

*The Origins and Symbolism
of Nazi Ideology*

by

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To

Phoebe and Ciaran

Abstract

In the following pages, Nazi ideology, its origins and symbolism, and its relationship to the thought of the Enlightenment will be studied. In this study, the main themes and elements of Nazi ideology, and the extent of their coherence, will first be considered. Then the symbolism, and the way in which this symbolism was used in the mobilisation of the German population, will be examined. In conjunction with this, Nazi propaganda techniques will be studied, to illustrate how closely propaganda, symbolism and ideology were bound together. Following this, an analysis of the historical context of Nazi ideology will be undertaken. In examining this context, the applicability of Sternhell's thesis to the growth of Nazism will be considered, and it will be argued that the crisis of liberal democracy that contributed to the birth of fascism also contributed to the development of Nazi ideology. To give some background to the intellectual climate of which Nazi ideology was a product, the work of Arthur de Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Heinrich von Treitschke and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck will be examined, and the similarity between much of their thought and elements of Nazi ideology noted. In order to achieve a thorough understanding of Nazi ideology's historical background, the extent of Enlightenment influence on Nazi ideology will be examined, by focusing on the thought and intellectual trends of this period. Then, by comparing aspects of Enlightenment thought with the ideology of Nazism, it will be concluded that Nazi ideology was not a direct rejection of the thought of the Enlightenment, but rather was strongly influenced by many aspects of Enlightenment thought.

Abbreviations

B.D.M.	<i>Bund Deutsches Mädchen</i> (League of German Girls)
N.S.D.A.P.	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei</i> (National Socialist German Workers Party)

Table of Contents

Declaration of Author's Rights.....	page <i>ii</i>
Acknowledgements.....	page <i>iii</i>
Dedication.....	page <i>iv</i>
Abstract.....	page <i>vi</i>
Abbreviations.....	page <i>vii</i>
Introduction.....	page 1
Nazi Ideology	
themes and elements.....	page 27
The Symbolism of Nazi Ideology	
mobilisation of the population.....	page 80
Zeev Sternhell	
the crisis of liberalism and Nazi ideology.....	page 132
Precursors of Nazi Ideology	
Gobineau, Chamberlain, Treitschke	
and Moeller van den Bruck.....	page 170
The Enlightenment.....	page 236
The Enlightenment and Nazi Ideology.....	page 303
Conclusion.....	page 373
Bibliography.....	page 384

Introduction

Introduction

In this study it is intended to examine Nazi ideology and its symbolism, and the way in which Nazi ideology was transmitted to the German population. It is also intended to examine the origins of Nazi ideology - seeking to discover whether it was solely a product of its era, or whether it had an historical dimension. Many questions will be addressed in the course of this examination, concerning the composition of the ideology itself, its role in propaganda and mobilisation, its relationship to thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and its connection with the thought of the Enlightenment.

Nazism has often been treated as a ragbag of ideas without any systematic formulation or foundation. Bullock, for example, entirely

rejected the idea of there being any ideological substance to it. In his biography of Hitler, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny*, he argued that Nazism was empty of ideological content, being merely a force of control and destruction, disguised as a race doctrine. “The great revolutions of the past”, he declared, “whatever their ultimate fate, have been identified with the release of certain powerful ideas...National Socialism produced nothing...The sole theme of the Nazi revolution was domination, dressed up as the doctrine of race, and, failing that, a vindictive destructiveness...”¹ Likewise, William L. Shirer, the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, considered Nazism as little more than insane ravings, dismissing it as “a grotesque hodgepodge concocted by a half-baked, uneducated neurotic.”² Trevor-Roper, too, discounted the idea of there being any ideological component to Nazism, describing it instead as “this vast system of bestial Nordic nonsense...”³

Despite this dismissal of the ideological dimension to Nazism, the study both of fascist ideology in general and of Nazi ideology in particular has recently been given much more salience. It is intended that this introduction will be used in order to survey some of the recent literature dealing with this.⁴ Griffin is one example of a writer

¹ Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny* (London, 1960) p. 736

² William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (London, 1973) p. 82

³ HR Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (London, 1962) p. 55

⁴ Zeev Sternhell is a prime example of a writer who has made the study of the ideology a main factor in his analysis of fascism. Because his work occupies a significant place in this thesis and will be

who gives prominence to the ideological factor in his works on fascism. In *The Nature of Fascism*, he explains that there are many ways in which fascism can be defined. He points out that there has been a great “divergence of opinions”⁵ as to its nature. His avowed aim in this work is to demonstrate the ideological character of fascism, rather than accepting the argument that it is simply a jumble of disparate ideas. “This book”, he declares, “aims to convince those for whom fascism is still a bewildering conundrum, that a distinctive ideology, one unleashing considerable affective energy in those who accepted its internal logic, underlies what could so easily be dismissed as fanatical ravings or cynical propaganda.”⁶ In order, to clarify the nature of fascism, he argues that it is essential to devise an ideal type. In his own words, he seeks to “offer a consciously constructed ideal type of fascism which sets out to be more heuristically useful to academic research than existing ones.”⁷ With this aim in mind, his definition of fascism is that it is “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.”⁸ In explaining this

thoroughly examined later on; at present it is merely intended to give a very brief summary of his principal arguments. These are that fascism had its origins in a turn-of-the-century crisis in both liberalism and Marxism, which led to a search for a radical “third way”, being neither of the Right nor the Left, but being rather a synthesis of anti-materialist socialism and nationalism. This encompassed a rejection of the materialism and rationalism of the Enlightenment, such rejection being portrayed as a revolt against decadence.

⁵ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p. 6

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 22

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 12

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26

definition, he first focuses on the “core ideology of fascism,”⁹ arguing that all ideologies have at their centre an irrational myth that is the mobilising factor for their activists and supporters. This is the mythic core of an ideology.¹⁰ By “mythic” he means “the inspirational, revolutionary power which an ideology can exert whatever its apparent rationality or practicality...”¹¹ The particular type of myth which underlies fascist ideology is palingenetic in nature, which denotes that it encompasses an idea of “re-birth” following “a period of destruction or perceived dissolution”.¹² Within fascist ideology this becomes a vision of a new order in society and the world, a new order underlain by ultra-nationalism.¹³ Griffin maintains that if a populist nationalism becomes linked with an idea of rebirth from decadence, then fascism will be the result. Nevertheless, such fascism would only become a mass movement if actual social conditions were such as to engender a feeling of substantive crisis within the population.¹⁴ “In other words”, he says, “our ideal type suggests that from the moment populist nationalism coincided with a climate of palingenetic expectancy fascism was ‘bound’ to appear. Yet it also suggests that it was only likely to gain any sort of mass following in conditions of objective structural dysfunction profound enough to create a wide-

⁹ *ibid.*, p. viii

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 27

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 28

¹² *ibid.*, p. 33

¹³ *ibid.*, pages 35 and 38

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pages 201-202

spread sense-making crisis.”¹⁵ Griffin’s distinctive contribution to the study of fascist ideology lay, then, in recognising that this particular idea of rebirth following a period of perceived decay - when linked with populist nationalism - was ubiquitous in the development of fascist movements.

Eatwell’s *Fascism: A History* is another example which acknowledges the importance of ideology in any understanding of fascism. The main thrust of this work is an examination of the reasons why fascism attained power in Germany and Italy and why it failed to do so in Britain and France. Eatwell points out that fascism varied in form between different nations, and argues that this was largely due to the differences in political culture and leadership between these countries.¹⁶ These differences, however, do not negate the fact of there being a strong ideological basis to fascism.¹⁷ Nationalism was one of its important elements, but it was a particular type of nationalism. The type of nationalism which fascism encompassed was holistic in that it sought to abolish difference - whether of class or of ethnicity - and to secure homogeneous unity within the nation: “it sought to overcome divisive differences and to

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 202

¹⁶ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1995) p. xviii. Eatwell emphasises the “impact of national political traditions, and the role played by leadership - fascist and non-fascist.” *ibid.*, p. xviii

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. xvii

forge a strong sense of shared purpose...”¹⁸ It also strove to create “a radical ‘Third Way’ which was neither capitalist nor communist.”¹⁹ These factors lead Eatwell to construct a definition of fascism as being a “serious ideology which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, and which is based on an attempt to create a holistic-national radical Third Way.”²⁰ Eatwell emphasises the importance of ideas in politics: “Ideas matter in politics - they inspire and shape action, take on a concrete force.” But he also points out that fascism needed specific social conditions for it to become a mass movement and for it to attain power.²¹

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11. With the growing emphasis on the nation and nationalism came ominous implications for those who were perceived as being alien to the nation. As Eatwell says: “The rise of a more holistic form of nationalism inevitably raised questions about who was not part of the community - and the Jew was the traditional outsider within Western culture.” *ibid.*, p. 18

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. xvii

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. xxiii. In Eatwell’s words: “Fascist ideology is, therefore, a form of thought which preaches the need for social rebirth in order to forge a holistic-national radical Third Way.” *ibid.*, p. 11

²¹ He says that “fascism was nothing if not a child of breakdown and doom.” *ibid.*, p. xviii. There is much debate over whether Nazism and fascism are the same - a good overview of which can be found in Kershaw’s *The Nazi Dictatorship*. In it, Kershaw acknowledges the extent of controversy and disagreement over the question of the nature of fascism and Nazism, and over whether Nazism can or cannot be described as a form of fascism. He explains that the Communists, for example, were clear that Nazism was simply a specific form of fascism - i.e. “Hitler fascism” - a function of capitalism (see pages 18, 24 and 36). Even some other, non-communist, interpretations stressed the importance of Hitler - saying that Nazism could most aptly be described as Hitlerism (see pages 20 and 39). In addition, there is an argument that generic definitions of fascism cannot encompass Nazism’s “singularity” (see p. 35). However, other interpretations stress the similarities between Nazism and fascism in such a way as to locate Nazism within the boundaries of fascism (see p. 37). Kershaw concludes that “there need be no contradiction, therefore, between acceptance of Nazism (as the most extreme manifestation of) fascism and recognition of its own unique characteristics within this category, which can only be properly comprehended within the framework of German national development.” Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship, Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1985) pages 18-40. In this thesis, it is accepted that Nazism is a specifically German form of generic fascism.

As with fascism, there have recently been studies on Nazism which have made ideology an important focus. For example, in *The Racial State*, Burleigh and Wipperman argue that, in order to understand the phenomenon of Nazism, it is necessary to appreciate that its ideology is of fundamental importance. In accordance with this, they emphasise the way in which the racial aspect of the ideology and, in particular, its racial anti-Semitism, was geared towards the establishment of a future, utopian, society which was to be founded on racist principles. The Nazi racial ideology, they assert, “reflected the desire to create a future society based upon the alleged verities of race...Racial anti-Semitism was the key element in a programme designed to achieve the ‘recovery’ of the ‘Aryan Germanic race’.”²² This race was seen as having been undermined by the presence and activities of the Jew. However, by following the principles of the race-doctrine, this damage would be repaired and a future society would be created in which the race would flourish. Burleigh and Wipperman further examine the development of this racial ideology, and emphasise that the Nazi attempt to establish their “utopian society” was undoubtedly ideologically-driven.²³ They point out that the racial ideology became “the official dogma and policy of the State.”²⁴ Therefore, when examining Nazi policies, the racial policies cannot be separated from the social ones because they

²² M. Burleigh and W. Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge, 1991) pages 304-305

²³ *ibid.*, p. 3

constitute “an indivisible whole.”²⁵ These racial and social policies are, they continue, “merely two sides of the same coin.”²⁶ The Nazi aim was to create a society where social divisions based on class would be superseded by those based on race. In other words, “race was meant to supplant class as the primary organising principle in society, with a narrowing of existing social divisions and a widening of the division between ‘healthy’, ‘Aryan’ ‘national comrades’ and those ‘elements’ which the Nazis designated as being racially inferior, ‘unfit’, or ‘alien’ and hence destined for exclusion and eventual extermination.”²⁷ Not only this, but the Nazi intention was that this race-based social structure was to become a global one.²⁸ The Nazi’s ultimate goal was to implement a universal racial “new order” and in the last instance all other policy was subordinate to this final objective.²⁹

Similarly, Weindling’s study, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* also acknowledges the role of ideology as being central to any understanding of the Nazi movement. The emphasis here, however, is on the relationship between the development of science and

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 305

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 4

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 2

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 4

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 304. As Burleigh and Wipperman put it: “Social policy was designed to achieve a global remodelling of society in accordance with racial criteria.” *ibid.*, p. 304

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 306

medicine in Germany, and the growing authoritarian ethos which eventually permeated that society. This work merits some detailed attention because it vividly illustrates the deeply-embedded links between science and Nazism, a theme picked up frequently in this thesis. The issues that it deals with, which include the idea of the nation as social organism, threats to it (via racial degeneration) and solutions to these threats (for example, by way of racial hygiene, sterilisation or euthanasia) will be returned to in the chapters dealing with Nazi ideology, its symbolism, and its links with the Enlightenment. Weindling examines the way in which science and medicine interacted with society as a whole and paved the way for the growth and acceptance of Nazi ideology and policies. He makes clear that, although the progress of science was initially a process imbued with the values of liberalism, this gradually changed so that more elitist and authoritarian values became dominant. This was partly because “science itself became regarded as the basis for authoritative pronouncements on social ills.”³⁰ Within the medical profession, the emphasis changed from being a concentration on individual health, to being a concern with the health of society as a whole. This eventually led to a situation in which scientifically-backed health care grew to become a way of controlling the populace, in that society began to be structured by various health-oriented directives laid

³⁰ P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 2. Also see p. 42

down by scientists and doctors. As Weindling explains: “Hygienic standards were to be imposed as a way of reforming lifestyle...The doctor took on a leadership role as Führer to guide the nation to an industrious, clean and healthy lifestyle.”³¹

According to Weindling, the medical and scientific authorities were a powerful elite who exerted a considerable amount of power over the lives of the people.³² Although their growing power did not go unremarked, they were inclined to insist that they had “authority to override individual rights in the interest of society and of future generations.”³³ In addition, the development of racial concepts of public health was yet another means of instituting social control and of promoting social integration.³⁴ The overall aim of integrating racial hygiene, population policy and health care was to achieve total control over the body of every citizen.³⁵ Weindling stresses the effect that the popularisation of the Darwinian theory of evolution had on the scientific and medical outlook and also on general perceptions of the nation.³⁶ There was a general acceptance that “evolutionary biology offered ‘objective’ criteria for evaluating fitness, welfare and the struggle for survival in urban and commercial life...The popularity

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 18

³² *ibid.*, p. 5

³³ *ibid.*, p. 6. See also p. 2

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 514

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 61

of Darwinism meant that the public was responsive to scientific medicine and to organicist portrayals of the nation as a social organism.”³⁷ This emphasis on the nation had the dual effect of encouraging the growth of nationalism, and engendering nationalist ideas within science and medicine.³⁸ Biology took a major role in the genesis of a distinctive form of racial ideology, and in establishing the threats of genetic defects to the health of the “social organism”.³⁹

It was, argues Weindling, a generally-held perception that the nation was under threat from processes of degeneration.⁴⁰ Aspects of Darwin’s theory, such as the “survival of the fittest” and the possibility of evolution into a higher form, became applied to society and to the nation. It was hoped and believed that by utilising the knowledge provided by these ideas, such processes of degeneration could be curtailed. An important proportion of the scientific and medical professions held that, through eugenics, the health of the people, of future generations, and of the nation as a whole, could be improved. This led to a situation where “the state and the people were brought into ever closer contact, as the rise of eugenics led to the invasion of the home and control over personal behaviour.”⁴¹

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 25. See also p. 47

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 493

³⁹ In this respect, as Weindling says, “biology was a valuable resource for Nazism in that it was meant to provide objective proof for racial ideology.” *ibid.*, p. 506

⁴⁰ *ibid.* See pages 40, 133 and 81

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. ix. See also pages 5, 7, 307 and 321

Eventually, the level of integration between the medical sciences and the state was such that “medical sciences became caught up in authoritarian politics and posed threats to personal liberties and autonomy.”⁴² This can be seen clearly in the sterilisation and euthanasia programmes - both of which were enthusiastically backed by a significant proportion of the medical and scientific professions. To achieve the goal of a healthy and vigorous nation, the medical killing of people deemed not fit to live was implemented. The ideology underlying the Nazi euthanasia programme had, therefore, a prior history.⁴³ As Weindling says: “Medical killing became a pilot scheme for the Holocaust.”⁴⁴

In this thesis it is argued that Nazism’s ideology was fundamental to its practices and it is intended to demonstrate the systematic nature of this ideology, and its symbolic functions. There is an enormous literature on the definition of ideology which lies outwith the scope of this thesis. However, a working definition of ideology is needed and, in this case, drawing on Griffin⁴⁵, ideology is taken to mean: a structured system of ideas, beliefs and values, the elements of which can be combined in a variety of ways while still maintaining the overall cohesiveness of the whole, which is believed

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 2. See also pages 6 and 7

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 397

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 548. See also p. 545

⁴⁵ Griffin, *op.cit.*, especially pages 15-17

by its subscribers to depict and explain reality and which is the basis for attempts to structure reality. This definition does not include interpretations of ideology which stress the way in which people are unconsciously imbued with ideas, beliefs and values. For example, the Marxist dominant ideology thesis, in which there are no specifically doctrinal aspects, but instead, an argument that the ideology of the dominant class imbues society - particularly to the detriment of the working class - is not here included.⁴⁶ Neither is discourse theory, which concentrates on the systems of meaning or “discourses” which are developed in the interaction of reality and thought, and which “shape the way people understand their roles in society and influence their political activities...”⁴⁷ Similarly, Wittgenstein’s rejection of the homogeneity of language in favour of an idea of “language games”, where the meanings of words are dependent on the circumstances, and thus the very language that

⁴⁶ The dominant ideology thesis argues that “in all societies based on class divisions there is a dominant class which enjoys control of both the means of material production and the means of mental production. Through its control of ideological production, the dominant class is able to supervise the construction of a set of coherent beliefs. The dominant beliefs are more powerful, dense and coherent than those of subordinate classes. The dominant ideology penetrates and infects the consciousness of the working class, because the working class comes to see and experiences reality through the conceptual categories of the dominant class. The dominant ideology functions to incorporate the working class within a system which is, in fact, operating against the material interests of labour. This incorporation in turn explains the coherence and integration of capitalist society.” Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London, 1980) pages 1-2. Abercrombie *et al* give a concise definition of this thesis as a prelude to demonstrating that it is empirically false. See also Joseph McCarney’s “Recent Interpretations of Ideology”, in *Approaches to Marx*, edited by Mark Cowling and L. Wilde (Milton Keynes, 1989) which is a critique of accounts of the conception of ideology to be found in Marx.

