2 *The Philosophical Justification of Prussianism*

The powers of national monarchs which were enhanced by the Reformation became increasingly absolute during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. No sooner had the various states liberated themselves from Roman influence than their rulers appropriated the powers and prerogatives which had previously belonged to the church. Nevertheless they were happy to endorse the theory that their right to rule was divinely ordained, since the confirmation of God for the exercise of their absolute powers was obviously desirable, and a religious foundation for their thrones would create reverence toward the crown from nobility as well as from the populace. The theory of "divine right" therefore received royal approbation and was defended by some of the best political thinkers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.[1]

Such a theory, however, diminished in popularity after the seventeenth century, partly because of the abuse of authoritarian rule, and partly because of the criticism of rational thinkers in England and France. These men based royal authority on natural law and a "social contract." The more liberal of them argued that the contract between ruler and subjects could be annulled by the people. Such a theory not only undermined belief in the "divine right of kings," but it also provided the individual with rights that he had not hitherto possessed. The nature of these rights remained a subject for analysis and dispute for centuries, but liberal thinkers in the age of Enlightenment inclined to follow the argument of John Locke that these rights were natural and inalienable in every human being. The French-Swiss Rousseau employed this concept to exaggerate the dignity of man in a state of nature. Both Locke and

[1] The Reformation brought more power to the state in Roman Catholic countries also. Those monarchs who remained loyal to the church employed their opportunity to take over many of the church's former rights This was particularly true in France where the theory of divine right was much in vogue.

Rousseau had a profound influence upon the leaders of the American and French revolutions.

Both these revolutions and the liberal thought of the eighteenth century helped to undermine absolutism in Europe, but the idea of the divine right of kings was never really discarded in Prussia. The American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man found some response in Prussia, but the ideas contained in them never took root there, and various interpreters distorted rather than cultivated the liberal principles involved. In Germany the cause of human liberty and individual freedom was gradually discredited by a host of conscious and unconscious critics from Kant to Spengler.

KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was the founder of what is called the "idealist" school. The provocativeness of his thought and the abstruseness of his expression resulted in his meaning many different things to many different men. He should not properly be brought into this discussion at all were it not for what certain German thinkers did with his philosophy as a starting point.

First of all, Kant made a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, one based on actual experience and sense perception, and another comprising those truths which we cannot know by experience but must assume to exist in order to get along in the world. These were the spiritual and moral truths. With regard to them, Kant said a great deal about freedom, but it was a peculiar metaphysical kind of freedom.

In this moral realm, Kant would assert, a man is indeed subject to law; but it is law which he finds in himself, and obedience to it, therefore, involves no restraint that is incompatible with freedom. This moral law is that which every man, acting as a rational being, regards as properly applicable both to himself and every other person. Once a man has discovered such a universally applicable law, he would be morally obliged to observe it. In fact, he could hardly do otherwise. This is what Kant called "the categorical imperative." Nevertheless, Kant insisted that the man would still be free because he would be obeying only laws of his own choosing.

When Kant applied this line of thought to human relations, he concluded that the aim of mankind was to create a society in which everyone would be a free agent who participated in the constitution and heeded the law only because he had given it to himself. Kant conceived of a society in which every man as a lawgiver was morally bound to make his own rules in such a way that they could have sprung from the united will of the people, and a man would be regarded as a citizen only in so far as he conformed to that united will.

If this appears abstract and theoretical, indeed it is. There are only two observations we wish to make about it. For one thing, Kant appears to have presented only the most lofty and rational argument for voluntary sacrifice and the doing of one's duty; but the emphasis which he placed upon duty and obligation appealed especially to people nurtured in the tradition of Frederick William. For another thing, Kant's assumption of a "united will" that could be arrived at rationally and to which everyone owed a moral obligation contained the germ of thoroughgoing authoritarianism. For it was possible to argue that the leaders of the state, being rationally more adept than the commonality, were better qualified to discover the united will which, when discovered, commanded the obedience of everyone to it.[1]

Actually Kant was no authoritarian, because of his insistence upon moral freedom, but he regarded the state as a highly centralizing and unifying power. When it came to the formation of government, Kant regarded the social contract as a principle binding all men together in mutual respect for the law which each one was capable of discovering for himself; and it seemed rational to him that, during the process of coordinating a state, those within its borders should transfer all power to it and accept the obligation to obey it. In his *Philosophy of Law* Kant stated clearly that the state had rights but no duties toward its subjects.

One could not reject this reasoning readily if the state actually represented the moral law which each citizen arrived at, or would have arrived at, through use of his own reason. But in actual prac-

[1] The same criticism may be made of Rousseau's philosophy to which Kant was indebted for inspiration. Some such reasoning was used to justify the Jacobin dictatorship of Robespierre. Our point is that while political development in France and England subsequently followed other ideas, it was these that were followed in Prussia.

tice this would hardly be the case, and the possibilities of abuse in the practical application of such a theory are tremendous.

At any rate, Kant's thoughts fitted in with the Lutheran and Prussian idea of duty, and they formed subsequently the basis of political idealism in Germany. Many philosophers and historians were capitvated by Kant's conception of society, and thinkers like T. H. Green and Thomas Carlyle in England employed his ideas to demand more authority for the state. In Prussia, Kant's genuine liberalism was frequently ignored, and the most extreme interpretations of his ideas of duty appeared in the teaching of Fichte and Hegel.

