継者として世界を分割し、現在その枠組が崩壊しつつあるという事実がある。以上の三つの書物が出版された時、ソ連の東欧帝国の崩壊はまだはじまっていなかった。それがロシア正教会一千年記念と同時に顕現化したことは興味ある事実である。二つの帝国はそれぞれ拡張の限界に達し、かつてのローマ帝国と同じ様に、時代の経緯とともに起こってくる内部からの挑戦に対応することができなくなったのである。

歴史学の危機は米国で脱構築(解体)の理論による建国神話の非神話化において顕著に見られる。帝国とは他民族を含むものでありながら、一つの共通言語・文化をもち、その優位性への絶対的信頼の上に平和と秩序を維持する政治・経済・文明形態である。かつてのローマ帝国の衰退も多数民族の民族主義と支配民族の優位性についての懐疑主義によって

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推進された。ブルームの著書はいわゆる世俗的ヒューマンイズムの立場から、70年代の学生紛争の体験をもとにしながら、世界における「アメリカ的現在」の回復を求めたものであり、ハーシュの著書も同様のテーマを、「文化的理解力」の社会における目立った衰退とそれに対する懐疑がいかに経済的な衰退の原因になっているかの観点から論じている。

本論文は、以上のような議論自体を「興亡」のテーマ以上に、「挑戦と応答」をめぐる議論として捉え、植民地時代、建国時代からのアメリカ思想史と1950年代中葉以後の大学教育をめぐる議論のコンテクストのなかに位置づけ、あわせて特にブルームの著書が巻き起し、今日まで続けられている論争を加味しながら、取り扱ったものである。

I

History is an overarching narrative which tries to account for and recount our human existence, and since it is in our experience taken only in time and place, the narrative succumbs to structuring, which entails limiting or defining its chronological scope and geographical extent. It puts aside data irrelevant to its purpose; it frequently, if not always, ignores those contrary to its author's thesis or intention; and finally it frames linguistically every available and pertinent datum into a signifying structure under a guiding grand idea. It is a product of ideological, linguistic strategy which tactically tries to persuade. And persuasion is the author's rhetoric, but if he/she is to succeed, the author is chronically dependent on the quicksand of contemporary mood, especially in our time-sensitive/-oblivious times. Our times are fraught with all possible contradictions and ambiguities. On the one hand we are conscious of history; in certain points we are supersensitive, but on the other it can be said that ours is not a historical mentality, living more and more deeply in the computerized, simultaneous data processing mode of noetics that instantaneously visualizes information.

It is against such backgrounds that there have arisen a number of

tendencies deeply critical and suspicious of overarching descriptions, denying the tacit value system behind traditional historicizing. The overarching vision is now being eaten away by deconstruction, feminism, *l'école des Annales* and new historicism. They are having their heydays trying to be subversive, setting up their perspectives with the hitherto unaccounted-for, suppressed and unauthenticated strata brought within their bearings. With this conquest of the erstwhile central by the marginal, peripheral, shoving aside accepted historical narrative, it would seem ironic that tremendous energy is now being generated in order to prove that any narrative text is a covered-up failure, an intellectual ruin which attempted to achieve an overarching coda. Not only the text but also the mind itself cannot always and already attain to the desired projected conclusion, hanging there in the air. According to such an anti-rhetorical rhetoric, the radical condition of the humanities consists in exposing the vanity of human wishes to posit a unified teachable vision; instead it Socratically maieuticizes to the effect that nothing human can be taken as whole; what seems a rise is a fall, a ruin. One must have a sharp, critical acumen toward a seeming rise, an ascendancy, and then it will expose its radical fall, always and already. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Is the result of the humanities' time-consuming efforts after all to realize that all our linguistic or textual constructions are a doubtful booby-trap, and to arrive finally at an enlightened skepticism and self-satisfaction that after all nobody understands himself/herself as well as the world? Or we may with Michael Foucault give complete equivalence to any text, archival as well, or give more to it, to show the startling countercurrents to an accepted overarching vision, underlying and thus subverting or jostling the historical ideology of the power-possessing class. Certainly the hitherto insignificant, meaningless, dispersed texts would then all of a sudden start assuming a new meaning, but we wouldn't know for certain whether it is a clever chimera or some genuine historical reordering.

II

Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York, Random House, 1988) is a product of traditional historiography. Instead of eponymous heroes, it has modern nations claiming each its sovereignty in rivalry to outdo others on its own terms as the successor nation to Imperial Rome in modern times. Successor sovereign states have made their claims and attempts to be empires. Kennedy concentrates not on the vagaries of the growth of American power and its decline alone, but on those of successive empire-claimers/-builders, some quite successful and others thwarted. But it is obvious that when he wrote, he had in mind the fortunes of the most recent claimers to the title. He specifically limited his terrain to Western Europe and concerned himself with the span of the last five hundred years, beginning with the "European miracle" in which first the Hapsburg empire emerged, followed by Holland, France, Britain and Prussian Germany, and ending with the relative decline of American power (and Japan's rise as an economic power with the potentialities of the Pacific economic basin), just before the now epiphanic, ongoing crumbling process of Russian power.