⁴⁷ David Howarth, “Discourse Theory”, in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, edited by David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (London, 1995) p. 115

people use can be structured ideologically, is not here included.⁴⁸

Instead, the more doctrinal aspects of Nazi ideology will be considered.

In so doing, it is intended to show that Nazism has paradoxical and ambiguous links with the Enlightenment. This relationship is being examined because, as this is a thesis on ideology, it is necessary to locate Nazism within the larger history of ideas in Europe, and one key issue of contention within that history of ideas is whether there is a link between Enlightenment and fascism. This argument for a link has been made before, most notably by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There they argue that, although enlightened thought is essential for social freedom, the Enlightenment paradoxically contained within itself elements that would lead to the demise of such freedom. This is because the overwhelming emphasis on reason as an essential element of enlightenment led inexorably to a way of interacting with the world which was totalitarian. During the Enlightenment there was a belief that the world could be explained by reason. If the mysteries of nature were examined through reason and empirical science, then these mysteries would be solved and there would be nothing left in nature of magic or myth, but everything would be subject to the laws

⁴⁸ See *The Social Science Encyclopaedia*, edited by Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper (London, 1985) p. 901

of science. Through reason and empirical science, Enlightenment sought to reduce nature to systematic facts. Everything became calculable. This reduction of nature to a fact-based system was, in fact, totalitarian, for nothing was permitted to be outside the system. Science and rationality became the only truths - no others were permitted.⁴⁹ This was because Enlightenment “equates the truth with scientific systemisation.”⁵⁰ This emphasis on the all-encompassing nature of scientific systemisation led to a view of the world as being a unified system: “The Enlightenment recognises as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows...”⁵¹ Adorno and Horkheimer argue that it was this totalitarian structuring of nature which had the effect of permitting the Nazis to impose their totalitarian rule.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the reduction of nature to a state of calculability, by way of empirical science, was a means of the domination of nature. As man is part of nature, this had the effect of also being the domination of man.⁵² This mastery of nature and control of man led to man’s alienation from nature. With Enlightenment, in fact, nature turns into “mere objectivity. Men pay

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (London, 1992) pages 5-6

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 85

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 7

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 4

for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them.”⁵³ However, although nature was to be wholly comprehended and controlled there still remained a fear of its unknown quantities - those quantities which existed before science was applied to it, and that were not explicable by science. This fear led to an urge towards self-preservation against the danger of unfathomed nature. There arose a fear of “outsideness” - a fear of that which was outside the fact-determined, systematic explanation of nature: “Nothing may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear.”⁵⁴ Man projected this fear onto elements of reality that were perceived as being representative of this “outsideness”, and felt that he had to protect himself from them. It is Adorno and Horkheimer’s contention that this process of projection enabled the Nazis to make anti-Semitism part of their system of domination by accusing the Jew of being outside nature (i.e. *controlled and systemised* nature) and by associating him, therefore, with the danger that had to be protected against. This was aided by the fact the advance of empirical science and the emphasis on facts undermined theoretical science and conceptual thought. “On the road to modern science”, they aver, “men renounce any claim to

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 9

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16

meaning. They substitute formula for concept, rule and probability for cause and motive...”⁵⁵ This had an adverse effect on determinations of right or wrong behaviour. Adorno and Horkheimer emphasise the “neutrality of reason”⁵⁶ - empirical science cannot in itself indicate moral qualities of right or wrong. “Because there can be no absolutely convincing argument against materially false judgements, the distorted perception in which they appear cannot be cured.”⁵⁷ It was the inability to cure such a distorted perception which allowed the Nazi regime to gain and maintain power.

Like Adorno and Horkheimer, this thesis also emphasises the contradictory relationship between Enlightenment thought and Nazi ideology. Here it will be argued that, despite the obvious and towering differences between them, Enlightenment thought in fact provided some of the foundations of Nazi ideology. Enlightenment thought and Nazi ideology shared many elements in their materialist explanation of the world. Like the Enlightenment, and despite all talk of instinct and *Geist*, Nazi ideology was deeply materialist, and it was also reason-bound. Both Nazis and *philosophes* had great faith in science. The faith in science that arose during the Enlightenment undermined religious universality and cast doubt on the existence of

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 88

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 193. In Nazism, the persecution of the Jews is seen as being a consequence of this distorted projection. *ibid.*, p. 187

a divine “spirit” within all people. If there was no divine “spirit” then it could be concluded that human beings were in no substantial way different from the animals. It became the norm to categorise all aspects of nature - including humans. These classifications of human beings were profoundly materialistic. With human rather than religious morality becoming important, it became accepted in some quarters that concepts of good and bad became determinable by reason. There was, in other words, no longer any risk of heavenly damnation. The demise of the religious explanation of human genesis allowed the possibility that different races were of different origins. With the discovery of the great variation in levels of “civilisation” between peoples, this led to the possibility that some peoples were naturally inferior. The stress on science meant that racial inferiority came to be seen as empirically verifiable. And medical science meant that it, or its effects on society, could be “curable”. In addition, because the idea of a spiritual human “brotherhood” had been discarded, this meant that, in the materialistic classification of human beings, which reached its epitome during the Nazi era, those who were deemed “inferior” were liable to be treated as sub-humans.

As far as the methodology is concerned, this author’s proficiency in German is limited. Therefore, in the main, German

sources will not be used. However, it is fortunate that there are excellent translations existing of the relevant, necessary material, which will be more than adequate for the purposes of this thesis. In *Documents on Nazism*, for example, Noakes and Pridhams's stated purpose is to "assemble in one volume a collection of documents illustrating the rise of Nazism and the Third Reich."⁵⁸ *Documents on Nazism* provides a substantial record of all aspects of the Nazi rise to power, from when the Party first emerged, right up to the end of the war. In *Nazi Ideology Before 1933*, Miller Lane and Rupp focus on the development of Nazi ideology, concentrating on Nazi ideology prior to 1933. They provide a selection of pieces ranging from 1918 to 1932, and including such individuals as Dietrich Eckart, Alfred Rosenberg, Gottfried Feder, Gregor and Otto Strasser, Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, and R.W. Darré.⁵⁹ And Roger Griffin, in *Fascism: A Reader*, Griffin provides a wide range of examples of fascist texts.⁶⁰

This thesis is not intended as a history of Nazism or of its ideology. It is rather an attempt to delineate its underlying structure and to show that it is not an inexplicable and irrational or meaningless outburst, but something that can be related to the intellectual history of Europe. In Chapter 1: "Nazi Ideology, themes

⁵⁸ *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945*, introduced and edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (London, 1974) p. 9

⁵⁹ *Nazi Ideology Before 1933, A Documentation*, introduced and translated by Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Manchester, 1978)

⁶⁰ *Fascism, an Oxford Reader*, edited by Roger Griffin (Oxford, 1995)

and elements”, there is an analysis of Nazi ideology - illustrating the main themes and elements. The main purpose is to show that the beliefs, desires and goals of Nazism did indeed constitute a coherent ideology. The emphasis on biology, encompassing the race doctrine with its belief in racial purity, the “struggle for survival”, anti-Semitism, and the conviction that a new Aryan man could be developed, will be considered. The radical nationalism of the Nazi movement and its many links with the biological theme, will also be examined. Thus, the idea of the nation as an organic whole, the unity of blood and soil, the idea of racial homogeneity upon one territory, and the idea of the nation (and hence the state) above the individual, will all be discussed. In addition, the importance of the concept of leadership will be emphasised in an examination of the leadership principle, the anti-equality, anti-democratic elements, the idea of domination, elitism, and scorn of the masses.

In this chapter, the main focus will be on Hitler, his works and speeches. This is principally for pragmatic reasons, in order to make the vast quantity of material more manageable. However, it is also in recognition of Hitler’s widely acknowledged centrality to Nazism, in his role as its primary ideologue.⁶¹ In this role, his thinking was

⁶¹ See Bracher who says, for example, that “one of the significant features of both National Socialism and the Third Reich is the fact that from the beginning to the very end it stood and fell with this man [i.e. Hitler], with his decisions, his ideological fixations, his purely political way of life, and his need for the grandiose alternative of victory or catastrophe.” Karl D. Bracher, “The Role of Hitler”, in *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide*, edited by Walter Laqueur (Berkeley, 1979) p. 215. Also see Kershaw,

fundamental to Nazi ideology, which wholly encompassed his main obsessions. These obsessions he had developed as a relatively young man and they remained with him throughout the rest of his life. However, the very obsessiveness of his thought resulted in it being marred by dogmatism, biased opinion and partiality.⁶² Therefore, his thinking - though coherent as far as the main themes and elements were concerned - had, nevertheless, a limited coherence, because it was constrained by his prejudices and could, therefore, only develop to a restricted extent. In other words, it was coherent until it encountered something which did not fit in with Hitler's world-view and at that point coherence would give way to inconsistency. Despite these limitations, however, he had a talent in synthesising many of the ideological currents that were present in society, and also in adding his personal obsessions to that synthesis.

In Chapter 2: "The Symbolism of Nazi Ideology, mobilisation of the population", the way in which these symbols fitted into the structure of the ideology, and the way in which the ideology depended on its symbols to help to maintain its cohesion will be examined. The manifold uses of symbols by the Nazis will also be illustrated, in terms of: The way in which symbols were used to

who emphasises the importance of Hitler's "charisma" in allowing him, in the eyes of his followers, "unchallengeable status as both the embodiment of the 'idea' and its organising genius." Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (London, 1991) p. 34

⁶² Kershaw, *Hitler, op.cit.*, p. 17

stand for aspects of the ideology; the use of symbols to transmit the ideology to the population; and the use of symbolism to mobilise the population - firstly to support the rise of Nazism, then to support Nazi aims, and finally to obey Nazis precepts. The way in which symbolism was able to portray unreality as reality or partial reality as total truth will also be considered.

In Chapter 3: "Zeev Sternhell, the crisis of liberalism and Nazi ideology", Sternhell's theory of fascism as a coherent ideology with an ideological history will be examined. Although there are other models of fascism that could have been used for this purpose, Sternhell's has been chosen as an effective aid to analysis and understanding. His work presents a view of fascism that plausibly explains many aspects of it. His explanation gives insight into the intellectual background of fascism and permits acknowledgement that fascist ideology possessed an internal coherence. By illustrating the intellectual precursors of fascism, fascism's developmental history is exposed. This enables fascism to be placed in a European context rather than narrowly situating it within a specific *national* context. In short, Sternhell's theory advances a convincing reason for the development of fascism and fascist ideology and one which, it will be contended here, can be used effectively in examining Nazi ideology and its intellectual precursors. In this chapter, the important elements of this theory

will be discussed. For examples: his view that fascism was a European phenomenon with a European history; that its origins are traceable to the turn of the century when, because of huge social changes, the prevailing popular ideologies of Marxism and liberalism were seen to no longer be adequate in explaining social conditions; and that both liberalism and Marxism therefore suffered a crisis. Sternhell contended that it was this crisis which led to the formation of fascism as a synthesis. This was a synthesis between non-materialist socialism and radical nationalism, which was neither of the right nor of the left. This contention will also be examined.

Chapter 4: "Precursors of Nazi Ideology, Gobineau, Chamberlain, Treitschke, and Moeller van den Bruck". In this chapter, four writers will be examined, whose works may serve as guides to some of the types of thought which led to the rise of Nazi ideology. It is intended to examine Nazism's forerunners, because they will serve as an illustration that Nazi ideology was not a bolt from the blue but had an intellectual history. In accordance with this, these four thinkers have been chosen in order to *illustrate* the intellectual forebears of Nazism. These writers will be used as examples, to depict certain aspects of this thesis. As such, an exhaustive consideration of their works will not be carried out. Instead certain elements will be emphasised. Thus, Gobineau's role

as the father of the race doctrine will be examined, including his explanation of history in terms of race and his extreme pessimism about the possibilities of racial degeneration. In a similar way, Chamberlain's particular slant on racial history will also be examined. With Treitschke and Moeller van den Bruck, the main focus will be on their nationalism and militarism.

Chapter 5: "The Enlightenment". In this chapter, the main aspects of Enlightenment thought will be focused on in order to prepare the way for an examination of the relationship between the Enlightenment and Nazi ideology. Therefore, the rationalism and materialism of the Enlightenment, the faith in empirical science, the cosmopolitanism, the idea of progress, and the antagonism towards traditional religion as being superstition, will be among the elements considered.

In Chapter 6: "The Enlightenment and Nazi Ideology", the relationship of Nazism to the Enlightenment will be considered. Furthermore, and *contra* Sternhell, it is claimed here that Nazism cannot be seen purely as a reaction to the Enlightenment, but its links with the latter need to be explored. In order to do this, aspects of the Enlightenment will be compared and contrasted with elements of Nazism. This is intended to illustrate that the explicit and

comprehensive Nazi rejection of the Enlightenment was far from being as unequivocal as it appeared on the surface. It is also intended to illustrate that there were elements in the Enlightenment which could only too easily be appropriated by harbingers of repression.

Therefore, in this chapter, the relationship of the Enlightenment and the Nazis to science, categorisation, rationalism and materialism will be examined. In addition, the relationship to the established Church, including the antagonism to the Church and Christianity evinced by both the Nazis and the philosophes, will be examined. Enlightenment and Nazi attitudes to other peoples, concepts of civilisation, and views on classicism will be among other elements considered.

Chapter Two

Nazi Ideology - themes and elements

Nazi Ideology

themes and elements

In this chapter it is intended to examine the main themes and elements of Nazi ideology. In so doing, it is intended to show that Nazi ideology was a coherent ideology. In other words, it was an ideology which consisted of a systematic arrangement of ideas, the main themes and elements of which related to each other in a predictable way. The themes that will be focused on will include: the promotion of the idea of a strong leadership which would provide social and racial unity, over the pluralism of liberal-democracy; the opposition to Marxism and the substitution in its place of the idea of an organic nationalism; the race doctrine, including anti-Semitism, ideas of racial purity, and racial struggle for survival; and the admiration for, and use of, force and violence.

It is important to address the question of the coherence or otherwise of the ideology. While a purely ideological explanation of Nazism is not sought here, if the coherence of the ideology is accepted, it helps to make explicable Nazi motivations, actions and goals. “The evidence strongly suggests that, although Nazi ideology contained contradictions and incongruities it was, nevertheless, an ideology which was, on the whole, coherent. Sternhell has no doubts that it was “intellectually self-sufficient - no less so than liberalism or socialism.”¹ However, such cohesiveness does not mean that it was without contradiction.

