

[1981 HES Distinguished Fellow citation for Joseph Spengler. Published in the History of Economics Society *Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 1 (July 1981), pp. 4-5.]

Joseph J. Spengler
History of Economics Society
Distinguished Fellow

Joseph Spengler is one of the most profitable and wide-ranging scholars of our time. His professional writings in his two primary fields of interest, economic demography and the history of economic thought, has spanned over five decades and has been concerned with over two and a half millenia of human history. His publication record so far of over 300 articles and 22 books is one that few can match either in numbers, depth or erudition.

While the greater part of Professor Spengler's writings are ostensibly in the field of demography rather than in the history of economic thought, there is often no clear line to be drawn between the two in his work. His writings in the history of economic thought turn more often than not to ideas of growth, development and population found in earlier thinkers. Indeed, his interest in our field was first evident in his earliest article on Malthus - a figure to whom he has returned again and again throughout his long career. Moreover, his writings on contemporary problems display a careful attention to the origins and development of ideas that is the hallmark of a fine scholar. Professor Spengler has shown us that to understand an idea means to know its intellectual and sociological origins.

What probably marks Professor Spengler's work as characteristically his even more than his notoriously plentiful and lengthy footnotes, is the enormous breadth of his interests. The subjects of his articles and books range from the more or less familiar - Aristotle, Heroditus, the Physiocrats, Bouisguilbert, Cantillon, Malthus, Smith, J.S. Mill, Cassel - to the clearly exotic - The Arthasastra and Indian economic thought, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Kautilya, Lord Shang, Islamic economic thought and Alberuni, Eleventh Century Iranaian Malthusian. In all of his writings, especially those not easily fit into any particular mold because of their basically philosophical nature, Professor Spengler displays a deep concern for values, order, intellectual humility in the face ignorance, and a civility in human dealings that he sees to be our fragile protection from Hobbes's jungle. This message he has conveyed not only through his writings, but, also during his long career as teacher and mentor to many a lucky graduate student at Duke University.

Vital, hard-working, loved and respected by his colleagues, Joseph Spengler has received many professional honors from learned associations. Ours, however, is a special heartfelt thanks to a man who has set an example for us all to follow but rarely ever to match.