Although Kennedy limited his treatment to Western Europe, the course of his historical narrative leads to a global perspective, since these nations in mutual rivalries and in succession have claimed and endeavored to encompass the entire inhabitable world. As nineteenth-century German historians would unabashedly say, and actual designers of the modern empires would have executed the idea, Western Europe has become the world; it permeated the other parts of the world and established the image of the world with its center in the small fringe of the north-western hemisphere. Kennedy is, to be sure, no chauvinist, but a globalist. What I would like to say is that even at this last juncture of the second millennium looking toward the third we still have to use the narrative structure of "world history" invented by nineteenth-century historiography (Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). In this sense Kennedy is another classical follower of major historians like Rancke, Spengler and

Toynbee. To these men, world history is a morphology of inner life's development; now that the world and Western Europe have collapsed, they refuse to consider ostensibly cultural orbits other than theirs and recognize their subsidiary roles. But what is called the historical sense is eminently theirs. Since we are to deal with "fall," we shall quote Spengler's remark on world history:

This, then, is our task. We men of the Western Culture are, with our historical sense, an exception and not a rule. World-history is *our* world picture and not all mankind's. Indian and Classical man formed no image of a world in progress, and perhaps when in due course the civilization of the West is extinguished, there will never again be a Culture and a human type in which "world-history" is so potent a form of the waking consciousness (Oswald Spengler, tr. Charles Francis Atkinson, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1927, p.15).

It is interesting to observe that subscribing to a Nietzschean vision of the collusion of two principles, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Spengler regarded the historical sense as something uniquely Western European. I don't intend to implicate Kennedy in the Spenglerian view of history. But the dynamism in his historical narrative brings a relatively small and insignificant fringe to the world stage, but ironically in so doing admits further fringes of this expanding area to the center of this world theater of struggles for hegemony. For behind this expanding and other-sphere-enveloping terrain of Western Europe, Kennedy poses at the outset of his narrative two potential outsiders — Japan and Russia — that were to emerge toward the end of the unit he has taken out of time. These two outsiders are preparing behind the stage for their appearance in the limelight. Together with China and the Muslim world, they constitute the backstage world that is eventually to be involved in world history, when it is conceptually formed. Yet this world history — an invention of the European historical sense, as it was — has been increasingly taken over by non-European elements. Even if the idea of world history is a peculiar

product of the nineteenth-century European mind, one can project it backward to grasp in a unified vision multiple strands of histories — and Kennedy too owes his history to it — and with this matrix one may control historical data to make fluctuating reality in time into a meaningful narrative.

The Western European geographical terrain is the core, the starting-point of the widening, ramifying, and complicating process. Although Kennedy stringently starts with the beginning of modern, post-Renaissance times, we have simply to posit a further beginning, a sort of primary matrix for the evolving of historical dynamism. Modern post-Renaissance sovereign states have all been successors to the Roman empire; inevitably each of them has tried to envision their future in terms of this imperial matrix, bedecking itself and its history with the imperial trappings. Such trappings are largely mythological, but their overall project was, territorial ambition notwithstanding, to produce a large power structure for guaranteeing order, security and peace to those integrated in the scheme. The Hapsburg empire containing several nations was both a residue of the medieval multi-nation empire and a modern innovation of a conglomerate of national interests, soon to be split into nation-states. Nation-states like Britain and France, and Germany, a very late comer to an imperial title (Frances Yates, *Astraea: the Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975; Howard D. Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England: the Decline of a Classical Norm*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978; Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature*, London, Arnold, 1983), vied and bickered in wars in the European terrain, each striving to become a superpower. As the other larger part of the earth came to be integrated into the history of this terrain through colonialism, and the spread of its culture all over the globe, peripheries started to form themselves in the theater of struggle among Western European nation-states.

These areas were in the beginning only subsidiary, material suppliers, but towards the end of Kennedy's historical narrative — especially in the latter half of the twentieth century through the Second World War — two superpowers of Soviet Russia and the United States of America emerged on the peripheries of Western Europe. It

would be interesting to note that these two lie not in the heartland of Western Europe but on its fringes, and that those appearing on the fringes are more powerful than those in the heartland of a history. Peripheral nations always become eventually more vigorous and powerful with their claims to past imperial heritage. A past example is Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, still giving unconscious and conscious reverberations to the German spirit. The American Republic is seen and sees itself as successor to *Pax Britannica* (significantly, Kennedy's two previous books are *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, London, Ashfield, 1976, and *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*, 1980), peace guaranteed throughout the world by the British Empire, which was highly successful, being situated off the shore of the Western European terrain, and which had as an ideological basis a rather strong historical consciousness of being a close, though remotely situated, successor to the Roman Empire. Western European dynamism expanding to all the fringes of the globe is the restoration, the renewal of Rome — the rise of many new Romes (and their falls). Empire and republic may sound contradictory in term, but even in ancient Rome they were unifiable. It is now well known that the founding of the American Republic was ideologically and dramaturgically set on the model of the Roman Empire, and the Founding Fathers frequently pondered on the actual making of the political system and thought of its enlightened destiny and enlightening mission in terms of the Roman Republic/Empire. Of course, we cannot explain only by means of an imperial idea the historical course of American democracy; coupled with it, we must attend to the idea of a millennial state that is to have no end (Ruth Block, *Visionary Republic; Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985). American historical dynamism has carried on this idea of ever growing, ever becoming better and greater, approaching ever nearer the ideal state and world rule. This was shattered on a conscious level by the Vietnam War, creating for the first time a radical crisis in the American mind, but has been alive on an unconscious level and demanding its rehabilitation.