In *Fascism in Western Europe*, Kedward makes a point of indicating that a political force can gain power despite its ideology containing discrepancies. Indeed, “throughout history there are examples of powerful systems or regimes based on a synthesis of opposites.” He maintains that such a synthesis of opposites was characteristic of fascism. “In both origin and rule”, he says, “fascism follows this pattern.” He points out that fascism contained within itself contradictions that seemed to undermine its cohesiveness. These incongruities were due to the eclecticism of fascism, taking its ideas from a wide variety of sources - often conflicting ones. In other

¹ Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, translated by David Maisel (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994) p. 4

words, “it took ideas, methods and attitudes from conflicting sides and presented the world with a unity so full of contradictions that an early collapse was widely expected. In these very contradictions, however, lay its strength.”² This was partly because Nazis used the rules of reason when it suited them, but were equally at ease with proclaiming the merits of irrationalism. As Kedward puts it: “Rationalism and irrationalism were combined into a new totality.”³ He concludes by saying that fascist claims “are full of contradictions and defy political science, but they point to a reality of history - the paradox that was fascism.”⁴ Kedward is correct to point out that no ideology is totally without contradictions. If most ideologies contain elements within them that are - at the least - inconsistent or incongruous, then the eclecticism of fascism in no way weakens its status or force as an ideology or undermines its worthiness as an object of investigation.

In this chapter, it will be argued that the Nazis had both a definite *Weltanschauung* (that is, a world outlook) and also a clear purpose. To explore this complicated and often contradictory ideology, it is useful to isolate four main themes that are intrinsic to it. These are: the leadership theme, the “might is right” theme, the

² HR Kedward, *Fascism in Western Europe, 1900-1945* (Glasgow, 1969) p. 6

³ *ibid.*, p. 18

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 34

theme of unity and the racial theme. These themes constitute the foundations of Nazi ideology and are also an aid to binding the ideology together. From these, all other elements either arise, or are logically essential. Although these themes are being isolated here as an explanatory tool, they are so closely connected within the actual ideology, that they cannot readily be disentangled. Nevertheless, they are useful guidelines to help structure the analysis.

For the Nazis, belief in the leader was vital to their ideology. The *Führerprinzip*, or principle of leadership, was fundamental. The ultimate leader was, of course, Hitler, and much of the importance of the leader-concept was rooted in him personally. But the idea of the leading role of the nation was also important, as was leadership in the abstract. The whole idea of leadership was particularly significant in that it encompassed many of the underlying assumptions of Nazism, for example, the idea of the value of total obedience and total loyalty. To Hitler, total obedience was essential because, as he said in a speech at the Nuremberg *Parteitag*, “nothing is possible if there is not a single will which issues its commands and which the others must always obey...”⁵ Within Nazi ideology, it was essential that the leader would have absolute authority and absolute responsibility. This type of leadership would strike a chord with the

⁵ Adolf Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939*, volume 1 (hereafter, *Speeches*), edited by Norman H. Baynes (London, 1942) 14 September 1935, p. 543

populace who would willingly respond to its demands, because it was a leadership which “was not afraid to take both risks and responsibility.”⁶ The *Führerprinzip* was also seen as an answer to the false doctrine of democracy. Part of its attraction within Nazism was its inflexible rejection of liberal democracy, which was condemned as “weak, vacillating and corrupt.”⁷ In a “truly Germanic democracy”, said Hitler, “there is no majority vote on individual questions, but only the decision of an individual who must answer with his fortune and his life for his choice. The people under his command would have total faith in him and would both willingly and happily subsume their individuality under his control.”⁸ Here lies the structure of what outsiders might call despotism, but, according to Nazi ideology, this type of leadership was something natural, sought after, and welcomed by the people. Hitler went so far as to say that the people “loves to be ruled.”⁹ Nazi leaders were depicted as persons of particular quality, naturally endowed with leadership ability. These people would arise spontaneously out of the mass of the population and would be the channel for, and the personification of, the will of the population. They would be welcomed, believed in, effortlessly obeyed, by the people. If the people were presented with a natural

⁶ Alan Bullock, *Hitler - A Study in Tyranny* (Armonk, 1984) p. 356

⁷ William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler, The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London, 1946) p. 14

⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (hereafter, *MK*), translated by Ralph Mannheim (London, 1989) p. 83

⁹ *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-44, His Private Conversations* (hereafter, *HTT*) translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, 2nd Edition (London, 1942) February 1942, p. 338

leader, they would follow him and leave behind the deceptions of democracy.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said that, at the beginning of the Nazi struggle, all men of “national and patriotic mind” became rebels “against a kind of government which in their conviction would inevitably lead to the destruction of their own nationality.”¹⁰ The true leader would not be elected in accordance with the “whims of the masses”.¹¹ Rather he was a unique individual who would take charge owing to his exceptional qualities - qualities that would be recognised and accepted by the populace. Within a Nazi society, even a common man could rise to a leadership position by way of these abilities rather than, as in democracy, because of his birth or wealth. Natural leadership, under National Socialism, would triumph over artificial divisions. The leader, on his part, would devote himself to the population with courage, dedication and selflessness. Their faith in him would be justified. Democratic rule was, of course, wholly alien to Nazism. Hitler himself stated that the people were unable to make decisions - decisions had to be taken for them. These decisions had to be taken by exceptional men. These would be men of action, men with heroic qualities. In other words, they would be “natural”

¹⁰ *MK*, p. 87

¹¹ Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945* (Michigan, 1965) p. 199. Bramsted explains that in a booklet published by Goebbels, *The Second Revolution*, he denied the need for elections in favour of the principle of leadership.

leaders. Parliamentary representatives, elected by the populace, were very far from being men like this. Instead, they had all the typical bourgeois shortcomings and, as far as Hitler was concerned, “in the political field there is no stupider a class than the bourgeoisie.”¹²

Parliamentary representation was viewed as a cynical misuse of political responsibility. Nothing more than a way for members of the bourgeoisie to take decisions and make deals affecting the population, without either answering to the population, or taking responsibility for the consequences of these actions. Any representatives elected by the people would never be answerable to them. This was because once these politicians assumed power, that very power put them beyond the reach of accountability to the masses. Therefore, they could follow their own individualistic interests with impunity, while maintaining the sham of accountability and responsibility to the electorate. Their duplicity indicated the duplicity of the parliamentary system as a whole. “There is no principle”, maintained Hitler, “which, objectively considered, is as false as parliamentarianism.”¹³

Parliament was depicted as an ineffectual talking-shop of second-rate people, where endless debate substituted inefficiently for action. It was a feathered nest for people who had managed to be

¹² *HTT*, May 1942, p. 484

¹³ *MK*, p. 78.

elected by the masses and who were now solely concerned with pursuing their own selfish interests.¹⁴ These parliamentarians were totally lacking in idealism - unlike the Nazis - and they had no principles. Their every action was geared solely towards re-election. Come election time there would be “a mad rush for seats in parliament, in which convictions and principles are thrown overboard like sand and ballast whenever it seems expedient...”¹⁵ Elected politicians were an unnatural elite consisting of people with a certain social or financial “background”, rather than people of true merit. In addition, parliament acted as a smoke screen which hid the “true rulers” of the population - i.e. Jews in their many personae. The political parties were not all they seemed because according to Hitler, “their real leading elements are always Jews and only Jews.”¹⁶ Parliament was a fundamentally flawed “symptom” of a duplicitous and destructive doctrine - democracy.¹⁷

Democracy, though proclaiming its benefits to the people, was detrimental to their interests. It was, therefore, the task of National

¹⁴ Dietrich Eckart described politics thus: “Politics has turned into a dirty business throughout the world because for a long time the official and unofficial leaders of the people have - consciously or unconsciously - sought only one thing: *personal power*...The itch for power leads among other things to the *creation of parties*.” Dietrich Eckart, “Men!”, in *Nazi Ideology Before 1933, A Documentation*, introduced and translated by Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Manchester, 1978) p. 3

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 343

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.411

¹⁷ Or, as Rosenberg would have it “race-destroying democracy.” Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts*, in *Alfred Rosenberg, Selected Writings*, edited by Robert Pois, in *Roots of the Right, Readings in Fascist, Racist and Elitist Ideology* series (London, 1971) p. 59. He also described democracy as “the rule...of money...” *ibid.*, p. 79

Socialism, as Hitler said in a speech in Stuttgart in 1933, “to liberate Germany from the fetters of an impossible parliamentary democracy...”¹⁸ As opposed to this parliamentary democracy, National Socialism would provide, “a philosophy of life which endeavours to reject the democratic mass idea and give this earth to the best people...”¹⁹ Natural leaders had to rise up from the populace, had to take power themselves (not be designated it), had to have total authority and total responsibility. The personality was all-important, and the value of the personality and the rule of democracy were mutually incompatible. As Hitler said, in a speech in the Berlin *Sportpalast* in 1933: “At all times Democracy has destroyed and annihilated the values of personality. It is madness to think and a crime to publish abroad that suddenly a majority can take the place of a man of genius.”²⁰ With the denial of democracy came a denial of the structures and processes of democracy - especially the bureaucracy and the legal system. These were said to be both stultifying and corrupting. Their dead weight laid an inhibitory hand on the development of the German nation. Hitler proclaimed in *Mein Kampf* that “the greatest evolutionary changes on this earth would not have been thinkable if their motive force, instead of fanatical, yes, hysterical passion, had been merely the bourgeois virtues of law and

¹⁸ *Speeches*, p. 242

¹⁹ *MK*, p. 403

²⁰ *Speeches*, p. 256

order.”²¹ Hitler had very little time for bureaucracy. As he put it: “I am often urged to say something in praise of bureaucracy - I can't do it.”²² Bureaucracy was said to lack dynamism and spontaneity, there was no element of instinct or intuition - qualities that were essential to the development of a nation and a race. Without them there could only be corruption. Until the bourgeois mentality and bourgeois practices were surmounted - society, the German people and the Aryan race would be in danger of destruction.

To prevent this destruction, radical action was needed. This radical action, in many ways, turned society on its head. New laws abounded. Much Nazi activity was outwith the rule of law altogether.²³ Indeed, Arendt castigates Nazi rule as “this permanent state of lawlessness...”²⁴ Hitler would use the threat to the race to justify the actions of the Party. When the race was in danger, he said, “the question of legality is reduced to a subordinate role.”²⁵ In

²¹ *MK*, p. 388.

²² *HTT*, p. 18

²³ Himmler openly admitted this. “Right from the start”, he declared, “I took the view that it did not matter in the least if our actions were contrary to some paragraph in the law; in my work for the Führer and the nation, I do what my conscience and common sense tells me is right.” *Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler in the Constituent Session of the Committee for Police Law of the Academy of German Law, 11 October 1936, Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945*, introduced and edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (New York, 1974) p. 283

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, 1963) p. 394. And Schapiro claims that “Hitler had only to say ‘off with his head’, and not only would the order be carried out, but learned lawyers would write volumes of articles explaining that the real essence of German law was to be found in the will of the Führer.” Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (London, 1972) p. 30

²⁵ *MK*, p. 88. In a 1938 speech, Hans Frank, the head of the Nazi Association of Lawyers, endorsed this. “The Führer”, he declared, “is supreme judge of the nation...There is no position in the area of constitutional law in the Third Reich independent of this elemental will of the Führer...Constitutional Law in the Third Reich is the legal formulation of the historic will of the Führer, but the historic will of the Führer is not the fulfilment of legal preconditions for his activity.

addition, the disregard for aspects of the law was often rationalised by the proposition that the law and the will of the Führer were identical.²⁶ The negative portrayal of the bureaucratic and legal structures and processes was convenient for the Nazi leadership in aiding them to achieve their aims. It also fitted in well with an ideology whose important elements included action, the primacy of the state over the ordinary individual and the leadership principle; and for which the payoff was a new order of world dominance. A new order in which, as Hitler said, “Berlin will one day be the capital of the world.”²⁷ Arguments against this “leadership principle” and in favour of the rule of law, democracy, and natural individual rights were dismissed as being nothing more than the mouthings of spineless liberals, or the work of enemies of the German nation. All these ideas were wiped away by the overwhelming message that the “iron fist” was the one and only determinant of justice. In other words, it would not matter that a person had the law on his side in an argument, or if he had more evidence supporting his claim, if his opponent used greater physical force against him. Ultimately, physical strength would win. The logical conclusion to this idea was that any existing legal structures could be by-passed, or arbitrarily

Whether the Führer governs according to a formal written Constitution is not a legal question of the first importance. The legal question is only whether through his activity the Führer guarantees the existence of his people.” Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 254

²⁶ Martin Broszat, *German National Socialism, 1919-1945*, translated by Kurt Rosenbaum and Inge Pauli Boehm (Santa Barbara, 1966) p. 28

²⁷ *HTT*, 21-22.10.41, p. 83

altered if necessary. The rule of law would always be subordinate to force. This elevation of force over law enabled the role of the leader to be made clear. The leader had the power to make his word law through his powerful will, his spirit, his heroic stature.

Hitler, of course, became more than simply the leader of the nation in the political sense. He became also saviour and redeemer, the one who had “awakened the nation” to its true destiny. In accordance with this, the idea of the Führer exceeded ordinary notions of leadership. Indeed, Hitler as leader both validated the *Führerprinzip* and also functioned as a crucial symbol of Nazi ideology. He was not just the leader of the nation, he and the nation could not be disconnected from each other. All patriotism, all loyalty to the nation could be transferred to him personally. It was no accident that one of the daily mottoes for children of the Reich Youth movement was “Hitler is Germany and Germany is Hitler.”²⁸ It is also revealing that in another Youth movement ceremony of admission, the children were called upon to swear an oath of allegiance which, they were told, “will bind you to him for all time.”²⁹ And more than this, the future of the nation and the future of the German people came to be seen as resting in his hands. He was to lead Germany out

²⁸ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 358

²⁹ The Ceremony of Admission into the Cubs of the *Deutsches Jungvolk*, *ibid.*, p. 357. In addition, Reich officials and German soldiers were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler. *ibid.*, p. 220

of the morass of division, corruption and decadence into which it had sunk. He was to lead them into a new future - a future of German glory. These God-like qualities of deliverance became closely associated with him. Baldur von Shirach³⁰, for example, associated service to God's will with service to Adolf Hitler saying that "*wer Adolf Hitler, dem Führer, dient, dient Deutschland, wer Deutschland dient, dient Gott.*"³¹ And Goebbels held on to his belief in the "Führer and his pure and sacred cause" right to the end.³²

The principle of leadership was personified and intensified by Hitler, but it did not confine itself to the relationship between individuals, it also applied itself to the relationship between nations. Some nations were said to be more fit to be leaders, and others more fit to be led. Hitler spoke of a "natural order" among nations, the form of which was "that there is a hierarchy amongst nations. The most capable nations must necessarily take the lead."³³ The German people were depicted as being a race and nation of leaders. Indeed, Hitler said that it was "a race of rulers..."³⁴ Therefore, they should be

³⁰ The leader of the Hitler Youth

³¹ "Whoever serves Adolf Hitler, the Leader, serves Germany; whoever serves Germany, serves God." *Speeches*, p. 537

³² *The Goebbels Diaries, The Last Days*, edited and introduced by Hugh Trevor-Roper, translated by Richard Barry (London, 1977) p. 330. This belief was shared by his wife, Magda, who caused her six small children to be killed, saying that, "the world which will succeed the Führer and National Socialism is not worth living in and for this reason I have brought the children here too. ..[i.e. to Hitler's bunker at the close of the war]...We have only one aim in life now - to remain loyal to the Führer unto death; that we should be able to end our life together with him is a gift of fate for which we would never have dared hope." *ibid.*, p. 330-331

³³ *HTT*, p. 314

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 19

at the top of the hierarchy. The German nation was a leader nation. This adoption of the idea of the leading role of the German nation meant that the leadership principle could be applied to external as well as internal matters. If the *Führerprinzip* was applied to nations as well as individual people, the result was that other nations should be obedient and subservient to Germany. The idea of Germany having a leading role among nations brings the leadership theme together with the theme of "might is right". A constant refrain of Hitler's was on the necessity for *Lebensraum*. This was the essential "life space" - the space necessary for a nation to be able to live to its full potential. Germany, it was claimed, did not have enough *Lebensraum*, and therefore it was necessary that territory should be gained from other nations. A disproportion between territory available and population in existence was fatal to the health of the nation and the race.³⁵ To Hitler, the only way that this territorial gain could be achieved was through conquest. "The acquisition of soil", he insisted, "is always linked with the employment of force."³⁶ Therefore, other nations had to be conquered or destroyed because, to Hitler, it was "inconceivable that a higher people should painfully exist on a soil too narrow for it, whilst amorphous masses, which contribute

