

# *The Eternal Dialectic: Thought and Power in the Rise and Fall of Civilizations*

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*[فقه الحضارات: بين قوة الفكر وفكر القوة](#)*

## *The Generative Forces of Civilizations*

*A civilization has two sources, and no third. The first is the Power of the Idea, and the second is the Thought of Power. These are two opposing sources in every approach, each with its own distinct philosophy. In the first, thought is paramount, and from its essence, power grows. In the second, power is the foundation, to which thought submits, whether by enticement or intimidation.*

## *The Civilization of Thought, and the Civilization of Power*

*An idea is a comfort to the weary and a finding for the anxious. Power, however, is a lust for dominion. An idea is magic, just as power is logic. The magic of an idea is a mover of the soul and a methodology for action. The logic of power, meanwhile, demands much submission and offers little benevolence. An idea is graceful, riding the breeze, permeating space. It reaches near and far without effort, storing within itself the energy for its own propagation. Power, however, is heavy-footed and unpalatable. It must muster an army of heralds in its perpetual quest to encircle squares and occupy fields.*

*The Civilization of Thought begins with an idea, but not just any idea. It is an idea with authority and influence that colonizes man, filling both his mind and spirit. It seeps deep into his consciousness, shaping his memory and the bulk of his awareness. Once his subconscious absorbs it, it becomes the driving force behind his daily life and its details. With it, and through it, life extends, gaining strength and overflowing with light and enchantment. Then, its poured fragrance slips into the*

*surroundings... it colonizes space. It flows through it like a shudder coursing through a body... it dances with the structures. It envelops the expanse like a gentle breeze on an April morning, sweeping across the plains and filling those valleys.*

*The Civilization of Power, in contrast, commences with the colonization of space. It sinks its claws into the earth and drives its awls into sore spots. The groaning of the place rises, and the squares clamor with annoyance, until it tightens its grip and secures its foothold. Once the land is subdued, it takes hold of time and tames its people as it loves and desires. Thus, it targets space, its field of action, first. Time conspires with it, and it ends with man, molding his consciousness to suit its purposes and perpetuate its dominance. It sowed, watered, and tended its tillage and its crop, achieving the influence, wealth, and permanence it desired.*

### ***A Clash of Objectives***

*The first has heaven as its goal, while the second finds its end on earth. The first ceaselessly searches for ascents, while the second endlessly explores detours. The first investigates origins to foresee endings, while the second also investigates origins, but to entrench the self. The first strives to sense existence, revealing insights, while the second busies itself with ransacking this existence, uncovering treasures.*

*The salvation of man is the anguish of the first; the lust for dominion is the passion of the second. In the first, man is the end; in the second, he is a sacrifice. In the first, man is an eternal spirit and an everlasting soul; in the second, he is a suffering mind and a perishing body. In the first, man is responsible freedom; in the second, he is whatever you and he will. In the first, man is a mind transcending the body; in the second, a mind enthralled by it. In the first, instinct is restrained; in the second, instinct rules. The first surrendered its reins to thought; the second refused to submit to anything but power.*

### ***Between the Concern for Livelihood and the Illusion of Livelihood***

*The first does not neglect life's concerns, considering them a bridge to arrival, while the second marshals all its forces into the philosophy of this livelihood and its promotion until it becomes the ultimate goal. The first views man's livelihood as a necessity of life, a patience of waiting, and an energy for passage to another place.*

*The second makes it the ultimate end, for which man existed and for which he shall exist.*

*In reality, and to achieve purely material gains, the second incessantly inflates man's material needs while constantly innovating new ones. It consumes minds, and souls are not immune, to market its malicious visions. It clothes the newly added in the guise of life's necessities, poisoning the nourishment. Its victims often confuse what is essentially necessary with what is newly introduced and often harmful. Then, it ultimately presents itself as a savior that fulfills man's new aspirations. It is a ring of fire with boundless greed. Man's illusory needs are in endless expansion, and material capabilities, no matter how immense, are never sufficient under any circumstances. The inevitable result is conflict, collision, and poor character and morals.*

### ***The Inevitability of Demise***

*Civilizations have differed in various aspects, but they all agree on the inevitability of demise. Whether their stay was long or short, they end, as always, as an inscription on the wall of time. Whether their edifice soared high or lay low, they turn into ruins upon which the algae of oblivion grows.*

*There are objective justifications for stating the inevitability of civilizational demise. Deficiency is a flaw in the very foundation and source of civilizations – be it from thought or power; these are inherent factors. Add to that the clash of perspectives and conflict of interests within the civilizational structure itself; these I call internal factors. Finally, new ideas and rising powers elsewhere in this world pose an existential threat that unsettles the old and senile; these are the external factors.*

#### ***First: Inherent Factors – The Deficiency of Sources***

*A civilization is an act of movement, and movement is an act that consumes energy. And energy is bound to deplete, even if its reserve swells one day. Whether it is the repercussions of thought or the outputs of power, its ember is destined to dim and its energy to exhaust. This is the nature of things as I have known them. It is the law governing the motion of things. For everything in motion tends towards stillness, or else it is a return to the beginning.*