In Kennedy's cool, realistic view, no power can have unlimited

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growth; every power, super or regional, has limits to its economic growth and it is impossible to overextend and survive as a power, though the limits of growth are taken to depend flexibly on the variability of increases in productivity, fostered by innovative technology; that too has limits. We are witnesses to the unexpected turn and rapid pace of history after Kennedy has brought his narrative to a coda. But it may be another example of his lesson: no empire can overreach and extend beyond the limits of its growth. And at the moment, it seems that the Soviet empire, motivated by the secular version of traditional czarist combinational ideology of the Roman Empire and millennial eschatology with apocalyptic, and taking shrewd advantage of the post-World War II situation, incarnated in the figure of Stalin, *the steel man*, is in the process of (self-)liquidation in desperately trying to cope with its utter economic failure and technological rust. All of a sudden, nations within the framework of the Soviet empire are calling vociferously for their independence, and those under its strong influence are withdrawing from its suzerainty. Communist (eschatological) universalist ideology has become in one day an obsolete object, to be discarded by the power-holders of the superpower and bringing a plight to Western Communists, and Marxists. It would be interesting to note that such a sudden development of events has occurred almost simultaneously with the Russian Orthodox Church's celebration of its second millennium's arrival. Although most probably Kennedy too did not foresee two years ago such a momentous debacle, his conclusion after analyzing Soviet difficulties seems prophetic to us:

It is a grim dilemma.

This can hardly be an unalloyed pleasure for the West, however, since there is nothing in the character or tradition of the Russian state to suggest that it could ever accept imperial decline gracefully. Indeed, historically *none* of the over-extended, multinational empires . . . ever retreated to their own ethnic base until they had been defeated in a Great Power war, or (as with Britain after 1945) were so weakened by war that an imperial withdrawal was politically unavoidable. Those who rejoice at the present-day difficulties of the Soviet Union

and who look forward to the collapse of that empire might wish to recall that such transformations normally occur at very great cost, and not always in a predictable fashion (p.664).

But Kennedy was writing his book in a generally gloomy consciousness of America's slide from No.1 position, at least being taken over by Japan in the world economy, while the vast transcontinental Soviet monolithic terrain did not seem to start fissuring so soon despite serious economic difficulties. The book's popularity depended perhaps on this general concern about the country's future; it offered in a sense the reassuring prospect of its still retaining a significant role on the stage of the world together with China, Japan, the EC and Russia. "From another perspective, however, the American position is a very special one. For all its economic and perhaps military decline, it remains, in Pierre Hassner's words, 'the decisive actor in every type of balance and issue' " (p.692). Kennedy is a type of historian who does not mix moral values in his recounting. The half a millennium of regional powers leading up to the emergence of two powerful universalist imperial superpowers soon, in less than half a century, to be led into decline, taken in the matrix of rise and fall, is almost a historical necessity. Yet the American Republic's destiny is "the linchpin of the western alliance system and the centre of the existing global economy" (p.664), despite its fortune. It may continue to be so, or it may not. For the moment at least, warned but unexpectedly, the Soviet superpower is crumbling, definitely receding from its sphere of influence. Suddenly people are discovering behind its atheistic credo the fiercely pan-Slavic czarist monolithic millenarianism, and the ancient, tenacious international political and cultural power-structure of two Romes, Rome in the West and Byzantine or Moscovite Rome. Soviet power is receding from the buffer zone of Eastern Europe, and as far as we can speculate, it seems now that German power is re-emerging in Central Europe on the ancient soil of the medieval empire, where millennial hope for the third empire had been strongly kept alive until the midst of modern times. (The idea of European unification or federation, in the shape of a Pan-European movement, de Gaulle's rather exclusivist, France-centered unification proposal from the west of the Urals to the

Atlantic, the EC's supernational unification projected for 1992, is for that matter a renovation of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire.)

