

[*2] This is the backward-looking counterpoint to the equally useless tendency to blame dysfunctions on a specific current cultural phenomenon: rock and roll, TV, video gaming, rap, cell phones, social media, to name a few of the whipping posts I've witnessed in my little lifetime. I realized the inanity of this latter tendency when I was teaching one of Aristophanes' plays about 25 years ago, can't remember which. An elderly character is complaining about the "younger generation" in exactly the same way that my parents' generation complained about mine: derelict, degenerate, certain to precipitate the downfall of civilization. And he seized upon the same kinds of superficial evidence for support: their equivalent of "sex, drugs and rock and roll." So, I thought, 2500 years haven't changed much of anything about the generational conflicts of the moment. And I vowed not to fall prey to that kind of stupidity when I got "old." I knew nothing then, of course, about what it means to get old. I do now. And the temptation toward that temporal fallacy can be intense. So far, I've not only resisted it, I've gone the opposite way: I actually think my generation has been the "problem," our arrogance, greed, shortsightedness, and selfishness (I guess my parents' generation was right, but for all the wrong reasons) and that the generations right behind mine, millennials and Gen Z, so much stronger, wiser and better, may be the salvation from us, assuming it's not already too late for that. Over and over when I talk to my generational peers who are deeply pessimistic about the future, I try to persuade them that these good young people will make a better world, no matter their affection for TikTok or avocado toast or whatever the target *du jour* is on Fox News. And they are both surprised and grateful to hear that, even if they don't believe it.

The failure of my generation to envision a long-range future for subsequent generations may be one of the reasons why so many now can't foresee the demise of "democracy," the "American Empire," or "nature" itself, all of which are happening at quite a brisk pace right before their eyes. Noticing that requires an extra-generational approach to history and knowledge—a past that came before me and the future that will come after I'm gone. If you read any history, you know that all Empires fall, most by rotting from the inside out, precisely via the sort of inattention, denial, infighting and wishful thinking, we are indulging in right now, well before they are overtaken from the outside in.