FICHTE'S NATIONALISM

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) began his career as a liberal critic of absolutism and ended as a conservative advocate of strict authoritarianism. In metaphysics his contribution was to have removed Kant's distinction between pure and practical reason. Kant had claimed that man's knowledge was limited by the fact that everything had to be interpreted in terms of human experience and that the real "thing-in-itself" was therefore mysterious and unexplainable. Fichte, however, felt justified in assuming that there was really no difference between what actually existed and what man's rational experience led him to believe existed. He believed that the mind, through a process that he called "intellectual intuition," was able to know the fundamental nature of the outside world of sensation.

In moral philosophy Fichte was truly liberal in that, like Kant, he felt that the basis of morality was man's free moral will. Instead of Kant's universal moral order, however, Fichte conceived of a great and universal Will. This Will was a difficult thing to describe, and Fichte never did it adequately. But he felt that the true individual self of each man consisted of a kind of inner urge or will to reach perfection and that each of these individual wills was but a member of a great universal Will, unable to exist apart from it, and existing only to participate in the struggle of this great Will to higher things. But freedom, for Fichte, consisted in the liberation of man from both his base internal instincts and any external fac-

tors that might hinder him in the exercise of his moral free will or his urge to perfection.

This is all very abstract, but it has an important bearing on the philosophy of the state which Fichte subsequently developed and in which we are primarily interested. Fichte's liberal metaphysics were the product of his earlier years. From 1800 until his death in 1814 Fichte lived in Berlin, and for much of that time he was a professor in the university there with the double task of teaching moral philosophy and inspiring patriotism. The nature of his work, plus the authoritarian atmosphere of the Hohenzollern capital, and the advent of conservatism that sometimes accompanies advancing years, led Fichte to say things about the political state which he might not have said before. But what he did say became a part of the German national tradition.

It was possible to conclude from Fichte's idea of freedom that, in political matters, the purpose of government was to remove external hindrances to the exercise of man's moral freedom and the fulfillment of his urge to participate in the universal Will. It was possible to go further and assume that if, in the performance of this function, the government interfered with the actions of the individual and imposed all kinds of restrictions and prohibitions upon him, these would not constitute a restraint upon freedom, but an advancement of it. Fichte, however, never insisted upon these conclusions, and his conception of the state remained a liberal one in which guarantees of individual freedom and liberty of action played a large part. His ideas about political economy and nationalism, however, overshadowed his somewhat inconsistent attitude toward liberalism in government, and his philosophy of history concluded with an idealistic vision of the submergence of the individual in society, an idea that could be misinterpreted as being almost totalitarian.

According to Fichte's philosophy of history the world was to be explained as the result of an evolutionary process in which progress was determined by masterful persons who symbolized or carried out dominant ideas of their times. Fichte imagined five great epochs, the first two comprising the era of instinct and the age of reason which, so long as man remained innocent, was a kind of

paradise on earth where the moral law of the free will ruled supreme. A third period comprised the development of rational society into absolutism, and this was followed by a fourth period (Fichte's own) characterized by revolt against tyranny. In a final stage, absolutism and individualism would be merged into a new order, the complete and voluntary identification of the individual with the state or society.

In the economic sphere, Fichte desired absolute national self-sufficiency, complete government control of business, and extreme economic isolation. Some of the details which he suggested in his book, *The Closed Commercial State*, were that currency that was valid abroad, such as specie, be taken from the hands of the state's subjects and exchanged for money of purely domestic value; that the ordinary citizen be forbidden to leave the country; that the state regulate and control all production, consumption, exports, and imports; and that the state even steal, if possible, foreign patents and copies of foreign machinery. Such demands for state authority were, of course, unpopular with liberals, and, it must be admitted, they were not espoused even by the autocratic administration of Prussia. But they constituted a description of nationalist economics which the Nazis adopted later.

Fichte became a nationalist late in life. At one time, when he was apparently under the influence of Kant's essay on *Perpetual Peace*, he had felt that international cooperation, based upon a strong political and economic organization with world courts and a mixed administration endowed with real power, were necessary for the realization of human progress. But he concluded that only through the nourishment of separate national cultures within national states could humanity eventually profit.

Fichte expounded the idea of national unity and national culture with disunited and defeated Germany especially in mind. He bemoaned the lack of unity and cohesion among the Germans, but he was enough of a romantic to see value in the diversity of society and in the inequalities of men and nations. There were, Fichte said, inferior and superior nations, each with its own destiny and talents; and the benefit of humanity depended upon the cultivation of these separate talents and destinies, rather than upon any attempt to achieve a uniform level of culture in the whole of

Europe. The national differences which Fichte recognized were for him based not upon race, but upon cultural and economic factors, and primarily upon language.

Fichte was not the first to consider nationalism as fundamentally linguistic, but his presentation and use of the theory was able and challenging, and it contributed much to the growth of modern ideas about national patriotism. For Fichte, a nation was more than a group of people or a political state or a geographical area; it was something of intrinsic value, a dynamic and creative community whose people interpreted their culture, their soul, the nation's soul, through their language.