³⁵ *Hitler's Secret Book* (hereafter, *HSB*), introduced by Telford Taylor, translated by Salvator Attansio (New York, 1962) 2nd Edition, p. 18

³⁶ *MK*, p. 24

nothing to civilisation, occupy infinite tracts of soil that is one of the richest in the world.”³⁷

The arguments for the pursuit of *Lebensraum* became linked with the idea of the survival of the fittest. The strongest nation, the strongest people, would win the day. The fittest would survive.³⁸ This struggle for survival was positively desirable because, as Hitler made clear in the *Secret Book*, “the compulsion to engage in the struggle for existence lies in the limitation of the living space; but in the life-struggle for this living space lies also the basis for evolution.”³⁹ This was because “the law of selection justifies this incessant struggle, by allowing the survival of the fittest.”⁴⁰ Broszat describes this as a “biologic-materialistic concept of the survival of the strong” and confirms that Hitler saw it as an unalterable law.⁴¹ The “fittest” nations and races would survive and would achieve higher forms. That a sustained belief in competition between races was an enduring part of Nazi ideology, can be seen in the discussion at the Wannsee

³⁷ *HTT*, p. 38. *Lebensraum* was essential for the health of the nation because with it, said Hitler, “a people...no longer needs to shunt off its rising rural generations into the big cities as factory workers, but...instead can settle them as free peasants on their own soil...” *HSB*, p. 210. For Trevor-Roper, the pursuit of *Lebensraum* was “the real message of Nazism.” H.R. Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (London, 1962) p. 5. And Bullock maintains that the “aim of [Hitler’s] foreign policy never changed from its first definition in *Mein Kampf* in the 1920s to the attack on Russian in 1941: German expansion towards the East.” Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 370

³⁸ For Toland, Hitler’s conviction that might makes right “led to a vital link between self-preservation and *Lebensraum*.” Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976) p. 230

³⁹ *HSB*, p. 6. Hitler claimed that struggle between peoples for material acquisition was an aid to their evolutionary development. *HSB*, p. 16

⁴⁰ *HTT*, p. 51

⁴¹ Broszat, *op.cit.*, p. 51

conference, in January 1942, on the forcing of Jews into labour gangs in the East. There the minutes reveal that Heydrich⁴² said that “natural elimination” would remove many of these people. However, “the remainder who survive - and they will certainly be those who have the greatest powers of endurance - will have to be dealt with accordingly. For, if released, they would, as a natural selection of the fittest, form a germ cell from which the Jewish race could build itself up again.”⁴³

In Nazi ideology the Jewish and Aryan races were each competing for the same resources to survive. This meant that Jews could be characterised as race enemies, because they were taking material resources that the Aryan race had to have for itself.⁴⁴ This linking of the so-called “struggle for survival” with anti-Semitism, enabled the Nazis to portray anti-Semitism as being one of the laws of nature. This “struggle” was portrayed as a serious danger because, as Hitler said, “the plundering of the prerequisites of life is the cause

⁴² SS *Obergruppenführer* Heydrich, the Chief of the Security Police and the SD.

⁴³ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 489

⁴⁴ To Toland, this link between Social Darwinism, *Lebensraum* and anti-Semitism was one of the most vital linkages that Hitler made. Toland, *op.cit.*, p. 226. It must be remembered, however, that the Jews were neither the only “race-enemies” nor the only group to be persecuted by the Nazis: Gypsies, Freemasons, homosexuals, pacifists, and others were also oppressed. In addition, “German genocidal policies were not confined to the Jews. Prisoners of war kept in camps under the control of the *Wehrmacht* were also decimated by brutal policies including insufficient food, forced labour, beatings, and arbitrary shootings on political, racial, or other grounds.” Martin C. Dean Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit, Scotland Yard) “The German *Gendarmerie*, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941-1944”, *German History, The Journal of the German History Society*, volume 14, no. 2, 1996.

of the dying out of a people.”⁴⁵ This interpretation of struggle was a radical change from ideas of the past, as Rosenberg makes clear.

“The actions of history and the future no longer signify class struggle or warfare between Church dogmas”, he declared in 1938, “but rather the conflict between blood and blood, race and race, people and people. And this means combat between spiritual values.”⁴⁶

Lebensraum could only be achieved through force of arms. This meant that war came to be depicted as essential for the survival of the Aryan race. But, it was not only essential, it could also be welcomed. A nation in a state of war had a common purpose, shared ideals, shared danger and many opportunities for the display of heroism. Noel O’Sullivan in his *Fascism*, argues that, to the Nazis “the logic of the activist style was finally accepted, and war became the supreme test of a people’s fitness for historical survival.”⁴⁷

War, and warlike activity, were depicted as being heroic and magnificent. There was, as Kershaw puts it, a “glorification of militarism and war...”⁴⁸ War was also said to be of positive benefit to the nation in that, through it, the nation was stimulated and revitalised. This was because, within Nazi ideology, bloodshed was seen as a revitalising occurrence. People spilling blood for the good of

⁴⁵ *HSB*, p. 7

⁴⁶ Rosenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 34

⁴⁷ Noel O’Sullivan, *Fascism*, in *Modern Ideologies* series (London, 1983) p. 70

⁴⁸ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1989) p. 38

the nation was seen as being healthy for the nation. According to Hitler, "a peace which lasts for more than twenty-five years is harmful to a nation. Peoples, like individuals, sometimes need regenerating by a little blood-letting."⁴⁹ The people, the nation were one blood, one soil - blood spilled on the soil regenerated the nation. Spilling blood, fighting war: all these were heroic - a nation of heroes was a strong and healthy nation, a nation to admire. Its members would feel "the pride born of the knowledge that each and every one has shed his blood and played his part in the greatest struggle for freedom in the history of the German race".⁵⁰ However, this glorification of war was countered by a recognition of the damage that could be done by war. Hitler from time to time lamented the loss of strong, courageous German youths - the cream of the nation. As he put it in the *Secret Book*, "the nature of war...leads to a racial selection within a people...a preferential destruction of its best elements."⁵¹ Also there was often a vicious condemnation of the Jews for "causing" the war. As Hitler said: "The nations are no longer willing to die on the battlefield so that this unstable international race may profiteer from a war or satisfy its Old Testament vengeance."⁵²

⁴⁹ *HTT*, p. 661

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 492

⁵¹ *HSB*, p. 8

⁵² *Speeches*, in *Reichstag*, 30.1.39, p. 741. As early as 1923, Rosenberg was making similar claims. "Behind the governments known as British, American, French or German", he claimed, "stands pan-Jewish high finance as the ruler...There will always be wars in world history. But there are wars in which peoples fight for *their own* right to exist, and those in which they shed their blood for a third party." Alfred Rosenberg, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and Jewish World Policy*, in Miller Lane and Rupp, *op.cit.*, p. 55-56

Nevertheless, war was said to be in the tradition of the German people. In Germany's glorious past, when tribes of vigorous, Aryan barbarians battled and conquered neighbouring tribes, achieved *Lebensraum* and enriched the genetic stock - the race was then at its healthiest. These barbarian, non-corrupt, Aryans were the basis upon which modern Germany was formed. Their love of war and battle made them strong, healthy and powerful, which was why similar qualities were to be admired and striven for during the Third Reich. Hitler was ever eager that war should be portrayed as a vital necessity, even before the actuality of war was upon him. This emphasis leads Bullock to conclude that "war, the belief in violence and the right of the stronger..." constituted the very essence of Nazism.⁵³ Hitler was certainly convinced that "to deserve its place in history, our people must be above all a people of warriors."⁵⁴

The undercurrent of this glorification of fighting and war was a will for violence.⁵⁵ The use of violence could enable the manipulation of the population and cause actions to be taken which would not otherwise be feasible. For the totalitarian leader, as Schapiro

⁵³ Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 357

⁵⁴ *HTT*, p. 435

⁵⁵ An order of Göring's to the Prussian police can give an example of this. In it, he says that "police officers who in the execution of this duty [i.e. to prevent communist acts of terror] use their firearms will be supported by me without regard to the effect of their shots; on the other hand, officers who fail from a false sense of consideration may expect disciplinary measures..." 17 February 1933, Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 169

explains, terror performs a “special function”.⁵⁶ This was certainly true for Hitler as a leader. As Bullock points out: “far from using violence in a furtive underhand way, Hitler gave it the widest possible publicity.”⁵⁷ Hitler was adept in the utilisation of terror. “Public rumour attributes to us a plan to exterminate the Jews”, he said at one point - “terror is a salutary thing.”⁵⁸

Although the use of force could be expedient, it was also enshrined within the ideology. Hitler “constantly exalted force over the power of ideas...”⁵⁹ He was quite candid about this. “Every philosophy of life”, he declared, “even if it is a thousand times correct and of the highest benefit to humanity, will remain without significance for the practical shaping of a people’s life, as long as its principles have not become the banner of fighting movement...”⁶⁰

There was no idea of morality separate from the employment of force - whoever was the strongest was also right. Even the youngest members of the population were to be indoctrinated with this idea. This can be seen by reference to a Youth Leadership Plan. Part of one “lesson of the day” consists of the following question and answer: “What is good? - To be brave is good! He who fights has right on his

⁵⁶ Schapiro, *op.cit.*, p. 29

⁵⁷ Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 72

⁵⁸ *HTT*, p. 87

⁵⁹ Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 804

⁶⁰ *MK*, p. 345

side; he who does not fight has lost all rights.”⁶¹ Within National Socialist ideology, moral behaviour could be reinterpreted as muscle power. An individual, a race, a nation could either be strong, victorious and dominant; or weak, defeated and subjugated. Abstract notions of justice did not enter into this equation. As Hitler tellingly put it, “whoever will not be a hammer in history, will be an anvil.”⁶² Again, violence could be used quite pragmatically, as an anecdote of Hitler’s from the *Table Talk* shows. Here he describes the early days of National Socialism and his utilisation of violence to manipulate the press. “I ordered our protective service to treat our opponents roughly”, he says, “and chuck them out of our meetings with so little mildness that the enemy press - which otherwise would have ignored our gatherings - used to make much of the blows and wounds they gave rise to, and thus called attention to them.”⁶³ This was a definite policy of Hitler’s that was also consistent with Nazi ideology.⁶⁴ Terror and violence were to be valued and revelled-in, not only because they were a means to power, but also because they could be the antidote to decadence.

⁶¹ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 358

⁶² *HSB*, p. 143

⁶³ *HTT*, p. 413

⁶⁴ Bramsted points out that Goebbels consistently made celebration of the early days of the struggle for the Nazi cause, and the heroism and martyrdom of those early fighters. Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 74. See also Griffin who says that, in fighting rival political ideologies and the decadence purportedly contained within them, “fascist activists see the recourse to organised violence as both necessary and healthy.” Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p. 44

This glorying in violence and battle was frequently compared with the decadent, over-intellectualised and unnatural ideology of liberalism. Nazi ideology was opposed to liberalism because the growth of liberalism was said to have, among other things, robbed human beings of their emotion and made society too rational. The Nazis were determined, as Glaser expresses it, to put “the objection of sensitivity to the coldness of reason...”⁶⁵ Reason was seen to be opposed to emotion, it had a sterility about it which tainted the life of a nation. Not only that but, being divorced from the essential spirit of a people, it was unreliable as a measure of what was in the best interests of a people. The Bavarian minister of education, Hans Schemm, decried it most eloquently: “After all”, he said, “what is reason? - Logic, calculation, speculation, banks, stock markets, interest, dividends, capitalism, careers, fraud, usury, Marxism, bolshevism, crooks and villains.”⁶⁶ According to the Nazis, a reliance on reason had led to many of the underlying problems of pre-Nazi Germany. The nation had become over-civilised, had become decadent. Action had given way to intellectualism, cosmopolitanism had flourished and had deprived the ordinary German of his links with the soil, with his race-culture, with his nation. Before the growth of liberalism, a people had its roots in the soil. It had awareness of its race-culture. It was dynamic, conscious of its

⁶⁵ Hermann Glaser, *The Cultural Roots of National Socialism* (London, 1978) p. 98

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 99

emotions and instincts, ready to fight and glory in battle. It was strong, virile and healthy. However, the growth of liberalism had heralded a baneful triumph of reason over instinct, intellectualism over action, corruption over health. Liberalism opposed the Nazi ideas of action, war and violence with due process, the rule of law and human rights. Nazi ideology rejected all this. Nazi ideology had replaced the rule of law by the rule of the leader; had discounted human rights in favour of power and strength; and had restricted liberty to being the liberty to obey. In Hitler's view, "a very large measure of individual liberty is not necessarily the sign of a high degree of civilisation. On the contrary, it is the limitation of this liberty, within a framework of an organisation which incorporates men of the same race, which is the real pointer to the degree of civilisation attained."⁶⁷ Speer echoed these sentiments. "Tight public order was in our blood", he said, "the liberalism of the Weimar Republic seemed to us by comparison lax, dubious, and in no way desirable."⁶⁸

Liberalism was said to be a system of money-power, of privileged birth, of intellectual sophistry, of cynical Jewish manipulation.⁶⁹ It was said that, although the liberal state publicly

⁶⁷ *HTT*, p. 423

⁶⁸ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich, Memoirs*, translated by R. & C. Winston (London, 1970) p. 33

⁶⁹ Glaser explains that "humanitarian, liberal, democratic or socialist arguments against discrimination of the Jewish minority were doubly distorted. On the one hand, they were considered

advocated consensus and equal and open participation, this was not the reality. Hitler forcefully put the Nazi view in his closing speech at the Nuremberg *Parteitag* in 1937. The state was not, he said, “the outcome of any general and voluntarily accepted social contract, but rather it has arisen through the natural rights given by capacity, by force, by strength of will, and the heroic cast of mind.”⁷⁰ The philosophy of liberalism was seen as a false philosophy. Not only that, but it was also a philosophy which was fundamentally at odds with Nazism. Liberalism posited the rule of law, as guaranteed by due process and civic equality. Nazism upheld the rule of the Führer. This was the split between Nazi intellectuals who lauded the ideas of force, action and will; and liberal intellectuals who were opposed to Nazism and who, in turn, were vilified by the Nazis. Nazi ideology traced much of the support of liberal values to intellectuals, and condemned liberal-democracy thorough its condemnation of them. Where intellectuals were said to critically differ from Nazis was in their reliance on reason. Nazis knew that the sword was always mightier than the pen and that action was a dynamic force. Abstract reflection, on the other hand only led to mental stagnation. The

as unnatural, as contrary to the essence of man as cerebral animal (a thesis which was ‘scientifically’ supported by social Darwinism); on the other hand they were considered as ‘outcroppings’ of Jewish ‘humanitarian propaganda’ designed to protect them from their impending elimination.” Glaser, *op.cit.*, p. 221. There was thus a tendency to associate liberalism with Jewishness and other aspects of society to which Nazis were opposed. Thus, in 1925, Franz Pfeffer von Salomon argued against Strasser’s “socialism”, condemning it as “the Jewish-liberal-democratic-Marxist-humanitarian mentality.” Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, *Barren Trees*, in *Fascism, an Oxford Reader*, edited by Roger Griffin (Oxford, 1995) p. 118

⁷⁰ *Speeches*, p. 696

reliance on instinct gave a useful denunciatory weapon against people trying to probe too deeply into Nazi theory. The important thing was to *feel* that something was right. A true German would be one with *Volk*⁷¹ consciousness - he would instinctively know what was right. Said Hitler: "The man of the people...sets the assurance of his instinct and the faith of his heart in place of the sophistry of our intellectuals."⁷² The intellectual generally did not have this capacity - being too inclined to lose himself in academic reflection.

An insidious danger of intellectualism was its ability to blot out instinct. Hitler particularly decried this because he, of course, glorified instinct.⁷³ Liberal intellectuals, on the other hand, were denounced for their elevation of reason over instinct. Not only this, but they were disconnected from the populace - expounding ideas that were all too often in direct opposition to the best interests of the nation. They were detached from instinct, from "reality" and were divorced from the people. The "intellectual classes," Hitler observed, "are so segregated and so ossified that they lack a living connection with the people below them."⁷⁴ In return, there was an initial tendency by intellectuals to deride Hitler and Nazism. This, of course, was bitterly resented by the Nazis. The practical thrust of

⁷¹ *Volk* can be loosely translated as "folk" - traditionally and culturally of the people with the addition of an element of blood-mysticism.