The American imperium's position now, in the dramatically changed context of a rapidly transforming power structure, surprisingly suggests the resilience of an abiding imperial matrix. The recent international events are outside the scope of Kennedy's narrative, but his book, just after being written, now has to be read and evaluated in this changed context. One may gleefully conclude in the face of the socialist economy's destitution that, after all, U.S. investment in colossal military hardware, even up to the recently projected star-war programme, has succeeded in bringing its counterpart empire to a final debacle by calling for a corresponding military build-up on a weaker economic basis. In many ways his historical narrative is a product of classical military historiography, with an overall, global extent, but dressed by the abundant figures, statistics, and charts familiar to economic history. The marshalling of such figures tends to give an impression of an inevitable, irreversible, rigid, rather mechanical law of natural necessity that will sooner or later fall on every rising nation, Japan included, in the anarchic world order. Although I think that anarchy and order are a complete dichotomy, history may be considered to be a descriptive discipline to bring order to such a primeval chaotic human reality. Thus epic and history have some common ground in myth. Obviously, Kennedy must have envisioned his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* after the model of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, taking the gigantic span of Rome's genesis down to the fifteenth century (E. J. Oliver, *Gibbon and Rome*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1958; G. W. Bowerstock, et al., ed., *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977), which had in its turn Augustine's *The City of God* written at the last hour of the Roman empire (or at least its Western part. See R. A. Marcus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: the Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987). Rise and fall, a pattern taken out of natural growth, is a myth that has made possible the structuring

for the historical narrative of “economic change and military conflict.” It has provided change and conflict (anarchic world order) with a meaning. Change and conflict are a chaos. Chaos is dynamic, but figures and charts conjure up the mechanism of historical inevitability. Myth is sometimes interpreted as a consoling palliative, and to have a necessary humanizing, liberating effect; at other times a tyrannical spell or jinx, which we can break through by our liberty and creative innovation. I believe that is what Arnold J. Toynbee meant by “challenge and response”: “In a growing civilization a challenge meets with a successful response which proceeds to generate another and a different challenge which meets with another successful response. There is no term to this process of growth unless and until a challenge arises which the civilization in question fails to meet — a tragic event which means a cession of growth and what we have called a breakdown. Here the correlative rhythm begins. The challenge has not been met, but it none the less continues to present itself” (*A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI*, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, p.548).

We don't wish to opine that the human race, or at least its civilized part, has lost the vigor to respond to the present challenge. That is too fatalistic. After finishing Kennedy's narrative, our sentiment is something like Augustine's:

After the state or city comes the world, the third circle of human society — the first being the house, and the second the city. And the world, as it is fuller of dangers, as the greater sea is the more dangerous. And here, in the first place, man is separated from man by the difference of languages. . . . For their common nature is no help to friendliness when they are prevented by diversity of language from conveying their sentiments to one another; But the imperial city has endeavoured to impose on subject nations not only her yoke, but her language, as a bond of peace, so that interpreters, far from being scarce, are numberless. This is true; but how many great wars, how much slaughter and bloodshed, to have provided this unity! If I attempted to give an adequate

description of these manifold disasters, these stern and lasting necessities, though I am quite unequal to the task, what limit could I set (*The City of God*, tr. Marcus Dods, New York, The Modern Library, 1950, p.683, Book XIX, 7).

III

Kennedy analyzes the difficulties the complex overextended super-powers — the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. — are now facing. With particular reference to the U.S., they are aggrandizements in terms of its military arsenal, its supporting technology and industry, and its internal and international economic relations. The horizon of these conflicting interests can hardly be seen. A dinosaur-like conglomerate of such conflicting interests finds it extremely difficult to change even minor policies. Efficiency is lost to the system itself, hardening its nerves and sinews. Hardware weapon technology does not necessarily contribute to adaptability to new circumstances. In view of such a situation and the increasing power of competitive partners, Kennedy's advice is as follows: "The task facing American statesmen over the next decades, therefore, is to recognize that broad trends are under way, and that there is a need to 'manage' affairs so that the *relative* erosion of the United States' position takes place slowly and smoothly, and is not accelerated by policies which bring merely short-term advantage but longer-term disadvantage" (p.690).

This is an enlightened political wisdom, but one may feel a certain *tristesse*. Toynbee, after giving a number of examples, concludes that intensity-bringing simplification is the answer to a less flexibly overgrown system of civilization in terms of hardware technology and bureaucracy.

We conclude that a given series of successful responses to successive challenges is to be interpreted as a manifestation of growth if, as the series proceeds, the action tends to shift from the field of an external environment, political or human, to the *for intérieur* of the growing personality or civilization. In

so far as this grows and continues to grow, it has to reckon less and less with challenges delivered by external forces and demanding responses on an outer battlefield, and more and more with challenges that are presented by itself to itself in an inner arena. Growth means that the growing personality or civilization tends to become its own environment and its own challenger and its own field of action. In other words, the criterion of growth is progress towards self-determination. (p.208)

History is in its last analysis a narrative of events and to bring it into the invisible inner world is as dangerous as to limit its vision to positive data. And the nexus of outer events is the epiphany of the spirit.

Kennedy's rather detached, subdued presentation of the rise and fall of modern powers in the anarchic world order is nevertheless based on the conservative trust in human's capacity for organizing data into history and the validity of such an attempt. Even if a historian has learned a matrix, he is not to superimpose it from outside, but to discover it in the flow of events. Although his work is of no such gigantic magnitude and his actual writing has not been so dramatically initiated, Kennedy could possibly share Gibbon's evolution of his *opus magnum* from an intuitive idea as he recounts at the end of *Decline and Fall*: "The historian may applaud the importance and variety of his subject; but, while he is conscious of his own imperfections, he must often accuse the deficiency of his materials. It was among the ruins of the Capitol that I first conceived the idea of a work which has amused and exercised near twenty years of my life..." (Robert Maynard Hutchins ed., *Great Books of the Western World*, 40, Gibbon, 2, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, p.598).