In describing the role which the German nation had played and was to play in the history of mankind, Fichte indulged in all kinds of forgivable and unforgivable exaggerations. It will suffice to remark here that, according to him, the German contribution was the one thing which gave meaning, purpose, and permanence to Western civilization, and that without the Germans the world would have been backward and degenerate. This kind of talk aroused German intellectuals at the time, and it has afflicted many of them ever since.

It may be pertinent to remark that, although Fichte based his definition of the nation upon language, he made one exception. He would not accept Jews as members of a nation even though they spoke its tongue. He was violently anti-Semitic, but not because of any racial doctrines. His wholesale condemnation of Jews appears to have been emotional and completely without tangible motivation.

Fichte's ideal of the voluntary identification of the individual with the state (society?), his advocacy of national autarchy, and his exaggerated ideas about the importance of German culture justify his inclusion in a list of the intellectual forbears of Nazism. In addition, he exerted considerable influence upon Hegel, whose place in such a list is even more unquestionable.

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF ABSOLUTISM

Four years after Fichte died in 1814, his chair at the University of Berlin went to George Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) whose philosophy of the absolute state was far more radical than Fichte's.

When Hegel's fame reached its zenith he was the uncontested leader of thought in Protestant Germany. His greatest rival was Goethe, the humanitarian, the cosmopolitan, the individualist. Of the two, Hegel's political philosohy triumphed. Although the Nazis rejected many of Hegel's ideas, they owed him much and granted him a place of honor. They disavowed Goethe, however. Goethe was politically a rank conservative indeed, but his broad-minded universalism was incompatible with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*.

Hegel was more dogmatic and absolute than Fichte. In his *Philosophy of Right* he demanded that the state be honored as divine, much as Luther, three centuries before, had proclaimed the divine nature of royal rulers. He sought to prove the reality of God, but his Deity was an impersonal one. His attitude toward religion seemed to be that of a moralist who applied Luther's disciplinary interpretation of Christian principles to the state.

As a matter of fact, the Prussian version of Protestantism had by this time degenerated into what was little more than an impersonal state ceremony required of civil servants and members of the armed forces. The church was dominated by the state, and, in spite of a brief flurry of mysticism in court circles, the official religion had lost its intimate personal appeal. It became a public function, with services conducted by officials who were Prussian subjects first and ministers of the gospel second. Many of the pastors neglected the gospel of love and emphasized the moral law of the state, identifying it with the law of God.

Hegel, like Fichte, sought to replace religious dogma and mysticism with philosophical proofs of God. Fichte had identified God more or less with what he called "the Universal Self"; Hegel identified God with the Absolute. His argument comprises the most complex philosophical speculation in the history of thought.

Reality for Hegel, as for Fichte, existed in an inner self, a mind, or urge, or spirit. The metaphysical problem he faced was to discover and prove somehow the relation between the individual's inner self and an ultimate reality above or beyond the individual which one might term a "moral order," "a universal spirit," or "God," or, as Hegel did, "the Absolute."

Knowledge about any one thing, Hegel averred, was impossible except in terms of its opposite. A man could know himself, for

instance, only in terms of what he once was or in terms of other people and things not himself. Moreover, life, he said, was a process of combining opposites. A man could not be virtuous without actually resisting sin, and his spirit was the force that compelled him to carry on such a struggle. Not only a man's life, but all life, then appeared to Hegel as a struggle between opposites; and the great reality was a universal spirit pervading everything and compelling it to struggle with its opposite. Hegel's unique idea was a conception of life and history as a process by which this spirit gave birth to perpetually recurring struggles between opposites in a kind of historic evolution, the final step of which would be the realization of perfection and the disclosure of the universal mind. His idea was that the result of each struggle, the "synthesis" between each "thesis" and its "antithesis," constituted a nearer approach to the Absolute.

The only reason this abstruse philosophy interests us here is because of its practical application in political philosophy. Each idea or institution, according to Hegel, was to be regarded as the latest "synthesis" at any given moment and therefore the nearest approach to the universal mind. Politically then, the absolute state as it existed in Prussia was the nearest approximation to this divine universal mind and therefore deserving of support, obedience, and even reverence.

The state was very important in Hegel's philosophy for yet another reason. His metaphysics had led him to assert that the individual was nothing considered apart from society and that a man completely detached from others not himself had no value or purpose and really no existence. He therefore concluded that freedom was not lack of contact or conflict with others, but that it consisted in as complete a contact with society as possible. And the freest man was he who most intimately identified himself with society. Freedom then, according to Hegel, could only be achieved by voluntary coordination of an individual with the group. And since the political state was the most complete development of the group, only by living within it and identifying himself with it could the individual know himself or grasp the meaning of life.

It was because of some such reasoning as this that Hegel was able to say, as he did in his *Philosophy of History*, that "the state is the

actually existing, realised moral life" and that "the state is the divine Idea as it exists on earth." [1] Such a conviction led Hegel to dismiss democratic philosophy and representative constitutions as based upon false assumptions and to justify in detail a thoroughly totalitarian state system, to laud as most nearly perfect the authoritarian Prussian state.