⁷² *HSB*, p. 42

⁷³ Glaser, *op.cit.*, p. 140

⁷⁴ *MK*, p. 392

Nazi hatred of intellectuals was partly because so many of them were opposed to Nazism. However, although intellectualism was widely criticised within Nazism, the number of Nazi intellectuals was not insubstantial.⁷⁵ Hitler, indeed, had to admit their essential role, both in society and in the Nazi movement. However, he was able to distinguish a specific kind of intellectual that was admirable. This was one who was said to be in touch with the people and working for the good of the nation. It was essential that the intellectual should combine with the peasant and the worker to give the greatest national benefit. As Hitler put it: "If a people wills to reconstruct its life, it must realise that the foundation of its strength lies in its peasantry, that the force which sustains the building is the working man. And to that must be added the mind - the intellectual leadership - and that must bind together the other two, so that there may arise the trinity of peasant, working-man, and worker with the brain."⁷⁶

A speech in 1934 fully elucidates the Nazi position on the differences between intellectuals. "Just as there can be no permanent dictatorship of the proletariat over the intelligentsia", said Hitler,

⁷⁵ Grunberger, for example, believes that "the abject obeisance made by many intellectuals to Hitler can be explained only in terms of the capitulation of bankrupt rationalists before the principle of irrationality incarnate." Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (London, 1971) p. 87. However, it will be argued here later that Hitler's emphasis on irrationality was far from being as straight-forward as it might seem.

⁷⁶ *Speeches*), 11 February 1933, at Kassel, p. 238

so there can be no dictatorship of a conceited and perverted upper class of intellectuals, which has lost touch with the people, over whole masses of artisans who at last have ceased to tolerate it. Real intellect can never be conceited; it is only superficial half-knowledge which everywhere leads to presumption and arrogance...We National Socialists know very well that intellect gives us our marching orders for this life. But we know, too, that intellect must ever be renewed and supplemented from those elements of a people's life which are in closest touch with the soil. A nation consisting solely of professors, officials, scholars, and so forth cannot maintain itself, precisely because in that case more and more its natural strength of decision, its force of will and of heart, tends gradually to be extinguished. Only if wisdom is united with the primitive force of self-preservation can a people in the long run successfully survive in its struggle for life.⁷⁷

Unsurprisingly, given the Nazi capacity to link all enemies together, the Jew was usually identified with the “wrong” type of intellectual.

Indeed, says Glaser, to Hitler, “intellect was a Jewish invention.”⁷⁸

The Jew was the enemy intellectual. This sort of categorising allowed Hitler an easy defence of the Nuremberg laws, saying that they were needed because the Jews had “flooded the intellectual professions, such as, for example, jurisprudence and medicine. The influence of this intellectual Jewish class in Germany had everywhere a disintegrating effect.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Speeches*), *ibid.*, 30.9.34, on the Buckenberg annual harvest celebration, p. 903-904

⁷⁸ Glaser, *op.cit.*, p. 228

⁷⁹ *Speeches*), p. 733

This “disintegration” was said to be worsened by liberal-democracy. It was claimed that the myriad of groups and interests in society that were produced by liberalism and democracy caused conflict, competition and lack of unity. Not only this, but liberalism explicitly defended this sort of disharmony, which was clear evidence of its subversive and destructive tendencies. To counter this, it was essential to achieve a united nation. This pursuit of unity was another of Nazi ideology’s important themes. It was an essential part of the ideology that the establishment of social unity would be of positive benefit to the nation. At the *Parteitag* in Nuremberg in September 1933, Hitler declared that “one will must dominate us, we must form a single unity; one discipline must weld us together, one obedience, one subordination, must fill us all, for above us stands the nation.”⁸⁰ The quest for unity would avoid the nation being subject to destructive or subversive internal conflict.⁸¹ Unity, lack of differentiation, lack of individualism, were strongly praised. Differences would only bring discord which, at all costs, had to be avoided. This theme of unity ensured that, within Nazism, all diversity and opposition could be criticised and condemned. Anything that was not in harmony with national “unity” could be

⁸⁰ *Speeches*), p. 538

⁸¹ Weindling points out the role that the health professionals had in this drive towards unity. “Health”, he explains, “was not only an ideology of national integration at a time of rapid social change, but it also could ensure national unity through a uniform life style in everyday life.” P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 1

attacked as an enemy of the nation. And, because National Socialism identified itself as being the “party of unity”, then anything that was not in accordance with National Socialism could be attacked as an enemy.⁸²

The depiction of national unity as an ultimate “good”, meant that anything more heterogeneous could be portrayed as a definite evil deserving of attack. Of course, not all Germans by any means were convinced by National Socialism. There was no room, however, either in Nazi ideology or in the Nazi state, for dissent or even critical enquiry, so it was clear that the “unconvinced” would have to be compelled to conform. Hitler was adamant that the National Socialist movement would “force the laws of life it represents on the German people despite all resistance.” There was a constant drive towards the achievement of unity. Even at youth camp, one of the mottoes of the day was: “anything that undermines our unity must go on the pyre!”⁸³ The idealisation of unity meant that social-democracy could be criticised for allowing the existence of political, cultural and racial diversity. Under liberal-democracy, declared Hitler, “the interests of the nation receded more and more into the background in comparison to the interests of definite and special groups.”⁸⁴ These

⁸² *HSB*, p. 36

⁸³ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.* (1937 Handbook of the Office of Culture of the Reich youth leadership) p. 359

⁸⁴ *HSB*, p. 56

groups had seriously interfered with the unity of the nation. Thus, anyone, or any group, that could be said to adhere to liberal-democracy could also be assailed.

Additionally, democracy was accused of being the precursor of Marxism. As Hitler said: "The Western democracy of today is the forerunner of Marxism which without it would not be thinkable. It provides this world plague with the culture in which its germs can spread."⁸⁵ Also, in a *Reichstag* speech, Hitler asserted that "the splitting up of the nation into groups with irreconcilable views, systematically brought about by the false doctrine of Marxism, means the destruction of the basis of a possible communal life. The disintegration attacks all the foundations of social order. Starting from the liberalism of the last century, this development is bound to end in communistic chaos..."⁸⁶ A united nation would be an antidote to these subversive intrusions of Marxist doctrine. To maintain this unity, it was vital that the state was strong. The achievement and maintenance of this strength would justify almost any course of state action in the name of unity. All other interests - whether group or individual - should be relegated to a lower importance. Individuality and individual rights were being squeezed out of existence for the

⁸⁵ *MK*, p. 72

⁸⁶ *Speeches*, March 1933, p. 264

ordinary person. Hitler made this unflinchingly clear: “The interests of the State”, he declared, “have precedence over private interests.”⁸⁷

The emphasis on unity led inevitably to an unqualified offensive against liberalism and democracy. This drive towards unity was obvious in the political sphere. Shortly after attaining power a law was passed by the Nazis, making any other political party than the NSDAP illegal, with the justification that the interests of the nation far surpassed the interests of groups.⁸⁸ Following close on this were moves to prevent the formation of new groups of associations, giving the reason that they only served to perpetuate the old division of forces.⁸⁹ Unity required one nation, one people, one *Volk*, one race, but more than this it demanded only one party, one Führer, one way of life and one way of thinking. To bring about this all-encompassing unity, laws were passed which both prohibited independent groups and also forced Nazi membership of other groups - the Hitler Youth being the most obvious example. In 1936, a proclamation was issued which stated that “the future of the German people depends on its youth. The entire German youth must therefore be prepared for its future duties. The Government of the Reich has accordingly approved the following Law, which is hereby published: The entire

⁸⁷ *TT*, p. 102

⁸⁸ *HSB*, p. 56

⁸⁹ *Speeches*, p. 280

German youth within the territory of the Reich is united in the Hitler-Youth.”⁹⁰ The Nazis wanted to ensure their version of national unity and passed their laws accordingly. The Nazi Party Programme made this quite explicit, as Point 25 shows: “For modern society, a colossus with feet of clay”, it declares, “we shall create an unprecedented centralisation, which will unite all powers in the hands of Government.”⁹¹ This “unprecedented centralisation” meant that all organisations, and then individuals, eventually found themselves being enmeshed within the Nazi system. It was Hitler’s open intention to “create a hierarchical constitution, which will mechanically govern all movements of individuals.”⁹² “Gradually”, explains Toland, “every citizen found himself involved with the regime.”⁹³ All dissent was to be obliterated. Hitler said: “I see no class and no social estate before me, but that community of people who are linked by blood, united by a language, and subject to the same general fate.”⁹⁴ He proclaimed it to be the “mission of the National Socialist movement” that class conflict brought about by Marxism - which set worker against employer - must be ended, and that “a new nation must arise...which overcomes even the worst evils

⁹⁰ *Speeches*, p. 535

⁹¹ Konrad Heiden, *Der Führer, Hitler's Rise to Power* (first published, 1944) translated by Ralph Mannheim (London, 1967) p. 82

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 82

⁹³ Toland, *op.cit.*, p. 309

⁹⁴ *HSB, ibid.*, p. 44

of the present, the cleavage between the classes, for which the bourgeoisie and Marxism are equally guilty.”⁹⁵

Declarations such as this were part of Hitler’s persuasive power. Toland explains that “he did not pit class against class. He could embrace them all.”⁹⁶ In the new, National Socialist Germany there would be no such schisms, but only natural divisions such as that between leaders and led, men of genius and the common horde, the better and the lesser. Goebbels, in his novel, *Michael: a German fate*, looked forward to “a newly formed aristocracy of achievement.”⁹⁷ People would achieve their position in society through merit and not through birth. Goebbels said that “the new aristocracy is being created on the basis of new law. Tradition is being replaced by ability. The best one! This title is not inherited, it has to be earned.”⁹⁸ The classes based on birth and inherited wealth would, therefore, be surmounted by a natural hierarchy based on merit in the new Germany of National Socialism. Hitler strongly emphasised this, saying that it was “an absolutely fundamental principal of National Socialism that office in neither Gau, state nor party is hereditary.”⁹⁹ He maintained, indeed, that, under National Socialism, this situation

⁹⁵ *HSB*, p. 79

⁹⁶ Toland, *op.cit.*, p. 242

⁹⁷ J. Goebbels, *Michael: a German fate*, quoted in *Nazi Culture, Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (hereafter, *Culture*), edited by George L. Mosse (London, 1966) p. 109

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 105

⁹⁹ *TT*, p. 535

had been achieved. In his closing speech at the Nuremberg *Parteitag*, he said that, in Germany, “owing without question to the work of National Socialism, no regard is paid to person or descent and much less to property, and those who are most fitted for leadership are sought out and trained for their task.”¹⁰⁰

Hitler’s experience at the Front during W.W.I made significant alterations to his perceptions of society. Up until the war, as Toland explains, “high state offices, diplomatic posts, army commissions were all held by men of ancient lineage, aristocrats of superior breeding and education. The war had changed all that. In the trenches persons of high and low births fought side by side; the depleted ranks of noble officers were gradually filled with commoners.”¹⁰¹ *Fronterlebnis*, as this experience was referred to, was seen as having broken down social barriers and pointed towards a possible society where social divisions became much less significant. The idea of *Fronterlebnis* was an inspiration to Hitler. He said it was a time “whose heroism represented the most overpowering proof of the force of idealistic motives. For what made men die then was not concern for their daily bread, but love of the Fatherland, faith in its greatness, a general feeling for the honour of the nation.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Speeches*, 1937, p. 700

¹⁰¹ Toland, *op.cit.*, p. xviii

¹⁰² *MK*, p. 397

Therefore, to have a society without social barriers at home, it was desirable that home-society should share some of the conditions of *Fronterlebnis*. Nazis sought to enact a “transformation of the experiences of the first world war into a rebirth of the German people...”¹⁰³ A new, dynamic and unified Germany could be built on the war experience.

This unified Germany would also be a Germany unified in race. The theme of unity runs in parallel with the racial theme and has many links with it. Within Nazism, the cardinal unity is racial unity and racial unity makes necessary the expulsion or destruction of non-Aryan racial elements. Racial unity, or purity, is fundamental to the strength of the nation. Racial diversity is to be feared and condemned as dangerous to its health. Nazis proclaimed that there were too many races within German territory, and interbreeding was too common.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, racial diversity was declared to be a far more intrinsic threat to the unity of the nation than the existence of competing interest groups, for it was a threat to the race itself. The nation had to be protected from dissolution. For that to be achieved, it was essential that the nation became united into a *völkisch*

¹⁰³ Broszat, *op.cit.*, p. 39

¹⁰⁴ R.W. Darré praised the old German marriage laws as having been a barrier against this sort of racial interbreeding. This law, he declared, was “the wall which protected valuable German humanity, which kept subhumans outside the German social order and limited very considerably their opportunities to reproduce themselves, even sometimes making it impossible.” R.W. Darré, “Marriage Laws and the Principles of Breeding”, in Miller Lane and Rupp, *op.cit.*, p. 114

community, where the race, the blood, the soil and the essential spirit of the people were welded together into an impenetrable unity.¹⁰⁵ This was one of Hitler's most frequently recurring themes. Many of the divisions in society were blamed on the communists and the capitalists. The racial theme enabled both the anti-communistic and the anti-capitalistic strands of Nazi ideology to be emphasised because it linked both of these strands with anti-Semitism. Capitalism, on the one hand, was condemned as a mechanism of Jewish exploitation of the people. The Jew was depicted as being completely venal and money-grubbing - permitting nothing above his love of wealth, having no other principles. Thus Hitler described the Jews as being "infected through and through with capitalism and acting in its spirit..."¹⁰⁶ It was claimed that nothing mattered to the Jew except money and self-seeking. This meant that he would have no hesitation in undermining the nation in which he was present in order to gain more wealth. The capitalist Jew had his finger in many pies - from international finance capital to control of the press. Thus, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was accused of being no more than a tool of an international Jewish conspiracy.¹⁰⁷ The Jew was portrayed as holding the country in thrall. Through his control of capital, through his control of the press, he would be able to dominate and destroy the

¹⁰⁵ According to Rosenberg, "Soul means race viewed from within. And, vice versa, race is the externalisation of soul." Rosenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ *Speeches*, Nuremberg *Parteitag* in September 1935, p. 577

¹⁰⁷ Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 125

people. To the *Völkischer Beobachter*¹⁰⁸, the Jew had established a “dictatorship of terror and money of over the leaderless masses.”¹⁰⁹

However, if the Jew was proclaimed to be the “inventor of capitalism”¹¹⁰, he was also portrayed as a Bolshevik subversive. Within Nazi ideology, as Bullock points out, “the Jew is everywhere, responsible for everything...”¹¹¹ Hitler continually emphasised this linking of Jewish capitalist and Jewish communist. In the *Secret Book*, he wrote that “present-day Bolshevik Russia” was “in reality Jewish-capitalistic.”¹¹² The evil-doing of the Jew was underlined by his linkage with communism. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler discoursed quite freely on “the Jewish doctrine of Marxism...”¹¹³ He also said that Marxism had a goal and a “constructive activity” which was “to erect a despotism of international world Jewish finance...”¹¹⁴ Again, the image of the Jew as capitalist and the image of the Jew as communist were neatly linked. The Soviet Revolution was characterised as a Jewish revolution - a step towards both Jewish domination of the world and also of Jewish destruction of the world. Hitler described Marx as “only the one among millions who, with the sure eye of the prophet, recognised in the morass of a slowly decomposing world the

¹⁰⁸ The paper of the National Socialist Party

¹⁰⁹ Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 382

¹¹⁰ *TT*, p. 374

¹¹¹ Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 40

¹¹² *HSB*, p. 133

¹¹³ *MK*, p. 60

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 412

most essential poisons, extracted them, and, like a wizard, prepared them into a concentrated solution for the swifter annihilation of the independent existence of free nations on the earth. And all this in the service of his race.”¹¹⁵ Communist leaders within Germany were denounced as being Jews. Jews were said to have firstly devised the hideous doctrine of communism, and now to be embarking upon carrying out a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, they posed an external threat through their links with the Soviet Union; and, on the other hand, they posed an internal threat through communist subversion within Germany.