*Ideas are an energy for change and mobilization, and in that lies their destruction. Power is an act of usurpation of both thought and wealth, and in that lies its demise. Ideas transport man from a state of anxiety to a new state whose fundamental characteristic is, again, anxiety. Its man is preoccupied with newly emergent concerns and preoccupations. The old ideas that suited the man of the first state are inevitably beneath the aspirations of the man of the second. They are incapable of meeting the needs of the new man, let alone soothing the pains born of the new condition, not to mention his growing ambitions. The new condition has its own objective conditions and laws. Consequently, and logically, it necessarily has its own specific ideas.*

*At such a civilizational juncture, thought must choose between impending annihilation or hoped-for modernization in vision and perspective. It is an inevitable civilizational predicament. Either submission and surrender to the obsolete old, and thus acceptance of God's decree and destiny, or a revolution against old concepts through modernization and development, making time an ally of thought... but only for a while!*

*For ideas, the fuel of modernity, are also destined to deplete because they are the product of a unified mind. The mind dominating the leadership of civilization is fixed and unchanging, and this is a shortcoming. The mind is anxious about its principles and methodology, a trait it cannot curb. It is anxious about the outputs of its thought, stingy with letting them expire. Its ideas, its constructs, have become, after gaining strength, rulers over it. It is now infatuated with them to the point of submission. And why not! They have proven their worth for life and built edifices of glory that rivaled the heavens in strength and loftiness. The mind, even if it reasons and raises its levels of flexibility and efficiency, cannot radically change its own mechanisms of inquiry. It is capable of development and modernization, but within constraints it cannot transgress, so that it always remains similar to itself.*

*Furthermore, the dominant mind works to domesticate minds within the scope of its control under a single methodology of thought. Thus, everyone becomes one, even if days separate them. Consequently, we face a single intellectual system that yields only intellectual similarities. Incapacity appears, and the structural deficiency at the*

*very foundation of the civilization's existence becomes evident... this is what I call the unification of mindset.*

*What holds true for thought also holds true for power. A significant aspect of the civilization of power is based on thought. It is a specific, domesticated thought that supplies it with the means to achieve its base ends of accumulating wealth and further entrenchment. However, the crisis of power is three-dimensional. Ideas are bound to deplete, as previously explained, just as wealth is bound to be depleted soon. Thus, a decrease in the level of power is an inevitable reality that must be faced.*

*The earth's reserves and repositories of wealth have been depleted or nearly so. They are now below the escalating needs of the voracious power. The roaring engines of power, its soldiers, its heralds, its servants, and even its victims and opponents, all consume wealth as a necessity of life. Thought strives, searching and prospecting for additional sources of energy. It succeeds a little, and often it fails. And bankruptcy remains an inevitability, whose consequences power must bear.*

### ***Second: The Internal Factor – The Fifth Column***

*In the intoxication of thought or the arrogance of power, neither thought nor power concerns itself much with its closest adversaries. These adversaries, whether in the right or in the wrong, represent a dormant force of destruction for the established order. They are now preoccupied with and indifferent to this latent force, for it currently has no tangible effect, muffled though its whisper may be. But this seemingly weak entity will one evening become the wrecking ball and the very act of annihilation that brings down the edifice of thought and the throne of power.*

*As always, a local faction appears, holding visions and interests different from those prevailing and dominant, whether of thought or power. It is a faction that does not lack patience nor opportunism. Diligent in its work, it never ceases to cast signs of the corruption of the existing order. It spreads atmospheres of doubt and confusion about the correctness of what thought proposes or power imposes. It diminishes the importance of clear beauty and manipulates the shameful ugly through exaggeration and magnification. It accompanies truth at times and abandons it for gain. It hides at the peaks and shines at the decline of thought and the setting of power. Thus, it has the greatest effect in dismantling the existing order, without necessarily being*



*an alternative to it or a part of this alternative. For highly particular interests and highly narrow visions are only fit as a philosophy for a fifth column, which never tires. It croaks at every morning and every evening, carrying the banner of disagreement and difference with what is prevalent of thought or power.*

### ***Third: The External Factor – The Emergence of New Thought or New Power***

*Thought, like power, may succeed in tightening control and mastery over the land, all the land, perhaps for long epochs. However, the winds of change are undoubtedly coming. For the world is vast and expansive, and wombs are fertile. The concerns, anxieties, and aspirations of people are too great for any single thought to encompass or any sole authority to gather, no matter how lofty the former or tyrannical the latter.*

*The emerging, youthful power, whether from thought or mere power, will reach the borders of contact with the ruling center. It is a matter of time, nothing more, and the clash becomes the decisive event. The rising power will undergo the test of merit against the old ruling order. It is either a decisive victory, leading to the decline of one civilization and the dawn of another new one, or a defeat, in which case it has the honor of the attempt. And the ruling order must prepare, even if after a while, for a new battle of existence with new rising powers.*


### ***Finally,***

*Ideas branch out from the salt of the earth, and they may slip from the eyelids of a dream. Power grows in the grasp of ambition and leans on the dreams of men. The salvation of man is the ultimate goal of thought, and salvation is ascents. The lust for dominion is the law of power, and lusts are slippery slopes. Thought is an energy for action; power is an incinerator of actions. Thought filters power, and power squeezes thought. The measure of thought is man, and man is inherently weak. The counter of power is time, and time has its assaults and rounds. In thought, there is shortcoming, and power has its incapacities. Thought is a source of civilization, as is power. Whether due to inertia or functional deficiency, both are destined to vanish... the throne of thought and the kingdom of power.*

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