Let us pursue Hegel's ideas a bit further. If the state was divine, its morality would be beyond human cavil. Moreover, if one state could be identified with the Absolute, so could another. The two would naturally compete for supremacy, and a new synthesis would arise out of their rivalry. If one state, more powerful than another, conquered its neighbor, this would be a new synthesis almost divinely ordained. War then was not only inevitable, but a part of the divine plan. This conclusion left Hegel unperturbed. War, he observed, was beneficial as well as necessary since in wartime citizens grew more conscious of being a part of the national entity. Long periods of peace, Hegel felt, would result in the deterioration of the state and of life itself, since life was struggle. This is about as far as one could go in justifying the principles of absolutism, national superiority, and conquest that were characteristic of what we call "Prussianism."

Fichte had never gone so far. When he spoke of subservience to the state or identification with the state, he meant an ideal state, not any that actually existed. When he lauded German culture, he recognized the right of other nations to have their own governments and their own cultures. He had wanted a closed commercial state, economically isolated, but he did not think in terms of expansion or conquest. Hegel, however, justified conquest as the fulfillment of the law of life.

A few more remarks will serve to clarify Hegel's idea of the state and indicate its similarity with the Nazi conception. The role of the family in Hegel's society was quite limited. The family was to be regarded simply as a unit to be incorporated within and permeated by the state. Its value was to be measured by its usefulness. The home was to be simply a place of shelter and reproduction. Sentiment and love were to be discouraged and ignored. The social

[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, The Colonial Press, New York, 1899, pp. 37-54.

status of women was to be narrowly restricted to the maintenance of the home and conduct of family affairs.

Economic life, Hegel felt, should be organized on the basis of guilds, and a "corporate" state established wherein the different vocational and professional groups voluntarily submitted to state control. Individual property rights should be exercised only at the sufferance of the state, and in the interest of the state. This would eliminate traditional economic classes in favor of new castes whose economic privileges would be determined by their relative importance to the state. The highest of these new castes, Hegel thought, should be the military, whom he regarded as the first line of national defense. The deified state might also reject ideals of humanity and conventional morality since it was to exist upon a higher level than that of humanity. Hegel also felt that the German nation was best qualified to fulfill his idea of the state and that the German spirit was that which most nearly approached the newly arising universal spirit. Historically, he taught, cultural leadership had passed from the ancient Orientals to the Greeks, thence to the Romans, and finally to the Germans, and that the German idea of the state as developed since the Reformation demonstrated the Absolute's recognition of Germany's right to political supremacy. This is sound Nazi doctrine and altogether Teutonic.[1]

ROMANTIC NATIONALISTS AND HISTORIANS

Numerous German men of letters, contemporaries and successors of Fichte and Hegel, further developed a brand of German nationalism best exemplified by the words of Hoffmann von Fallersleben's poem, now Germany's national anthem. The double meaning of "*Deutschland ueber alles*" is quite apparent. It means both Germany *before* everything else, and Germany *over* everything else. There has been some debate about this, but there is enough evidence of German claims to superiority, even during the years when

[1] Paradoxically, Hegel's political philosophy provided inspiration for Karl Marx and scientific socialists as well as for Prussian nationalists. Marx substituted materialism for Hegel's idealism, but employed Hegel's dialectics. He advocated a social state while other disciples of Hegel preached the national or folkish state. The national Hegelians and the Marxian Hegelians disagreed about many characteristics of the state, but they both defended its absolute power Thus Hegel was an intellectual source of two widely divergent forms of totalitarianism—National Socialism and Soviet Socialism

the nation did not exist as a political unit, to indicate that the song is a challenge to the rest of the world as well as an expression of deep devotion to the nation.

One of the first exponents of German nationalism was Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) who advocated before most writers the fusion of German lands into a folk state. Although German particularism offended him deeply, he regarded Germany as a cultural unit rather than a legal organization. He was opposed to absolutism, and it was no idea of his that unification should be based on the military and political power of the Prussian state. His patriotism was founded on a belief in the soul of the German people and admiration for the common language and cultural traditions of the folk. He felt that Germany could experience a rebirth if only the spirit of the past were rediscovered and made the basis of social, political, and cultural life. These ideas constituted a revolt against the prevailing rationalism and aroused the opposition even of Kant.

Herder's enthusiasm for the German past led him to believe that Gothic and German were synonymous, an idea enthusiastically adopted by German Romantics. The fact that Gothic was one of the visible symbols of romanticism in all western Europe did not lead them to doubt this thesis. It merely buttressed their belief in the superiority of German culture. Surging Gothic arches represented for them the German striving for the infinite. They were not consciously exclusive nationalists, but there developed with them the idea that *Deutscheit* (Germanity) and *Deutschtum* (Germandom) were the very essence of life. Forests, trees, lakes, and flowers were German; the sky, the clouds, and the stars were German. Nature, life, and art were German. Unwittingly these German romantic poets deprecated things foreign and fostered a belief that the German mind alone had access to the infinite, and that only Germans strove to embrace heaven by building Gothic arches and cathedrals. During the Napoleonic wars, many of the German romantic poets naturally wrote martial verse or went to the wars, thus fusing their art with military and patriotic action.

Another disciple of Herder was Joseph Goerres, a journalist and passionate enemy of France, who agitated ceaselessly for German unity. He proposed a folk state based upon "historical and cultural

rights" and including Alsace, Lorraine, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Goerres and his followers were much impressed by the importance of culture in fashioning the nation, and they were led with the philosopher Schelling[1] to regard the guardianship of religion, the arts, and sciences as a primary function of the state. This emphasis upon the cultural aspects of German Nationalism diverted many Germans from politics, and the German middle class tended to leave state affairs in the hands of their traditional rulers.