IV

Allan Bloom in his *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987) and E. D.

Hirsh, Jr. in his *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1987) (together with the supplementary *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, HM, 1988), all controversial bestsellers, are largely concerned with inroads being made into the noetic premise and the system of values based on the fundamental legibility of text and reality. Although the potential problematics implied in the title "The Closing of the American Mind" has generated still on-going discussion, and suggested an agenda for American society looking for long-term causes and solutions after becoming acutely aware of its inner vulnerability beneath its weakened economic and international power (e.g. Bruce Wilshire, *The Moral Collapse of the University: Professionalism, Purity, and Alienation*, Albany, State University of New York, 1989), the bestseller itself, serious as it may be in its intent, seems rather a concordance of mutually disjunct complaints that *in toto* reiterate the age-old, almost in that sense traditional, melody of accusing higher academic institutions of failure and incapacity to produce citizens deeply committed to society's inherited cultural values, or sustain cultural, political, economic and legal ideology, which some scholars might critically assault, though the assault is to strengthen and revitalize ("Law, deconstruction and the resistance to theory," Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and the Interests of Theory*, London, Pinter, 1988, p.153, n.3). There should never occur a destruction of the rock upon which society as well as individuals can live an ordered, enriched life. Bloom bitterly laments in harking back to the miseries, and disruptions brought by student unrest in the late sixties, the introduction of black studies and of feminist movements, and the aftermath's student apathy, inactivity and silence — all these in the ambience of parental *laissez-faire*, sexual emancipation and overall neglect of morals against the background of unheard-of material enrichment.

Bloom gathered experience *vis-à-vis* students, professional activist tactics, good-natured faculty appeasement, and final impotency surrender, when he was teaching at Cornell, on whose department of French, with its strong deconstructionist tendency, he lays in his book the blame for shattering all the traditional (American) humanist values on campus. His endless description of this *malaise* is touching to those who

were at that time not sympathetic toward radical elements. We should not forget the serious threat humanism then faced, but it is doubtful that too much reflection on the horrors of those days is fruitful. Actually, the whole matter appears, at least to myself, to be rather a largely jarring chunk, together with a polemic against deconstruction, that does not always unify with Bloom's defence of traditional (American) educational values. Bloom seems to take all these phenomena as symptoms of the decline of American ethos, the cause as well as result of American power.

Hirsh's book may be described as proposing the execution of research results in the field of language studies in their historical and psychological aspects, emphasizing the inseparable connection between language-learning and culture. In short, his thesis is that unless the nation maintains a good social reservoir of literate culture, it cannot further advance in today's high technological world. He shows that modernization and industrial revolution were carried forward not by technological inventions on an economic basis but by the dissemination of literate culture that supported and fostered these (pp.72-78). For a modern industrial nation literate culture is essential to a political, social system highly conscious of equality: "The claim that universal cultural literacy would have the effect of preserving the political and social status quo is paradoxical because in fact the traditional forms of literate culture are precisely the most effective instruments for political and social change" (p.22). "It is, therefore, a very odd cliché that connects literate national culture with elitism, since it is the least elitist or exclusive culture that exists in any modern nation. Literate culture is far less exclusive, for instance, than any ethnic culture, no matter how poverty bound, or pop culture or youth culture" (p.106). If we can turn the Babel myth upside down, and posit the incommunicable plurality of languages in the human origin, thus considering that language is no efficient, transparent means of communication but rather a code which keeps secret knowledge within a tribe or a group (George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, London, Oxford University Press, 1975), the end of future technoculture would be linguistic unity.

While Kennedy ascribes the loss of American vitality to overexten-

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sion and inability to cope with the complicating aggrandizement of its inner as well as international structure, Bloom seems to do so to the betrayal of American myth, ultimately reducible to the Bible, to be found in the Declaration of Independence drawn up by Thomas Jefferson. What matters is tension between two revolutions and two states of nature: the American and the French, the Lockean and the Rousseauian (On the other hand one must remember that the state of pure nature in the discovered new world generated a host of political speculations from Thomas More to Locke. See Arthur J. Slavin, "The American Principle from More to Locke," Fredi Chiappelli, ed., *The First Images of America: the Impact of the New World on the Old*, vol.1, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1976, 139-64). Bloom lays ultimate blame largely on Rousseau for America's loss of spiritual power, but he accuses rather sharply the infiltration of German philosophy from Nietzsche to Heidegger, who is supposed to have been a Nazi sympathizer, into American university education. He also considers Freud as the ultimate consequence of Rousseau's view on the state of nature. Since recent hermeneutic, critical theory and practice's connection is an indirect German connection through the French, and the new reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger is loudly proposed, and one of its deceased leaders of European Continental origin has posthumously been implicated with the Nazi past simultaneously as Heidegger became an object of heated controversy, where Bloom's thrust is directed appears to be rather evident.