Communism, even apart from its Jewish dimension, was condemned as a serious threat. As an ideology, it could not be compatible with Nazism in any way. For example, its ideological commitment to internationalism was, by definition, antagonistic to National Socialist ideology. The Nazis were opposed to the very idea of internationalism¹¹⁶, both because of the importance of the nation to them, and also because they did not believe that the calls for internationalism were genuine anyway. Instead they claimed that the idea of internationalism was simply an excuse for world domination by the Soviet Union and the Jews. Hitler, in the *Sportpalast* in Berlin

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 347

¹¹⁶ In *National Socialism or Bolshevism*, Goebbels addresses an imaginary communist thus: “The more corrupt a system, the more international its relations. Your and our most bitter enemy, democracy, money, is international.” Miller Lane and Rupp, *op.cit.*, p. 78

in march 1933, excoriated internationalist-pacifism as a Marxist idea and proclaimed the Red Army to be “the symbol of this Marxist-pacifist world-idea.”¹¹⁷ Not only this, but the basic equality-of-man idea of communism was alien to Nazi ideology. Nazi racism negated the idea of human equality - whether national or international. Even within a nation of the Aryan race, where Aryan people were, in race terms at least, on an equal footing - there was still no overall human equality. Some people were stronger than others, some more brave, some more instinctively intelligent, some more naturally leaders than others.¹¹⁸ Equality did not exist and rather than communism being a system of equality it was, according to Goebbels, nothing more than “the dictatorship of inferiors.”¹¹⁹ Hitler agreed, declaring that “Marxism presents itself as the manifestation of the Jew’s attempt to exclude the pre-eminence of personality in all fields of human life and replace it by the numbers of the mass.”¹²⁰ Marxism’s major threat, however, was in the menacing pervasiveness and artifice of its ideology and in its intention to instigate the rule of the Jew. As Hitler put it: “Marxism itself systematically plans to hand the world over to the Jews.”¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Speeches*, p. 258

¹¹⁸ Carl Schmitt, a leading professor of international and public law, praised the acceptance of inequality in National Socialism. In 1935, he wrote that National Socialism “has the courage to treat unequally what is unequal and enforce necessary differentiations...without being impeded by the erroneous concepts of equality imposed by a liberal democratic scheme of things.” Carl Schmitt, “The Legal Basis of the Total State”, in *Fascism, an Oxford Reader, op.cit.*, p. 138

¹¹⁹ Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 381

¹²⁰ *MK*, p. 407

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 347

The racial theme meant, therefore, that the Jew could be condemned both as a capitalist and a communist, but also, and fundamentally, simply because he was a Jew. Gilbert explains that, on 7 April 1933, "the concept of a racial difference between German Jews and all other Germans was given legal status when the German government ordered the dismissal - called in the Order 'retirement' - of all civil servants 'who are not of Aryan descent'."¹²² In addition, entrance to university became dependant on having an acceptable "proof of ancestry" form.¹²³ The Jews were condemned as being of a different race - an allegedly parasitic, corrupting and subversive one. Nazi racism both permitted and engendered the use of the Jew as an all-enveloping symbol of enmity. There was a much expressed view that the Jew neither deserved nor had a right to be prosperous, because his prosperity was depicted as being due to his parasitism upon the German people. Thus, he would unconcernedly sacrifice the interests of Germany and the German people to feather his nest. Because of this, his very existence was innately destructive. Hitler emphasised these sentiments in the *Secret Book*. There he says that the Jew is "a parasite of nations and his victory signifies his own end as much as the death of his victim."¹²⁴

¹²² Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust, The Jewish Tragedy* (London, 1986) p. 36

¹²³ *Culture*, p. 310

¹²⁴ *HSB*, p. 213. And a proclamation of Hitler's characteristically described the Jews as "the parasitic race." *Speeches*, p. 685

This parasitism was described, on the one hand, as a form of material exploitation. It contained the idea of the Jew skimming off the wealth of the nation - its riches, its luxury goods, even its food and drink. This could be described as a material parasitism. As Hitler said in a speech in the *Reichstag*: "What they [i.e. the Jews] possess today, they have to by far the largest extent gained at the cost of the less astute German nation by the most reprehensible manipulations."¹²⁵ On the other hand, it was described in a more abstract, even more mystical way. This was that the Jew sucked up the achievements of a people, their life force, their spirit, their vitality. The Jew had none of these attributes himself, so could only experience them vicariously - through a "host" or, in this case, a "host-nation". Himmler declared that the Jew was "a parasite which, like the parasites of the animals and plant world, lives from the strengths and productive labour of host peoples."¹²⁶ This representation of the Jew as parasite led Hitler to make the threatening forecast that "any and every nation which fails to exterminate the Jews in its midst will sooner or later finish by being itself devoured by them."¹²⁷ The *Völkischer Beobachter* of 12 September 1938, typically elaborated upon this. In its pages, the Jew was, "the world's enemy, the destroyer of cultures, the parasite of the

¹²⁵ *Speeches*, 30.1.39, p. 738

¹²⁶ Robert A. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (hereafter, *NS+RN*), (London, 1986) p. 123

¹²⁷ *TT*, p. 678

peoples, the son of chaos, the incarnation of evil, the stew of corruption the shapeless demon who brought about the decay of mankind."¹²⁸

The racial theme throws into contrast supposed positive and negative racial forces. Thus Aryan-Nordic and *völkisch* elements linking with blood, nation, *Geist*¹²⁹, instinct and nature are depicted as positive and valuable, and to be maintained. These have to be protected against negative racial forces or anti-race elements such as communists, liberals, Jews and other inferior races. The racial theme also allows a celebration of the past. Germany's tribal history is eulogised and described as a time when a race of healthy, Aryan, warrior-tribes bore the seeds of a great German *Kultur*. This, in turn, permits the development of the idea of a return to this racial "health" - a new order of racial purity.¹³⁰ There were said to be many Germans of pure Aryan race, as could be seen from certain physical, or racial, characteristics. The ideal Aryan had blond hair and blue eyes, nobility of features and "heroic" physical proportions. In the *Table Talk*, Hitler asserted that "the number of Germanics has considerably increased in the last two thousand years, and it's undeniable that the race is getting better looking."¹³¹ This was seen as a good indicator

¹²⁸ Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 382

¹²⁹ *Geist* - a combination of soul, territorial spirit and race-based intellect.

¹³⁰ For example, in Merkl's study, one person was quoted as saying that she had joined the Nazi party to fight "for the genuine, pure, racial soul ." Peter H. Merkl, *Political Violence Under the Swastika, 581 Early Nazis* (New Jersey, 1975) p. 455

¹³¹ *TT*, p. 116

that the race was maintaining its “health”. The Aryan was seen as the originator of culture and the instigator of all human progress. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declares that “human culture is inseparably bound up with the presence of the Aryan.”¹³² This meant that, the more pure-blooded Aryans there were, the more civilised would be the world.¹³³ The Aryan was undeniably superior to other races and it was the job of National Socialism to instil this understanding into its people. Hitler said that the young National Socialist’s “*whole education and training must be so ordered as to give him the conviction that he is absolutely superior to others.*” [Original emphasis]¹³⁴ “*It must be*”, he proclaimed, “*a greater honour to be a street-cleaner and citizen of this Reich than a king in a foreign state.*” [Original emphasis]¹³⁵

The emphasis on purity made it vital to cast out “foreign elements” because, by way of miscegenation, they polluted and undermined the Aryan race. The particular foreign elements being thought of were, of course, almost entirely, Jews. It can be debated whether the notion of racial purity would have become so concrete had it not been for the existence of the Jew as racial scapegoat. Hostility to the Jew was certainly in existence before the idea of racial

¹³² *MK*, p. 348

¹³³ It was essential, therefore, to maintain the purity of the blood. Darré, in 1930, said that “every available means should be used to achieve the goal that the creative blood in the body of our people, the blood of human beings of the Nordic Race, should be preserved and increased because on this depends the preservation and development of our Germanness.” R. Walther Darré, “Breeding a New Nobility”, in *Fascism, an Oxford Reader, op.cit.*, p. 127

¹³⁴ *MK*, p. 374

¹³⁵ *MK*, p. 401

purity became so established.¹³⁶ It is hard to say, though, whether anti-Semitism gave the impetus to the doctrine of racial purity in Germany, or whether the doctrine of racial purity eagerly adopted the symbol of the hated Jew to entrench itself. One thing is clear though, the Nazis put these elements together in a way that had never happened before. The Jews came to be portrayed as sub-human polluters of “clean” races. Hitler was, of course, utterly fanatical about the recognition of Jewish blood. “All half-caste families”, he declared at one point, “even if they have but a minute quantity of Jewish blood in their veins - produce regularly, generation by generation, at least one pure Jew.”¹³⁷ The Jews were said to have infiltrated the Aryan nation in order to destroy it. Hence they would indulge in activities such as making propaganda denying the validity of the Nazi “race doctrine” and encouraging people in race-destroying measures such as abortion, birth control and racial intermarriage. This made them a deadly enemy. “Any and every nation”, prophesied Hitler, “which fails to exterminate the Jews in its midst will sooner or later finish by being itself devoured by them.”¹³⁸ It was in the Jew’s interest to try to undermine the purity of the Aryan race to weaken it and gain control over it.

¹³⁶ Pauley, for example, says that “although religious anti-Judaism in Austria dates back to the Middle Ages, modern racial anti-Semitism has its Austrian origins in the emancipation of the Jews, completed in 1867, and the Industrial Revolution, which followed.” Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis, A History of Austrian National Socialism* (London, 1981) p. 16

¹³⁷ *TT*, p. 545

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 678

However, the Jew would be prevented from winning this battle, because the Nazis would see to it that the racial purity of the Aryan race would be maintained at high levels. It was believed that, through a programme of racial breeding (eugenics), complete racial purity would eventually be achieved.¹³⁹ Consequently, it was the duty of the nation and the party “to methodically pursue a racial policy.”¹⁴⁰ What this entailed, in practice, was the promotion of high levels of “breeding” by *healthy* Germanics (particularly those with established Aryan pedigrees) and an attempt at the close control of the procreation of others.¹⁴¹ With the emphasis on high Aryan breeding levels went extreme disapproval of the use of contraception and abortion by Germanics. Hitler was very clear on this. In *Mein Kampf*, he declares that “the folkish state...must see to it that only the healthy beget children...and conversely it must be considered

¹³⁹ This was seen as being essential both to combat the dangers of racial degeneration, and also to achieve racial health. In 1933, Gottfried Benn was in no doubt that “a new man will once again emerge in Europe, half from mutation and half from breeding...In the last decade [there has been] a growing awareness of biological dangers, one which bears out the precept that a people which becomes conscious of the dangers facing it produces genius.” Gottfried Benn, “The New Breed of German”, in *Fascism, an Oxford Reader, op.cit.*, p. 136

¹⁴⁰ *TT*, p. 25. Thus did the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour” come into being. This law stated that “marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden...” And also that “sexual relations outside marriage between Jews and nationals of German or kindred blood are forbidden.” 15 September 1935, Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 463

¹⁴¹ In 1941, Gross commented on the changes made by Nazis with regard to procreation. “There is the deepest imaginable gulf in outlook on life dividing us from the mentality which accorded every living creature as one of their supposed ‘human rights’ the right to procreation, even where the unfortunate results of this attitude could only live at the cost of their own distress and as a burden to, or even to the detriment of, society as a whole...For now our greater sense of responsibility means that we recognise it as a duty to the community to take decisions in this area too, and make procreation impossible in cases where it would only mean suffering, misery, and damage.” Walter Gross, “Improving the Stock”, in Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 157

reprehensible: to withhold healthy children from the nation. Here the state must act as a guardian of a millennial future in the face of which the wishes and the selfishness of the individual; must appear as nothing and submit.”¹⁴² Hitler appeared shocked to report that “a single year of birth control in Europe kills more people than all those who fell in battle, from the time of the French Revolution up to our day, in all the wars of Europe, including the World War.”¹⁴³ Therefore, in accordance with their role as “the guardian of a millennial future”, the Nazis set in motion the implementation of their racial policies. “The preservation of our racial purity”, said Hitler, “can be assured only by an awareness of the racial issues involved. Our laws, therefore, must be framed with the sole object of protecting our people not only against Jewish, but also against any and every racial infection.”¹⁴⁴ This “protection” took many forms. For example, members of the SS (who were seen as a racial elite) could only marry racially acceptable females¹⁴⁵ and it was hoped that their example would be followed by the rest of the population. “Where marriage is

¹⁴² *MK*, p. 367

¹⁴³ *HSB*, p. 8

¹⁴⁴ *TT*, p. 563

¹⁴⁵ Himmler explained that “the SS is a band of definitely Nordic German men selected according to certain principles...In accordance with the National Socialist ideology and with the realisation that the future of our nation rests on the preservation of the race through selection and on the inheritance of good blood, I hereby institute from 1 January 1932 the ‘Marriage Certificate’ for all unmarried members of the SS...The aim is to create a hereditary healthy clan of a definitely Nordic German type...” Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 281. Also see Mosse (*Culture*), p. 304

concerned”, declared Hitler, “it is...essential that both parties should be absolutely healthy and racially beyond reproach.”¹⁴⁶

However, radical “cleansing” was not seen as being possible through programmes of breeding alone. Alien races and inferior racial elements were already in existence within the body of the nation. So that the nation and the Aryan race should survive, it was necessary, as Hitler said in a speech to the doctors’ union, that there should be “a vigorous repression of elements of alien race...”¹⁴⁷ In addition, to achieve full racial health there had to be a rooting out of inferior elements within the Aryan race. To this end it was necessary to cast aside the conventional humanitarian mores of the day. The survival of the individual - especially an inferior specimen - was not important, the survival and improvement of the race was. As an aid to this improvement, steps were taken to prevent certain groups of people having children. At “a cabinet meeting in July 1933...it was decided to pass a law permitting the compulsory sterilisation of people suffering from a number of allegedly ‘hereditary’ illnesses. The latter included such elastic conditions as ‘feeble-mindedness’ or ‘chronic alcoholism’.”¹⁴⁸ Sterilisation gave way to “euthanasia”- a

¹⁴⁶ *TT*, April 1942, p. 440

¹⁴⁷ *Speeches*, April 1933, p. 729

¹⁴⁸ Michael Burleigh, “Euthanasia and the Third Reich”, *History Today*, volume 40, February 1990, p. 11. Arendt points out that the decree authorising murders of so-called “race-improving” nature referred “not merely to the insane...but to all those who were; ‘incurably sick’.” Arendt, *op.cit.*, p. 348

euphemism for murder. Even weak, ill or handicapped babies were considered to be prime candidates for “euthanasia”. Hitler unashamedly declared that it was essential to “give the number of births free rein but cut down on the number of those remaining alive.”¹⁴⁹

That these sort of actions were condoned was in part due to the linking of a biological concept of the race to the idea of the nation. The nation became something far more than simply a political or social entity. It was a unity of race, a territoriality of common blood, imbued with a *völkisch* spirit. As Goebbels put it: “the German soul is our soul, because each of us is a piece of Germany’s soul.”¹⁵⁰ The nation was depicted as a living, unified body - an organic entity. An entity which was personified by the Führer. He was a man of the people, his blood and their blood were one, and like all true Germans, they were of the Aryan race. This unity could enable the birth of the Third Reich because, as Hitler put it: “One blood demands one Reich.”¹⁵¹ This organic symbolism meant that anything that was at odds with the main tenets of Nazi ideology could be portrayed as diseasing the nation. In other words, any social element to which the Nazis were opposed could be depicted as being at “a level of nature so

¹⁴⁹ *HSB*, p. 17

¹⁵⁰ Goebbels, *op.cit.*, quoted in (*Culture*), p. 104

¹⁵¹ *MK*, p. 3

low as to be comparable with disease-bearing germs.”¹⁵² Hitler used this type of representation frequently, for example, when speaking of the role of the trade unions in “eliminating social cankers, attacking intellectual as well as physical infections, and thus helping to contribute to the general health of the body politic.”¹⁵³ Jews, inevitably, were accused of being the main sources of these health-threatening situations.¹⁵⁴ By portraying the nation as a living body, and all perceived enemies in “disease” terms, it was possible to use the most horrifying imagery about these enemies. The Jew becomes, as Bullock tells us, no longer a human, but rather “a mythical being, a grimacing devil invested with infernal powers, the incarnation of evil...”¹⁵⁵

This sort of imagery had the dual effect of “de-humanising” any enemies of Nazism and whipping up a sense of fear about the “health” of the nation.¹⁵⁶ This meant, in turn, that it was possible to justify inhuman action against these enemies, by portraying their destruction as a national “cure”. Again, these tactics were used with

¹⁵² Pois, *NS+RN*, p. 123

¹⁵³ *MK*, p. 43

¹⁵⁴ Hitler went so far as to declare that, regarding Jews, “as a people it has special intrinsic characteristics which separate it from all other peoples living on the globe.” *HSB*, p. 212