The relative refinement of Herder's and Goerres' cultural nationalism was not a quality to be found in the doctrine and practice of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), the boisterous father of the *Turnvereine*. Jahn was anti-intellectual, in spite of his university education, and he was intentionally rough and ill-mannered, as if it were true that one was looked upon as a liar if he tried to be polite in German. Jahn's book, *German Folkdom*, written in 1810, was a rebellious work influenced by bitterness over Prussia's defeat, and many of his ideas foreshadow Nazi doctrine and practice. He thought in terms of the physical or biological purity, as well as the linguistic and cultural purity, of the German nation. He was originally isolationist, but, after Prussia's military victories in 1814, he was an outspoken expansionist. He disapproved of the Christian church as it existed in Germany and wanted to substitute for it a German church of "Northern Christianity."

Jahn's campaign for the physical regeneration of Prusso-German youth led to the foundation of a political movement of Gymnasts (*Turnvereine*) who were particularly numerous in all the universities and who served as a military free corps during the War of Liberation in 1813–1814 like the Storm Troopers and SS battalions of Hitler's Reich.

Certain German historians of the nineteenth century produced a more practical variety of nationalism than the cultural traditionalism of Herder or the romantic patriotism of Jahn. Among them, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) was the most influential. His belief in the military virtues, in the state as the embodiment of force, in the state as above private morality, and his prejudice against Jews,

[1] Friedrich Wilhelm J. von Schelling (1775–1854), romantic philosopher and interpreter of Fichte's idealism.

small nations, socialists, materialists, and money-bags mark him as an intellectual standard bearer in the march of Prussianism toward National Socialism.

As a youth, Treitschke had been a liberal, but the failure of the German liberals in 1848 led him to look for Germany's regeneration through a strong state and policies of force, and in his mature years he developed a political philosophy in which the state was the embodiment of power. He advocated opportunism and force, *Machtpolitik*, which had been favored by Prussian rulers like Frederick the Great and which found clear expression under Bismarck and Hitler.

With a naivety incomprehensible to an outsider, Treitschke regarded himself as a liberal even to the end of his days. But his readiness to grant all kinds of power and special morality to the state in order to foster and protect the national culture left little room in reality for individual liberties. Treitschke had little sympathy for democratic institutions even though he defended a parliamentary two-chamber system. His ideal was a parliament that accepted rather than determined state policies, and his idea of individual freedom was so hemmed about with acknowledgements of the state's prior claims, that it was practically nonexistent.

In religion and economics as well as politics, Treitschke forsook his early liberal views. He became convinced, for instance, that the state, in order to protect the national culture, ought to dictate the religion of the citizens and provide in its schools compulsory religious education in an officially approved creed regardless of the predilection of individual students. Like the Nazis and Fascists, Treitschke felt that the state could not tolerate any institution whose interests might be alien to those of the nation or whose power was independent of the state. Therefore, a church controlled by the state was tolerable; but a religion whose gospel might be opposed to nationalist ambitions Treitschke regarded as a threat to the national culture and the state.

Treitschke did not believe in equality either of nations or of individuals. Because he made a fetish of force, he asserted that small nations were comical aberrations of civilization condemned by the judgment of history to be subject to superior nations. Even among large nations he assumed the superiority of Germans and their his-

toric mission. He asserted that Germans had a capacity for deeper thinking, a greater sense of loyalty, and more thoroughness than other people, and he made scornful remarks about foreign countries. His contempt for alien cultures scattered among Germans misunderstanding and mistrust of nations beyond their borders. His technique of distorting historical data to substantiate preconceived judgments was readily emulated. As a consequence, German teachers systematically warped the beliefs of students with distortions of historic facts. Dangerous generalizations and wholesale misjudgments became a commonplace of German political thought and helped to develop the pan-German notions popular in the Second Empire and after.

Treitschke's swashbuckling philosophy recognized war not only as an ultimate tribunal in disputes between states, but as a moral good and "the one remedy for an ailing nation." War, Treitschke said, brought forth the heroism, bodily strength, and chivalrous spirit essential to the character of a noble people; it fostered the idealism which materialists rejected; it caused social selfishness and party spirit to be dumb before the call of the state in danger. "The grandeur of war," he wrote, "lies in the utter annihilation of puny man in the great conception of the State, and it brings out the full magnificence of the sacrifice of fellow-countrymen for one another. In war the chaff is winnowed from the wheat." [1]

Treitschke was realist enough to know that war was not all glory and garlands. He was even an advocate of what might be called "total" war. It was perfectly equitable, he said, "to wage war in the most effective manner possible, so that the goal of peace may be reached as quickly as possible. For this reason the blow must be aimed at the enemy's heart, and the use of the most formidable weapon is absolutely justifiable." [2] Psychological warfare and fifth-column activity were foreshadowed by Treitschke's suggestion that a state may "take advantage of all the enemy's weak points, and . . . turn to treason and mutiny within its enemy's borders to serve its own ends." [3] The Nazi doctrine of ruthlessness to "inferior" people is anticipated in Treitschke's statement that "A negro tribe

[1] H. v. Treitscke, *Politics*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1916, Vol. I, pp. 66–67.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 609.
[3] *Ibid*

must be punished by the burning of their villages, for it is the only kind of example which will avail. If the German Empire has abandoned this principle today, it has done so out of disgraceful weakness." [1]

Treitschke's opinion that there were superior and inferior human beings made him extremely class conscious. He disliked providing equal educational opportunities for all, and he complained at the number of lower middle class youths entering the universities. His attitude toward the lower classes was patronizing, and he approved of organized social-welfare measures because he thought they would not only prevent social strife but compensate laborers for the absence of opportunity and equality.