Thomas Jefferson opined in a letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813: "... there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talent The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed, it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. May we not even say, that that form of government is the best, which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government? The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its ascendancy. . . ." Bloom characterizes the American youth's

innocence as “the clean slate” when he/she first comes to receive higher education, in comparison with his/her old-world sophisticated counterpart who up to that hour of initiation has absorbed a good deal of culture. Each American youth therefore is a phenotype of the aetiological myth of the American nation, American (new) Adam. As a matter of fact, the story of American innocence *vis-à-vis* European sophistication has been repeatedly told in countless nuances and versions in literary works, histories and social sciences. This aetiological creation myth, recounted to millions of native born Americans and later immigrants, and triumphantly proclaimed to the world, has long been the bulwark of the American nation; it is an indelible sign as well as guarantee of the nation’s uniqueness among the community of nations, with its consequences in the American Republic’s richness, power and glory assuring each of freedom, equal opportunity and success.

The American Republic had in its origin already always the consciousness of an empire. Contrary to its Adamic, almost on the surface pre-lapsarian, myth of nature (overemphasis of the biblical creation myth with its ignoring of the post-lapsarian condition, although this must have existed due to the puritan heritage) combined with Enlightenment thought, the republic was to assume the shape of the American Empire, when it came to be conscious of its unique mission to the world. Bloom’s lengthy analysis of the development of the modern European academic world (Germanization of modern learning and its downfall in Heidegger’s surrender to Nazism) is highly stimulating, but as Saul Bellow remarks in his preface, a bit heady and hazy. He is, to be sure, deploring the inroads made by academic disciplines’ calling in doubt of the American myth that has entered into the fabric of American public discourse, legal, administrative and academic. He holds this responsible for the shallowing and pejoration of the American ethos typically to be seen in today’s American youth as the reflection of their parents’ lifestyle. To Bloom, C. P. Snow’s claim to make natural science into a culture (*The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution: the Rede Lecture, 1959*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1959) is simply to be rejected.

Interestingly, Bloom’s reference to the relationship of natural science to the Soviet regime sounds in today’s international political

situation highly prophetic. According to Bloom, the Soviet ascendancy was built on the tyranny's total control of neutral natural sciences for its exclusive, sinister benefit. And natural sciences's defencelessness and surrender to it made the situation all the more aggravating. But now in 1990, this "evil empire" is ostensibly crumbling at a far greater speed than it was imagined. I can even at present recall the shock that awoke the American public from a comfortable dream one day with the Soviet shooting of the Sputnik into outer space that since America is a democratic political system and the U.S.S.R. is a totalitarian one, theirs is the best system to hold the lead in science and technology. Suddenly, every American realized that the supposedly best political system does not necessarily mean the best higher education. Reading Bloom's book together with Hirsh's, I feel that there exists a genealogy of writings on the failure(s) of higher education in American democracy, starting with Jacques Barzun's then controversial book *Teacher in America* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1944), which suddenly took off after Sputnik, or Harold Taylor's *Students without Teachers: the Crisis in the University* (New York, McGraw, 1969). Actually, this is an old stock cry against higher education; I found by chance in the T. S. Eliot-edited *Criterion* an article by B. I. Bell called "The Decay of Intelligence in America," 14/55 (January, 1935), 193-203. Although Bloom claims himself to be a philosopher (and we should not forget the past history between philosophers and humanists, teachers of letters), and although he takes an ambivalent love-hate attitude to culture as something that has replaced in the nineteenth century the philosophic universalism of the Enlightenment, and has begun the cultivation of the particular, he and Barzun are curiously attuned to the effects of the youth's reading the great classics. It is evident that behind Bloom's battle of disciplines, and Hirsh's for that matter, stands the whole history of literature (culture) vs. natural science between Matthew Arnold and Thomas Huxley, and F. R. Leavis (*Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1972) and Snow, and now joined by social sciences.

Bloom is particularly acerbic toward psychology and social sciences. These have infiltrated into the American academic life, demythologized its political and social life, and desocialized the

American individual. The humanities are not exonerated by Bloom, for the teachers of humane learning sold their domains to new trends of psychology, cultural anthropology and social sciences coming from the old world. Bloom is a supporter of "Great Books," and although not particularly complying to a religious tradition, he sees the need for supporting the moral values hitherto thought essential, but now increasingly suspected and denigrated, to the life of American democracy. To him, a galaxy of imposing writers like Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, Freud and Marx is not to be rejected outright, but to be confronted. The superficial and depotentialized adaptations, like Magaret Mead's cultural anthropology, and American deconstructionists are in his view typical of an easy-going American compromise, and academic charlatans.