¹⁵⁵ Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 40

¹⁵⁶ Nolte says that what the political race doctrine developed “more than anything else was the element of arbitrariness, an integral part of itself; fear replaced anxiety as a dominant emotion; a narrow conception of nature was countered with that of antinature which - most fateful step of all - was identified with a particular human group.” Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism, Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, translated by Leila Vennewitz (New York, 1969) p. 364

most effect against the Jews. The Jews were referred to in terms such as “plague”, “bacteria”, “virus”. In a letter of 1919 Hitler refers to Jews as causing a “racial tuberculosis of the nation.”¹⁵⁷ It was clear that their destruction would not be seen as an evil. Hitler claimed, indeed, that “we shall regain our health only by eliminating the Jew.”¹⁵⁸ Himmler’s speech to a group of SS leaders at Posen on 6 October 1943, is a chilling indication of the way in which the ideology was made solid reality. “I am referring to the clearing out of the Jews”, he said, “the extermination of the Jewish race...we have exterminated a bacterium because we do not want in the end to be infected by the bacterium and die of it.”¹⁵⁹

That an ideology such as this was believed in and followed by so many, may seem extraordinary. However, it must be remembered that there were particular circumstances that favoured its establishment. Nazi ideology thrived in the adverse economic conditions of the post-war period.¹⁶⁰ The Nazis were not alone in resenting the defeat of World War I and the strictures of the Treaty of Versailles which followed from it. This resentment was felt and compounded by numbers of recently demobilised soldiers, trying to get back into society. Griffin explains that, in Germany and Austria,

¹⁵⁷ *Hitler’s Letters and Notes*, Werner Maser, translated by Arnold Pomerans (London, 1974) p. 215

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, in 1942, p. 332

¹⁵⁹ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 492-493

¹⁶⁰ Griffin points out the “impotence” of fascism as a revolutionary force “except in the most exceptional of circumstances...” Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 52

“both of which faced the immediate problem of reintegrating millions of demobilised soldiers, not to mention overcoming the deep psychological trauma of national humiliation, conditions were rife for the diffusion of a sense of revanchist nationalism and for the emergence of radical forms of anti-communism and anti-liberalism.”¹⁶¹

In addition, unemployment, lack of housing and inflation guaranteed that there was a general discontent within society; a discontent that could allow an ideology of opposition such as Nazism to prosper. Nazi ideology was opposed to liberal society and the democratic parliamentary system which followed from it, and this opposition was shared by many within society. It was opposed to both capitalism and communism and, again, this opposition was shared by many. In addition, it was opposed to heterogeneity in any form, and even this could be acceptable. Nazis traced everything to which they were opposed to the Jew and, to this extent, anti-Semitism was the driving force of Nazism. It rejected systems of thought founded on reason and instead, celebrated the nation, elitism, authoritarian leadership, unity, racial purity, instinct, youth and action. It sought to achieve its aims by manipulation, propaganda and violence. Blood consciousness and self-sacrifice in the interests of the nation or the race were lauded. The Nazis held that power was the only genuine arbiter of justice. Any means of safeguarding the *Volk* could be

¹⁶¹ Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 215

warranted. Nazism impelled social, political and racial change. Its ultimate governing motivation was the drive towards a new order; a new order of National Socialism, German world supremacy and racial purity. This was the mission of the Nazis. The idea of a new order was the point to which all the elements in the ideology were directed. In pursuit of this goal, democracy, human equality, freedom of expression and intellectual credibility were supplanted by absolute rule, a morality put to the sword, a striving for “organic” unity and a race doctrine founded on destruction.

In conclusion, it is clear that Nazism did not consist merely of ideas thrown together randomly, but was, in fact, an ideology with a systematic structure. Nazism was not an aberrant eruption of irrational nonsense, but rather a manifestation of ideas and patterns of thought that can be placed in the context of the intellectual history of Europe. In the next chapter the ideology will be further examined with reference to the symbolism and methods used by the Nazis in pursuance of their goals.

Chapter Three

The Symbolism of Nazi Ideology

mobilisation of the population

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This chapter will focus on the symbolism of Nazi ideology and the relationship of this symbolism to Nazi ideology as a whole, and to the way in which Nazi ideology interacted with the world at large. In the context of this analysis, Raymond Firth's thoughts on symbolisation are particularly useful. He explains that "symbolisation is a universal human process...Pervasive in communications, grounded in the very use of language, symbolisation is part of the living stuff of social relationships...In *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle held that in a symbol there is both concealment and revelation...The essence of symbolism lies in the recognition of one thing as standing for (representing) another, the relation between them normally being that of concrete to abstract,

particular to general. The relation is such that the symbol by itself appears capable of generating and receiving effects otherwise reserved for the object to which it refers - and such effects are often of high emotional charge.”¹ The use of symbols has been focused on in this way, because an analysis of the Nazi utilisation of symbols is a particularly effective method of illustrating both the structure of Nazi ideology and also the manner in which it engaged its audience. It is true that, without the particular economic and social conditions that prevailed during the establishment of Nazism, neither the symbols nor the ideology would have achieved success. Nevertheless, given that these conditions were favourable, that success was possible, and the employment of symbols played no small part in attaining it. In this chapter, the main themes and elements of the ideology as delineated in the previous chapter will be considered in terms of their symbolism. Therefore, it is intended to examine the role that symbolism played in presenting Nazi ideology to the public and establishing the dominance of the ideology.

In the previous chapter, the main aspects of Nazi ideology were examined. Thus it can be seen that the level of integration of Nazi ideology was certainly high enough for it to be sustained. For all

¹ Raymond Firth, *Symbols Public and Private* (London, 1973) p. 15-16

² William Kornhauser in *The Politics of Mass Society* (New York, 1959) makes the point that “popular

practical purposes, it was an ideology which could maintain its coherence. It was, in addition, a powerful and stirring ideology and, as can be seen from its wide appeal, it was an ideology that inspired belief. Indeed, it was an ideology that generated a mass movement. The question of why it was so powerful, and why it had such effects, must be asked. In seeking to answer these questions, it is essential to examine those aspects of the ideology that made it able to assert itself over the minds and emotions of much of the population. Nazism was an ideology which was both geared to action and also laden with symbolism. And, as such, its use of symbolism was vital in persuading people to adopt it. Moreover, the Nazi leadership had a sophisticated - and cynical - view of the use of propaganda. When these factors were linked together, they created a powerful impelling force towards acquiescence with the Nazi outlook.

In this chapter, therefore, it is intended to examine Nazi symbolism and its use in the mobilisation of the population. The way in which the ideology was reliant on its symbols to preserve its coherence will also be considered. It will be argued that these symbols were not only functional in Nazi ideology (i.e. useful shorthand representations of more complex realities), but also integral to its cohesiveness. Much of the ideology was only sustainable through the emotional impact of its symbols. These symbols imparted power

to the ideology. Symbols are able to carry more emotional weight than the complex realities that they represent and this can increase their effectiveness. In the case of Nazism, this very reliance on symbols gave it added power to gather popular support. It can also be argued that the use of symbols was crucial both to the mobilisation² of the population and also to Nazi rule.

In the main, Hitler's own references to methods of mobilising the population, especially where they involve the uses of symbolism, will be examined. Hitler makes many mentions of methods of rallying the population in support of National Socialism, and symbolism figures largely in these. The symbols that Hitler utilises in his references to the mobilisation of the population are highly significant within the ideology. They are not simply functional in terms of propaganda techniques, but are also intrinsic to the ideology itself. Within the ideology, they often have larger connotations - signifying the whole Nazi *Weltanschauung*. The Nazi mobilisation of the population was underlain by ideology and structured by its symbolism. It is important to look at the way in which the ideology became popularised, the way in which Nazism took hold of the public imagination. It is intended to examine how the ideology was transferred from the Nazi leadership to the people - the way in which

mobilisation generally is the work of counter-élites, since they are not inhibited by commitments to the social order, nor by constraints resulting from participation in a balance of power." p. 36

the people became imbued with the ideology, and the effect this had upon them. Symbolism, it will be found, plays an important part here. It was inherent in the ideology and it was utilised by the Nazi leadership and Nazi agitators to mobilise the population. Nazism was geared to appeal to the emotions - not intellect, and its appeal on this level was undoubtedly very successful.

The ideology of Nazism appealed to many human emotions, but to a great extent, it played on the worries and anxieties of the population. In Germany, following the defeat in World War I, these sorts of feelings were rife. There was a pervasive disillusion with the *status quo*, and general feelings of insecurity and dislocation. The great offer made by Nazism was of a bright future, a future re-creating past glory and offering a sense of belonging to a national community - a Nazi community. This idea of community is described well by Melita Maschmann, the leader of the B.D.M.³ She describes her stay at a B.D.M. camp:

Our camp community was a model in miniature of what I imagined the National Community to be. It was a completely successful model. Never before or since have I known such a good community, even where the composition was more homogeneous in every respect...The knowledge that this model of a National Community had afforded me such intense happiness gave birth to an optimism to which I clung obstinately until 1945. Upheld by this experience, I believed, despite all evidence to the contrary, that the pattern of our

³ *Bund Deutsches Mädchen* - the female "equivalent" of the Hitler Youth

camp would one day be magnified on an infinite scale - if not in the next then in future generations.⁴

A further example can be given from the experience of a party recruit attending his first district meeting. "At first", he says, "I could hardly believe that a janitor was local group leader. Here, in the west end of Berlin, where 90 per cent of the population were intellectuals. Nevertheless, neither envy nor ill will could be perceived. This was how I had always imagined the true community of the people."⁵

The ideas of a glorious past and a glorious future were two important interlocking symbols within Nazi ideology.⁶ It could be argued that these would be better described as themes or motifs within Nazi ideology. However, it is argued here that, within the context of Nazi ideology, these elements come within the previously-given definition of symbols, in that they functioned as representations of aspects of Nazism. In so doing, they concealed aspects of both the past and the future which would not tie in with Nazism, and at the same time revealed a version of the past and a vision of the future inseparable from the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. To this extent, they were

⁴ *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945*, introduced and edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (New York, 1974) p. 361-362

⁵ H. Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements* (New York, 1963) p. 251

⁶ The "two pillars" of Nazi ideology, according to Mosse, were "a look backwards" and "a look forward." George L. Mosse, *Nazism, A Historical and Comparative Analysis of National Socialism, An Interview with Michael Ledeen* (hereafter, *Nazism*) (Oxford, 1978) p. 39. Also see Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944, His Private Conversations* (hereafter, *HTT*), translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London, 1973) September 1941, p. 40

able to particularise abstract elements of the ideology. In so doing, they were able to represent the rectitude and validity of Nazism - its ideology and practices. The immediate pre-Nazi past was portrayed as a time of stagnation and decadence. In comparison, the more distant Germanic past, it was claimed, had been a time of supremacy, purity, vigour and "naturalness" - a time and a condition from which Germany had since deteriorated. However, this glorious past could be re-established - and would be - under National Socialism.⁷ The idea of a glorious past symbolised, to Nazis, the deterioration that had come along with the Republic and with the growth of democracy.⁸ As Hitler stridently put it: "This parliamentary Democracy of ruin has at all times destroyed peoples and States. It does not express the will of the people: it serves only the ambition and interests of conscienceless corrupters of the people, be they small or great."⁹ In order that the people regain their pre-democracy past and attain a glorious new future - the Nazi "New Order"¹⁰ - it was essential that they should realise the necessity of both accepting Nazi aims and ideology and also rejecting opposition to Nazism. The concept of a "new order" was a powerful mobilising device for people who, for

⁷ *ibid.*, November 1941, p. 119

⁸ Kornhauser explains that "modern democratic systems possess a distinct vulnerability to mass politics because they invite the whole population, most of which has been politically quiescent, to engage in politics." Kornhauser, *op.cit.*, p. 227

⁹ *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler* (hereafter, *Speeches*), April 1922-August 1939, edited by Norman H. Baynes, volume 1 (London, 1942) 17 August 1934, at Hamburg, p. 452

¹⁰ *HTT*, September 1941, p. 32

various reasons, were profoundly disappointed with their present society and were worried about what the future might hold.

Hitler was adept at using “new order” symbolism to put forward his views. In an interview with Richard Breiting, the editor of the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, in 1931, he expounded on the necessity of making clear to the citizens of Germany “the historic turning point at which Germany stands today. We are on the threshold of a unique new epoch in our history. We have reached the turning point when the bourgeoisie must decide whether it will choose bolshevist chaos in Germany and therefore in Europe, or a National-Socialist Germany and a new order on our continent.”¹¹ Throughout both his interviews with Breiting, he uses the symbolism of a possible glorious future and contrasts it with the appalling consequences of failing to choose this Nazi future. Here can be seen the symbolic playing off of representations of good and evil; “good” in the shape of National Socialism with its “new order”, “evil” in the shape of National Socialism’s various enemies. The juggling of symbols of good and bad was a prime mobilising tactic of Nazism, and a successful one. The vanquishing of the enemy and the pursuit of the “new order” was spoken of in rousing terms. It was a “national cause”¹², an “historic mission.”¹³ It was a fight to “guarantee the

¹¹ Edouard Calic, *Unmasked, Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931* (London, 1971) p. 21

¹² *ibid.*, p. 23

German people a new and better life for the coming centuries..."¹⁴

The intention was to "set up a thousand-year Reich..."¹⁵ and National Socialist plans were "designed for eternity..."¹⁶ The creation of Germany's new society was synonymous with the defeat of Germany's enemies.

In this "new order", Germany would triumph as a political unit by achieving world leadership (world dominance). It would also triumph as a racial unity with the nation being purged of all races except the Aryan one. The Aryan-race element of Nazi ideology symbolised more than a biological category. It symbolised rights of leadership, heroism, national rejuvenation and natural superiority - all of which would be fully expanded under National Socialism. Stereotypical Aryan characteristics, such as blond hair, blue eyes¹⁷ and "classic" features¹⁸, were themselves elemental symbols, both of Germanic superiority and of Nazi aims. This emphasis on the superiority of Aryan characteristics was allied with an emphasis on health and physical beauty, particularly classical beauty.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 51

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 25

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 68

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 57

¹⁷ *HTT*, November 1941, p. 119

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 290 re: "classic" heads

There was a great deal of classical symbolism in Nazism, ranging from the idea of achieving physical perfection in human beings, right through to the promotion of the classic style in architecture as an expression of Aryan creative superiority.¹⁹ When Hitler described the effect which was to be produced in the design of the Reich Chancellery, it was that “those who enter the Reich Chancellery should feel that they stand before the lords of the world.”²⁰ Huge buildings and monuments were overt symbols of Nazi greatness²¹ and were allied with the idea of a long Aryan/Germanic history - a history of creativity and of elevation of the world’s culture. When Hitler spoke of “the German Reich with its thousand years of living history”, he meant that for a thousand years the Aryan race had been the upholder and creator of all civilisation.²² This history and civilising effect would now be under the control of Nazism. Hitler made this quite explicit when he said that “the Movement has taken over two thousand years of German civilisation and German history:

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 523 and p. 674

²⁰ quoted in Michael Burleigh, “...And Tomorrow the Whole World”, *History Today*, volume 40, September 1990, p. 35

²¹ In one instance Hitler said: “In a single section - in the coming into being of the new Nuremberg - one may recognise the growth of our Movement, the development of Germany. A gigantic forum is being constructed: the spaces for our parades are the greatest in the world. To-morrow there is to be laid the foundation stone of the Stadium such as the world has never seen. In two years at least the structure of the colossus of our Congress House will stand completed and as our first granite monument will bear witness to the greatness of the idea which inspired it and bear witness also to the greatness of the whole layout of the new city.” *Speeches*, September 1937, opening of *Parteitag*, p. 206. To the Guardian leader of 1939, this emphasis on large scale architecture was simply one more example of Hitler’s worrying lack of control: “Although he demands the utmost discipline from his followers and from his people, he is undisciplined. He is self-controlled with regard to food and drink; his indiscipline shows in extravagance in other matters, notably in monumental and political architecture.” *The Guardian*, 20 April 1939

²² *Speeches*, April 1942, p. 436

it will be the support of the German civilisation and German history of the future. It will see to it that new imperishable monuments shall be created which will place Germany for the future amongst the great civilised peoples of world-history. We labour not for the Movement but for the millennia."²³

German civilisation and creativity could be symbolised by the Aryan race. According to Nazi ideology, the Aryan race contained within itself a "creative force"²⁴ born out of an alliance between the race itself and the forces of nature. In the distant past the Aryan had been in union with nature and had relied on his instincts to deal with the world. This had given him the ability fully to develop his creative force and it was this force that had enabled the growth of civilisation. The reliance on nature had made Germans a great people. However, as industrialisation, capitalism and liberalism²⁵ had made more and more advances in Germany, the Aryan race had slowly become alienated from nature. The doctrines of liberalism meant that German society stopped being a society governed by men of instinct and instead became a society governed by parliamentarians. This

²³ *ibid.*, 22 April, 1933, Munich, p. 223. Hitler's architectural plans were plainly directed towards this end. As Cannadine points out: "The House of German Art, the Berlin Chancellery, and the buildings and parade grounds of Nuremberg, to say nothing of the later and unrealised schemes for triumphal ways and arches in Berlin, all reflected Hitler's abiding belief that a civilisation was judged by the great buildings it left behind." David Cannadine, "Splendour out of Court: Royal Spectacle and pageantry in Modern Britain c.1820-1977", in *Rites of Power, Symbolism, Ritual and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, edited by Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia, 1985) p. 227

²⁴ *ibid.*, October 1941, p. 87

²⁵ *ibid.*, July 1941, p. 5

alienation from instinct and from nature had led to the decline in German society. Therefore, it was essential for the race (and the nation) that it should regain some of those qualities of nature that it had lost by adherence to the falsity of bourgeois society. These were qualities such as, for example, a reliance on instinct, a close union with the spirit, with the emotions, with intuition, and a glorying in action and battle.²⁶ Hitler himself regularly extolled the virtues of intuition.²⁷ “At the beginning of our movement”, he said, “I acted above all by intuition.”²⁸ However, this much-vaunted concept of “intuitive” leadership was actually a way of defining and sustaining dictatorship founded on mass appeal. This was because the Nazi concept of intuition symbolised the arbitrary rights of the leader over the workings of any kind of due process. In other words, an intuitive leader would have no cause for elections or consultations. This was quite consistent with Hitler’s views that the people needed strong leadership because, as he put it:

the psyche of the great masses is not receptive to anything that is half-hearted and weak. Like the woman whose psychic state is determined less by grounds of abstract reason than by an indefinable emotional longing for a force which will complement her nature, and who, consequently, would rather bow to a strong man than dominate a weakling, likewise the masses love a commander more than a petitioner and feel inwardly more satisfied by a doctrine, tolerating no other beside itself, than by the granting of liberalistic freedom with

²⁶ *ibid.*, October 1941, p. 51. Hitler also emphasised the unnaturalness of the Christian creed.