Treitschke was not a Prussian, but a Saxon by birth. With his views, however, it is not strange that he was welcomed to the University of Berlin where, like Fichte and Hegel before him, he spent his maturer years carrying the torch for Prussian authoritarianism and overweening German nationalism.

RACIALISTS

Thus far we have tried to describe the ideas of several prominent German intellectuals who have stressed with fair consistency the importance of the state at the expense of the individual or who have assumed or asserted the superiority of German culture and the German people. They have done so generally by appealing to metaphysical argument or to history. We now come to a group of men, none of them German by birth, whose pseudo-scientific theories of race established a half mystical, half biological basis for belief in Aryan or Teutonic supremacy.

Racialism is a theory that humanity is divided into biological groups some of which are superior, and some inferior to others by nature, and that the superior groups are entitled to more power and privilege than the others. Such an idea has been prevalent in many eras. Men as great as Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece distinguished between superior and inferior people, although the more liberal sophists did not. Aristotle believed, in fact, that differences between free men and slaves were ordained by nature, and that racial prejudice was a fundamental human instinct.

[1] *Ibid.* p. 614.

Although the Jews and the Christian church affirmed the equality of all men before God and the Protestant revolt served to reemphasize this ideal, social institutions were long based upon privilege, serfdom, and slavery. By the eighteenth century, the pressure of economic forces and the bold advocacy of natural rights by rationalist and humanitarian thinkers in western Europe and the United States helped to establish new social and political ideals in which the equality of all men, of whatever race or creed, played a large part.

The insistence upon equality was bitterly attacked by advocates of privilege, absolutism, imperialism, and authoritarianism. These men denied human equality both as a fact and as an ideal. After Charles Darwin's biological theories became popular, they frequently applied the idea of survival of the fittest to their argument. German advocates of racial discrimination derived their arguments from two other sources; first, the mystical and romantic nationalism of German writers; second, the teaching of a few Anglo-Saxon eugenists like Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, and Lothrop Stoddard, who adopted Darwin's theories of selection and claimed that "nature knows no equality." These men observed that life produced greater qualitative differences as its organic forms became more highly developed. They concluded that, since man was nature's most complex organism, he was thus the most variable and the least likely to have been created equal.

Most of these eugenists did not give political point to their reasoning except the American, Stoddard, who denounced the idea of natural equality as "one of the most pernicious delusions that has ever afflicted mankind." [1] Stoddard distrusted not only the idea of equality, but the principles of democracy in general. He claimed that eugenic science, by proving equality among human beings nonexistent, had completely undermined the liberal principle of equality in government. Equality, he said, was a creed of "undermen," dangerous malcontents impiously asking to share life with superior beings on an equal basis.

True racialists, however, went much farther than the eugenists in applying their theories to political and cultural life. They had

[1] Lothrop Stoddard, *Revolt Against Civilization*, Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, 1922, pp. 30–31.

two prophets: a Frenchman, Count Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), and an Anglo-German, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1926). Gobineau was the father of the school. His main work, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1853–1854), was a pseudo-scientific development of the thesis that between races there are pronounced biological differences of a mental as well as physical sort. Superimposed upon Mendelian theories about heredity, it became the nucleus of German racialism under Hitler.

Gobineau divided mankind into three racial units: the white, the yellow, and the black. Ignoring the cultural achievements of the Asiatics, notably the Chinese, he asserted that the white race was superior, the yellow race mediocre, and the black race inferior. He excluded Jews from among the white races and called them "negroid." Latin peoples, being mixed with Mediterranean races like the Jews, he classified as "Semitized." Intermarriage between races, Gobineau thought, would lead to the decay of national civilization, although he recognized certain remarkable exceptions to this rule. But race mixture, he said, was responsible for such "unaryan" and decadent phenomena as democracy and liberalism.

Among the white races, according to Gobineau, the Aryans [1] were the most advanced, and among them, the Teutons ranked higher than all others. His intention had been apparently to justify in this fashion the overlordship of the French aristocracy as the pure descendents of the ancient Teutons, rather than to credit the modern Germans with sole claim to any racial preeminence. But his ideas aroused more interest in Germany than elsewhere, and the Germans naturally took special satisfaction in them. Richard Wagner, whom Gobineau met in 1876, helped to popularize the idea of German racial supremacy, and he passed it on to his son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who was a British expatriate and an ardent advocate of German imperialism.