It is thus extremely interesting to notice in Bloom's thinking the age-old version of interpreting America as the pejoration of old-world culture, in which even domestic animals and plants are being dwarfed (Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: the History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, Revised and Enlarged Ed., tr. Jeremy Moyle, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973, pp.3-34; 52-79). Definitely when he discusses American academic life, the otherwise homespun but extremely well-read Bloom seems to be pessimistic, though confident of the fundamental moral values generating from the American myth. For him the best American moment is the fifties, when these were accepted unchallenged, with America's international power at its height. But the apparent spiritual strength at its peak contained some intellectual blindness to be dramatically exposed by Sputnik. The aetiological myth of American Adam — of making a completely new start for humankind, and of the radical superiority of this newness over the old and the bygone — is coterminous with the myth of the fall. The clean slate is an ambiguous state; American innocence is from time to time American ignorance, as Bloom describes in reference to the campus youth, that turns into arrogance and callousness, helped by material affluence. Bloom regards Socrates an eponymous figure for the American teacher who has the role of mediating between university and democratic city, for he sees an essential tension between people and intellect, and somehow the people's freedom and pursuit of happiness

ought to be restrained by reason for society to function. I would rather say that the consciousness of the new start on the basis of pristine nature actually and implicitly posits and stands in tension with the old world. In as much as you emphasize the radicality of the new start, so you stress the culture of the old world. Jefferson upheld natural aristocracy and rejected old hereditary artificial aristocracy, but to draw the aristocracy of virtue out of nature is in itself an artificial task.

The American aetiological myth of nature is an artificial, cultural myth, fabricated to assert America's unique mission. Those who fabricated it — Puritans and Founding Fathers — were highly educated persons with an Anglo-Saxon tradition and a keen sense of their derivation from it. They were not noble savages, and therefore the clean slate is no true description of American Adam. America knows only modernity. It started with literate culture rather than with pre-modern orality (Lewis P. Simpson, *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness in America*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1980, pp.3-22). Hirsh adverts to the essential formative role of classical education and Ciceronian rhetoric for the American public discourse starting with the Founding Fathers (p.109), the rapid loss of whose influence in the twentieth century has accelerated the weakening of the cultural sinew of the nation; he argues that without his "cultural literacy" or the general, if vague, supply of such common-property-like inputs and an agreed manner of discourse, the nation now in the stage of a material and techno-computerized culture simply faces a serious communication break-down, and will be thrown into a grave crisis. He points out the failure of energetic, massively funded attempts to disseminate "reading skill" among the lower income classes. Call it an imposition of a ruler ideology or not, you cannot simply succeed in educating children to the level of actively participating in the running of the complex organization of the nation, and of joining its middle echelon and getting an adequate share of the nation's riches. Hirsh further suggests that all such inputs do not need to be an active knowledge, but a large part of it may remain passive in the subconscious of the mind to be quickly related to and activated by incoming information. Without such a culturally, socially agreed reservoir of snaps in the mind, the management of a vastly complex

social organism like the U. S. would become inefficient, taking much more time and energy despite instantaneous information systems and will eventually face disorganization. One may add with Bloom a moral aspect to Hirsh's thesis, for literacy, culture and morals are actually one, to be disseminated by Bloom's Socratic maieutic now based on teacher-student discussion on Great Books and through Hirsh's public discourse based on Ciceronian rhetoric with the identity of orality and literacy (I feel that Hirsh should have been more attentive to the radical difference between orality and printed text. See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, London, Methuen, 1982). Language and culture are the intertextuality that supports the American mind. To both of them, talk of social control and hegemonial constraint are a travesty. I don't know whether Burkean conservatism can be shared by Bloom and Hirsh. But since to Bloom the fifties was an idyllic landscape in which the American Adam or clean-slate American youth encountered and assimilated the traditional discourse, one may recall a celebrated thought-provoking book, Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, H. Regnery, 1953), in which several conservative tenets are stated. At least Kirsh's cultural literacy seems to me a rather linguistically sophisticated, but by no means more deepened, version of Kirk's thesis. At any rate Bloom would agree with the conservative tenets that "conservatives know man to be governed more by emotion than reason" or "innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress."

Bay Colony Puritans and founding fathers were not noble savages; they were literate persons. Puritan divines and statesmen of the American Revolution were intellectuals with classical backgrounds, well-versed in classical history. The former were almost all products of old-world university education, and the latter native borns, the products of a traditional school liberal curriculum (Franklin being a famous self-educated exception). When one looks through the Federalist Papers for instance, one would easily notice the extent to which ancient history was used by Alexander Hamilton for discussion on the future political organization of the American Republic. America was the first nation that started with literacy and university. Think of

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Harvard University's origin after the first winter of the colonists' settlement. It was to perpetuate the learning of the old world: "After God had carried us safe to New-England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for Gods worship and settled the Civil Government; One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in Dust" (Britannica, 1970, 11, p.137). Jefferson wrote to Joseph Priestly in England on January 18, 1800, when he was contemplating plans for the University of Virginia that he intended "to draw from Europe the first characters in science" but later the possibilities for Europeans would be foreclosed, once "fit successors" were formed. The Jeffersonian ideal of an American as distinguished from an old-world man is definitely an agricultural man modelled on the Virgilian concept of an upright, thrifty, frugal Roman farmer. His myth of American origin is the biblical myth of creation superimposed by that of God's covenant with his elected (rather the creation interpreted in the ideological framework of covenant) rationalized by the Lockean doctrine of social contract. As Bloom suggests, already in this synthesis attained by Jefferson, representative of Southern agrarian interests, we may see a powerful tendency energized by some quasi-religious mission-consciousness toward mercantilism, that has in the course of two centuries brought forth affluence and the power of the American empire. The myth of American innocence had been taken for granted without much scrutinizing until the Vietnam war. It was the driving spiritual force for historicizing America's manifest destiny that supported American self-consciousness of its perpetual rise and growth (pre-Darwinian Darwinism), making the nation always right and just in any dealings in the international community. So the myth of American innocence is also the myth of American righteousness. But the mercantilian element is a "tragic flaw," and the peripeteia of American drama is the Vietnam war — the loss of American innocence and the relativizing of American power. The story of American civilization's growth is how the Bible and Cicero have forged and cemented the nation's democratic linguistic identity, or the enlarged myth of American democracy. In his plan

for the University of Virginia, which was to be "broad and liberal and modern," Jefferson excluded useless sciences however hitherto estimated, and introduced practical and natural sciences. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the age of scientific thought. The Founding Fathers were at most benign deists, not particularly pious in a Christian sense, but they would all have agreed with Russell Kirk's tenet: "a divine intent rules society as well as conscience forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead."

V

The creation-Lockean synthesis in the Declaration of Independence contains also the Rousseauian atavistic element: back to nature. But it can further go back to the Puritan ambivalence toward nature (wilderness/Eden). (Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1988) But Puritans migrated to the new world to build colonies, cities, new, true England, new, true Europe. They intended to become city-builders. (We may recall John Winthrop's famous sermon on board the *Arbella* en route to the new world. "We shall be as a city upon a hill.") In the Adamic moment, the American nation can posit its origin on the hypothesis of virgin nature. The passage of time brings ever greater separation (fall or loss of innocence) from this origin, but virgin nature herself remains as guarantee of American innocence, possibility, and power. But nature taken as human nature in history succumbs to the degeneration of time, if it is left to itself. The pursuit of happiness, if left to complete mercantile freedom, becomes unrestrained avarice and egotism. It is in this sense that Bloom, basing himself on Tocqueville's *American Democracy* stresses the role of *paideia*, university education in democracy. But rather than Bloom's tension between university and city, intellectuals and *demos*, there has existed a deeper tension between nature and culture, since nature has been always predominantly upheld against culture. One may sense a deep-seated, atavistic distrust of

culture in Bloom's critique of Modern European emphasis on culture. His Socratic maieutic is more directly related with the American adoration of nature, that has made the American intellectuals' role ambivalent in the society. In that sense Emerson may be considered Bloom's spiritual ancestor, who in his "The American Scholar," which Oliver Wendell Holmes considered "our intellectual Declaration of Independence," set unity with nature as the foremost condition for an American intellectual. In contemporary parlance Emerson insists that books offer a secondary or tertiary experience. "Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon have given." One may find surprisingly Rousseauian nature combined with Lockean mercantilism in activism flowing from pristine nature. "Men, such as they are, very naturally seek money or power; and because it is as good as money — the 'spoils', so called 'of office'. And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them up and they shall quit the false good and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture." To Emerson education is primarily through nature, and laborious learning of books (history and exact science) should not stifle genius. This is Rousseau's theory of education, and that of John Dewey. We may see curiously enough that Bloom's ideal education is essentially related to this habit of thinking. The American scholar is a grown-up American Adam.

Emerson saw growing bright vistas for the future of the new empire. The aetiological myth of nature is turned into the eschatological myth of the future. The clean slate, which is American innocence, has become easy-going closedness instead of openness to the future, when America has become wealthy and powerful. (This seems to be a universal phenomenon. Already in post-Augustan Rome, youth refused to comply with Virgilian ideals, living decadent lives. See Stanley F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1977, pp. 98-99. And it is becoming more and more manifest in the succeeding generations of Japanese youth nowadays.) Nobody will hastily conclude that the

American moment in world history is gone for good; it can be kept, perhaps with relative loss, in the anarchic world order by what Kennedy may call fore-sighted adaptation, but for that spiritual dynamism is needed, and perhaps it does not come out of the course of nature, but through constant efforts on the part of those custodians of intellect. Bloom's conclusion is abundantly incisive: "This is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. Just as in politics the responsibility for the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities, and the two are related as they have never been before" (p. 382). Kennedy's benign historical pragmatism will tell that America is only one of the centers of many orbits of the international power structure, but to maintain even the relativized American moment requires, it seems, some widened and deepened new public discourse without which Bloom's teacher-student dialogue becomes futile. Only by so doing will America's relative significance as one of the major powers be assured of longevity.¹

Note

- 1 Paul Kennedy's book and Allan Bloom's were translated into Japanese. 鈴木主税訳 (tr. Suzuki Chikara) 『大国の興亡』上下 (東京, 草思社, 1988), 410 pp. + 390 pp.; 菅野盾樹訳 (tr. Sugano Tateki) 『アメリカン・マインドの終焉・文化と教育の危機』 (東京, みすず書房, 1988), 446 pp.