Chamberlain, like Gobineau, was more writer than scientist; he

[1] There is no "Aryan" race The word "aryan" comes from the Sanscrit and was used originally by Sir William Jones (1746–1794) to designate a group of Indian languages. Subsequently, the German scholar Frederick Max Mueller (1823–1900) extended the term to include linguistic groups of Central Asia. Mueller seems first to have used the term "Aryan race" which was readily adopted and widely misused in England and Germany, much to Mueller's discomfiture There is certainly no Aryan race today nor is there such a thing as a German "race," from an anthropological point of view.

was an amateur in anthropology and a mystic in politics. His stuff appealed to German aristocrats who liked to hear that they were superior because, in spite of their cultural and political achievements, they had never been very sure of themselves. They seemed to suffer from inferiority complexes for which they compensated by boisterous self-assertion which Chamberlain's books appeared to justify. Many of them swallowed the idea of Aryan supremacy eagerly and used it to rationalize a deep-rooted anti-Semitism.

Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* was a favorite of Emperor William II. It provided an intellectual basis for Hitler's racial theories and for Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century*. Along with *Mein Kampf* and Rosenberg's book, it headed the Nazis' required reading list.

The basis of Chamberlain's ideas was more fancy than science. Instead of stressing race as a biological phenomena, he emphasized the emotional experience of "race feeling." He was one of the first to ascribe German origin to great men of other lands, such as Dante, Columbus, and Jesus of Nazareth. The Nazis have exploited this idea to the limit, attributing not only the ancestry of Jesus but the greatness of Greece and Rome to Germanic invasions of the Mediterranean world.

Chamberlain characterized nearly everything of value in Western civilization as Germanic and was highly critical of other cultures, both past and present. Rome was great, he said, only because it destroyed Jewish influence and so prevented the semitization of the occident. When Germanic tribes invaded southern Europe, he continued, they carefully retained and Germanized only the best of Roman civilization and rejected all features unsuitable for Nordics. According to Chamberlain, therefore, the Teuton was "the soul of our culture" since all great European culture was basically German, and German Aryans "surpass all other beings; therefore, rightfully they are . . . the overlords of the world." [1]

Chamberlain was outspokenly anti-Semitic. He did not accept Christianity as of Jewish origin. He complained that it had been semitized, but he felt that it had regained much strength by being "Aryanized" during the Protestant revolt. He opposed intermarriage with Jews and feared their intellectual influence. He de-

[1] H. S. Chamberlain, *Auswahl aus seinen Werken*, Breslau, 1934, pp 67–69.

nounced all intercourse with them, the reading of their books, the study of their philosophies, or the enjoyment of their arts. He characterized democracy as an expression of decadence and linked it to Judaism. And he felt that a general decay of civilization could be prevented only by putting an end to the current process of Semitization.

It was a small step from Chamberlain to Alfred Rosenberg, the official philosopher of the Nazi party.[1] But Rosenberg was even less scientific or objective than Chamberlain. He turned racialism into a myth, and from the myth he developed a new creed and a new "German morality." He rejected Christianity as we know it and denounced the ideals of humanity and humility as signs of decay. He attacked the philosophy of love and pity as a distortion of Christ's real teaching. He accepted Christ only as a non-Jew and heaped derision upon his Jewish disciples. In place of Christianity, he recommended worship of the ancient Teutonic nature gods, supplemented by deified personalities from German history. In his Nazi Valhalla, Wotan would stand arm in arm with Bismarck, and Siegfried with Frederick the Great.

The racialism which all these men advocated was more than mere condemnation of "inferior" races. It became a very aggressive national creed with great political significance. As proposed by Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Rosenberg, it was the basis for belief in the supremacy of a racially superior nation which could only be Germany. It was used by the Nazis as a pretext for their ideological expansion and for the claim that a mystical tie existed between the Reich and people of German descent abroad. Its logical consequences would be the doom of the ideal of equality, the subversion of Christian and democratic ethics, permanent antagonism between "master races" and "slave races," and lasting war.

CAESARISM AND CYNICISM

As we have followed it, political thought in Prussia and Germany showed a trend toward state absolutism, racial mysticism, hero wor-

[1] It is curious that the outstanding advocates of German race superiority were "men either of a different race or of a different nationality; Gobineau, a Frenchman; Chamberlain, an Anglo-Scotchman; Hitler, an Austrian; Rosenberg, a Balt, who, until the World War, was a Russian subject."—Melvin Rader, *No Compromise*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1939, p. 111.

ship, and a tendency to reject traditional morality. Hero worship was extended by nineteenth- and twentieth-century pessimistic philosophers to leader worship, or Caesarism. Nietzsche and Spengler, for instance, repudiated customary ethics and sought to establish a new morality excluding Christian love and pity, and exalting the strength of will embodied in tyrants. But we must introduce our discussion of them by a brief reference to another.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was a pessimistic philosopher who gave a new twist to the fundamental thought of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel concerning the relationship between mind and reality. According to Schopenhauer, beneath the mind, which produces the essence of life, there is a very strong energy, the Will. But, instead of believing this Will to be a constructive force comparable to Fichte's Will or Hegel's inner urge, Schopenhauer conceived it to be a "vicious power" responsible for the permanent struggle of life. Harmony and peace, he concluded pessimistically, were Utopian concepts incapable of realization.

This depressing philosophy was elaborated in 1818 in *The World as Will and Idea*, but it did not become very popular until the latter part of the nineteenth century. At that time it gripped the imagination of Richard Wagner, who composed his Tristan under its spell; and it appealed to Nietzsche, who transformed it from a negative into a positive philosophy.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) accepted the idea of Will as the basis of struggle in life, but he interpreted it in terms of the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. He believed the fittest to be the men with the strongest wills, the superior persons, or supermen, whose irresistible "will to power" was "beyond good and evil."

Nietzsche made no practical suggestions for a government of supermen. He was no racialist, although he was frequently misinterpreted as being one, and he thought of leadership in terms of a superior caste rather than any superior nation. It is true that he praised the Aryan race and called the Teutons "magnificent blonde beasts," a description which represented distrust and intellectual condescension as much as admiration, but he was not anti-Semitic. His contempt for the masses, and for Christianity and democracy, however, helped to pave the way toward totalitarian mentality.

Condemning his own century, Nietzsche looked forward to what seemed to him a nobler world:

> The aspect of the European today makes me very hopeful. A daring and ruling race is here building itself up upon the foundation of an extremely intelligent gregarious mass. . . .[1]

Nietzsche anticipated with satisfaction a "classical era of wars and revolutions in the twentieth century" because he thought it would harden and invigorate the world and produce a more heroic type of man and a new ruler caste. He believed that wars were necessary and sound, and he was not the least disturbed by the moral commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Moreover, he advocated eugenic breeding to eliminate the unfit, the sick, and the weak although, ironically enough, he himself was physically weak and sick all his life and died after years of insanity in an asylum.

Nietzsche's uncompromising and challenging philosophy was not very popular in his generation. Yet his belligerent pessimism, his philosophy of the superman, and his advocacy of Caesarism found an increasing number of admirers as the years wore on, and many of them became convinced that they were destined to be members of the master race. Among these people, who represent a transition from disintegrating German liberalism to National Socialism, the most influential and universal thinker was Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), author of *The Decline of the West.*

Out of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and his own vast store of knowledge, Spengler developed a pessimistic and fatalistic philosophy, and his gloomy outlook impressed the worn-out minds and hearts of the German postwar generation. His book, which is a work of enormous erudition, combined historical analysis with forays into the fields of biology, anthropology, metaphysics, mathematics, art, and culture in general. He discarded the traditional partition of history into ancient, medieval, and modern eras and divided history rather into separate cultures which he compared to living organisms with definitely recognizable eras of youth, maturity, and old age. The youthful age was a primitive one, he taught, a formative period characterized by myth, and aspiration,

[1] Fr. Nietzsche, *The Complete Works,* Oscar Levy, ed. Vol. XV, *The Will to Power,* T. N. Foulis, Edinburgh and London, 1910, aphorism 955.

and struggle. Maturity was recognizable in the highest development of all the forms of art, and science, and thought. But a culture's old age was identical with what Spengler called "civilization," by which he meant a society preoccupied with material things and techniques and bodily comforts rather than with the spiritual and intellectual goods such as religion, philosophy, the arts, and pure science. Between civilization and culture so defined, Spengler's preference was obvious, but he believed that Western civilization was now in this final and decadent stage. Gothic youth had been followed by the full flowering of a baroque period which, in turn, was succeeded by the present sterile civilization incapable of producing anything but gadgets and wealth and insipid imitations of the great creative work of a more glorious past. This was the "Decline of the West."

The future, Spengler thought, belonged to an entirely new culture, to be introduced by a youthful age of comparative barbarism and formless primitivism, whose leaders would be a sort of Caesarean supermen, approaching Nietzsche's ideal of a ruler caste. Their methods, their outlook upon life, and their ethics would be quite foreign to "the West" and would constitute a complete reversal of democratic methods and philosophy.

Such a train of thought led Spengler to distrust the social and intellectual standards of contemporary civilization. He rejected conventional morality, and he saw little hope in education, or intellectuality, because he had little respect for the average man's mental stature. Men seemed to him less creatures of intelligence and more like "beasts of prey," less noble than other animals which, at least, could not be accused of hypocrisy. Consequently, he felt that a new "ability to hate" was more important and worth while than a capacity to love.

If the broad outlines of Spengler's thesis found many adherents, even in liberal circles, there was wide disagreement over such detailed conclusions, and especially over the practical solution of the problems facing society. German liberals after 1918 were in the difficult spot of having their plans for a normal, evolutionary recovery of society rendered almost hopeless by the external and internal consequences of the First World War. In this situation many conservatives—we might call them "reactionary revolutionists"—adopted Spengler's program for a new Caesarism based upon a com-

bination of Prussian ideology and state socialism.[1] This program was a prophetic forerunner of National Socialism, but when Spengler was actually confronted with the rise of the Nazi movement and saw its character, he did not fully approve of it, and he never became a member of the party. Nevertheless, the similarity between his philosophy and that of Hitler is striking, if not in practical detail, at least in the ruthlessness and nihilism and contempt for humanity that was common to them both.

Spengler was one of the most scholarly advocates of ruthless absolutism. His erudition may explain why he never quite approved of the Nazis and never took the racial myth seriously. Intellectually he towered head and shoulders above the Nazi pundits to whom he showed the way and whose confused distortions of political and social realities comprised the body of National Socialist philosophy.

[1] See *Preussentum und Sozialismus*, Beck, Munich, 1920.