²⁷ *ibid.*, November 1941, p. 114

²⁸ *ibid.*, July 1941, p. 117

which, as a rule, they can do little, and are prone to feel that they have been abandoned.²⁹

However, the establishment of this type of leadership depended, in the first instance, on popular appeal. Hitler was himself very clear on the necessity of this. It was vitally important, he said, because of the “tremendous power” inherent in the masses, that any movement “with great aims” should not lose contact with them.³⁰ He notes in his critique of the Pan-German movement, that it could have been far more successful if it had “above all...dedicated itself to winning the masses.”³¹ It was essential that all propaganda “must be addressed always and exclusively” to the people.³² One of the most effective ways of doing this was through control of the media. The Party, as Hitler put it, “had to put an end to the thoughtlessness of public opinion. It had to take into its hands all means of guiding the people - Press, theatre, films, and all other forms of propaganda - and to direct them towards a single goal.”³³ The crucial inroad to the masses was through understanding and manipulating their “emotional

²⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (hereafter, *MK*), translated by Ralph Mannheim (London, 1989) p. 39-40

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 99

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 93

³² *ibid.*, p. 163 This was because “the reservoir from which the young movement must gather its supporters will primarily be the masses of our workers.” *ibid.*, p. 309. Propaganda should, in this case, “be adjusted to the broad masses in content and in form, and its soundness is to be measured exclusively by its effective result.” *ibid.*, p. 311

³³ *Speeches*, 6 September, 1938, in Proclamation at opening of Party Congress at Nuremberg, p. 121. With regard to, for example, film, Michael Burleigh says that the object was to “shift responsibility from the State onto every individual through the device of human interest drama, and hence to secure their collusive passivity, if not consent.” Michael Burleigh, “Euthanasia and the Third Reich”, *History Today*, volume 40 February 1990, p. 14

ideas”³⁴ and Hitler’s speeches were geared to this effect. Toland agrees that “despite the complicated structure of his [i.e. Hitler’s] speeches, they were easy to follow, being designed primarily for emotional appeal. Thus he could switch from subject to subject without losing his listeners because the bridge between topics was an appeal to some emotion - indignation, fear, love, hate.”³⁵ By appealing to them through their emotions, by showing them strength and inspiring them through this strength, Hitler was sure that the aims of the National Socialist movement could be achieved. “All great movements”, he declared, “are popular movements, volcanic eruptions of human passions and emotional sentiments...”³⁶ Therefore, “in the propaganda campaign we naturally place the emotional aspect first.”³⁷ This was because “propaganda is a matter of the emotions, German emotions, and an unshakeable faith in a future for Germany.”³⁸ That Hitler and the Nazis were supremely adept at using propaganda is undoubted. Kurt Ludecke described a 1922 rally in Munich thus:

Adolf Hitler was scheduled to speak last. It needed no clairvoyance to see that here was a man who knew how to seize his opportunity. Red placards announced in huge black letters that he was to appear. Many who read them had never even

³⁴ *Speeches*, p. 165

³⁵ John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976) p. 139

³⁶ *MK*, p. 98

³⁷ Calic, *op.cit.*, p. 30

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 31 And again: “I have said many times that propaganda is not a scientific argument but has its roots in national sentiment. The Germanic sentiment is now aflame and the masses are marching under the swastika banner.” *ibid.*, p. 89-90

heard his name. Here were inflammatory slogans: "Versailles: Germany's Ruin", "Republic of the People or State of the Jews?"³⁹, "International Solidarity: A Jewish World Swindle"...When the Nazis marched into the *Koenigsplatz* with banners flying, their bands playing stirring German marches, they were greeted with tremendous cheers.⁴⁰

Another description, this time of a mature Nazi rally, will clearly illustrate how proficient the Nazis were at staging spectacle:

Hitler entered, wrapped in a trench coat, followed by his entourage. He quickly strode down the aisle as the audience cheered, feet stamped. Once Hitler reached the platform there was abrupt silence. Then 200 Brownshirts marched in, preceded by two drummers and a flag. The audience broke into thundering *Heils* and held out arms in fascist salute. On the stage, Hitler stood stern-faced, his right arm out. The music mounted, flags passed by the stage, glittering standards with swastikas in wreathes with eagles, patterned after the banners of the Roman legions.⁴¹

The masses had to be appealed to through their emotions because their intellectual level was not high enough to grasp complex ideological or political arguments. "The political understanding of the

³⁹ Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, 1963) says that, before the Nazi ascendancy, "each class of society which came into conflict with the state as such became anti-Semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state were the Jews." p. 25

⁴⁰ Kurt G.W. Ludecke, *I Knew Hitler, The Story of a Nazi Who Escaped The Blood Purge* (London, 1938) p. 21. Hitler was very satisfied with this. He said to Breiting that "our marches form our headlines. Our success rests solely on our electoral speeches, our propaganda and our organisations." Calic, *op.cit.*, p. 29

⁴¹ Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, quoted in Alistair Brown and Roger Diski, *Führer, Seduction of a Nation*, published by Screen Guides, (London, 1989) to accompany Thames Television programme. No small amount of preparation went into the construction of these spectacles. Speer, speaking of the Nuremberg Rally of 1933, gives an example of his contribution: "Preparations were being made there for the first Party Rally of what was now the government party. The victorious spirit of the party was to be expressed even in the architecture of the background...Instead of my great banners I provided a gigantic eagle, over a hundred-feet in wingspread, to crown the Zeppelin Field." Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (London, 1970) p. 27-28

broad masses”, insisted Hitler, “is far from being highly enough developed to arrive at definite political views of their own accord...”⁴² Thus, by the use of propaganda, those of superior intellect had to administer political views to them. It was essential, according to Hitler, that this propaganda “must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is addressed to. Consequently, the greater the mass it is intended to reach, the lower its purely intellectual level will have to be.”⁴³ Hitler’s ideal method was to pick a few ideas, or points, and continually repeat them. “All effective propaganda”, he said, “must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.”⁴⁴ Hitler called this constant repetition of a few points a “fundamental principle” of propagandist technique.⁴⁵ An example of this “fundamental principle” can be seen in his description of two 1920’s lectures.⁴⁶ “I considered these two lectures”, he said, “the most important of all, and so I repeated and repeated them dozens of times, always renewing the form, until, on this point at least, a certain clear and unified conception became current among the

⁴² (K, p. 78

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 164

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 165. As Cantril explains: “Slogans arose to serve as catalytic agents, as simple, memorable rationalisations of new goals to be achieved, of old evils to be destroyed.” Cantril, *op.cit.*, p. 262

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 168. Or, as Mueller puts it, there was “a relentless repetition of slogans, emotive terms, and superlatives.” Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication, A Study into the Political Sociology of Language, Socialisation, and Legitimation* (New York, 1973) p. 30

people from among whom the movement gathered its first members.”⁴⁷ This constant repetition encompassed such ideological elements as the struggle⁴⁸, posterity⁴⁹ and the aims of the movement.⁵⁰ The way to persuade the masses into the pursuit of the “new order”, according to Hitler, was to present to them a single overriding and dominating goal to be attained by any means. To this goal should be imputed such importance that it could not be ignored by the general populace and it would take on an overriding importance. *“In all cases where the fulfilment of apparently impossible demands or tasks is involved”*, he declares, *“the whole attention of a people must be focused and concentrated on this one question, as though life and death actually depended on its solution.”*[original emphasis]⁵¹

Uniformity of outlook was, of course, a major element in Nazi ideology, as was uniformity in other spheres (for example, race and culture). A major part of the mobilisation of the German people behind Nazism consisted of creating at least an appearance of, or a belief in, this uniformity. To do this it was essential that there should

⁴⁶ These were: “The True Causes of the World War” and “The Peace Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Versailles.”

⁴⁷ *MK*, p. 426

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 108

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 96

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 98

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 227. Even though this question might not concern the ultimate aim of National Socialism but only a part of it, or even just a stepping stone on the way, this “partial goal” had to be presented to the people as “the one which is solely and alone worthy of attention, on whose conquest everything depends.” *ibid.*, p. 227-228

be certain levels of exclusivity - where contrary opinions, viewpoints or beliefs would not be tolerated. The Nazi *Weltanschauung* should be the only belief system permissible. Toch explains this well when he says that "to the extent to which a belief system is closed, it must ensure that all incoming data fit. Everything must be evaluated in terms of how well it can be reconciled with existing beliefs, and how well it can be used to serve the system."⁵² Within Nazism, the belief system was ordered, idea-structured, unyielding and all-encompassing. Dissent was prohibited. There must be no differences, no alternative views, nothing that would divide the community of the German people. Hitler made a positive virtue out of this elimination of political pluralism. "When I entered political life", he proclaimed, "it was with the burning vow in my heart that I would root out from Germany this world of the political parties - that I would set in its place a community of the German people."⁵³ In order to successfully propagandise this eradication of variety, each argument should be narrowly focused and should avoid being side-tracked by other considerations. Hitler gives a clear example of this himself when he defines the function of propaganda as being "not to weigh and ponder the rights of different people, but exclusively to emphasise the one right which it has set out to argue for."⁵⁴ In this

⁵² Hans Toch, *The Social Psychology of Social Movements* (London, 1966) p. 149

⁵³ *Speeches*, 17 August, 1934, Hamburg, p. 96

⁵⁴ *MK*, p. 166

way, according to Hitler, the people would assimilate Nazi views. This dedicated one-sidedness would both help to establish a certain fanaticism in society and would also be bolstered by that fanaticism. The success of National Socialism could thus be guaranteed because, as Hitler put it: “The future of a movement is conditioned by the fanaticism, yes, the intolerance, with which its adherents uphold it as the sole correct movement...”⁵⁵ Therefore, fanaticism became a positive attribute in the characters of Nazi followers. Fanaticism and intolerance were depicted as virtues to be encouraged. This was because they would nurture the development of a unified outlook that would enable National Socialist agitators to proclaim the Nazi future (both in order both to gain new converts, and also to establish a unitary, Nazi version of a German future).

The Nazis were quite clear on how to translate this narrowing of alternatives into practical propaganda. A 1930 memorandum from the Prussian Ministry of the Interior describes the activities of “propaganda squads”. It reports that

frequently such propaganda squads stay in a certain place for several days and try to win the local population for the movement through the most varied sorts of entertainment such as concerts, sports days, tattoos in suitable places and even church parades. In other places an outside propaganda speaker is stationed for a certain time; with a car at his disposal, he travels systematically through the surrounding

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 317

district. National Socialist theatre groups travelling from place to place serve the same purpose.⁵⁶

It was neither essential nor even desirable that the masses should understand every nuance of Nazi ideology.⁵⁷ It was enough that the leaders and men of intellect within the movement were aware. They, by careful use of propaganda, and by the erecting of potent symbols, could pass over to the population those aspects that would most make them amenable to the National Socialist Party.

It can hardly be disputed that the most important of all Nazi symbols was Hitler himself. Goebbels whole-heartedly described him as “the image of the German resurrection and the symbol of a strengthened and revived Reich.”⁵⁸ Although it was Goebbels’ stock in trade to deliver fulsome descriptions of Hitler, yet he was also a genuinely enthusiastic admirer. In this, he was united with many ordinary Germans, as a few examples will illustrate. One man, for instance, an electrician and son of a farmer, said that, when he heard Adolf Hitler for the first time, “new hope came into my heart. I told myself ‘that is my man’; he and no one else has been called to pull

⁵⁶ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.* Memorandum from the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, on Nazi propaganda activity, May 1930, p. 102.

⁵⁷ However, in ideological terms, in order to secure the victory of Nazi ideology it is essential, says Hitler, to “pick out from the broad world of its ideas certain guiding principles, suited in their essence and content to binding a broad mass of men, that mass which alone guarantees the struggle for this idea as laid down in our philosophy.” *ibid.*, p. 416

⁵⁸ Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945*, (Michigan, 1965) p. 2089

the German people out of the morass..."⁵⁹ A carpenter, who served in the war said: "When in 1923, for the first time, I heard the soldier Adolf Hitler, I realised after years of searching for truth and justice, that my place could only be with these men of true deeds...In 1927 I turned my back on the idle and joined the active fighters of the S.A. After that time I participated courageously in the demonstrations carrying the flag of the group."⁶⁰ Another man, a Rhinelander, said that when he heard and read about Hitler "his words went right to my marrow."⁶¹ And an elementary school teacher said that when he "heard for the first time about the idea of the front-line soldier Adolf Hitler, who was speaking to big rallies in Munich...He said the things I had always felt without being able to express them. With just a few men of like mind, about 15 in number, we founded the first NSDAP local in the Palatinate in October of 1924."⁶² The rallies were, of course, structured in such a way as to encourage adulation of Hitler. Bramsted, in describing a typical Nazi Party rally, concludes that "this whole pageant and ritual would have been pointless without the Führer, whose very existence gave it direction and meaning."⁶³ Hitler symbolised everything for which National Socialism stood. He

⁵⁹ Noakes and Pridham, p. 354

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 349

⁶¹ Peter H. Merkl, *Political Violence Under the Swastika, 581 Early Nazis* (New Jersey, 1975) p. 89

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 201. Kurt Ludecke said: "To us he [i.e. Hitler] was the 'Unknown Hero', the yearning German-Austrian, the half-grown lad who had arrived orphaned and penniless in Vienna, carrying in his hands only a pathetic bundle, but in his heart an indomitable will 'some day to be somebody'." Ludecke, *op.cit.*, p. 49-50

⁶³ Bramsted, *op.cit.*, p. 214

became a “living symbol”⁶⁴ in that he was perceived, not merely as a political leader, but also as a symbol of truth, future well-being and national inspiration. He was the focus of the National Socialist movement, he brought everyone’s beliefs together and provided a world view to which everyone could adhere.

His usefulness as a symbol was well understood by Nazi propagandists, who lost no opportunity in presenting this view to the public.⁶⁵ As Cantril explains, the *idea* of Hitler became much greater than Hitler himself, to the extent that “even his name is something external to his person, a symbol of the whole ideology.”⁶⁶ If the Jews became the ultimate symbol of all that was evil in the world⁶⁷, then Hitler became the opposite symbol - of all that was good in the world. Although this image was, of course, assiduously encouraged by Nazi propaganda, it remains the fact that much of its success was due to Hitler’s personal charisma. Hitler was, above all, a charismatic leader and this charisma was, at the very least, as important as the propaganda machine. As Albig points out, the charismatic leader was “the leader symbol of greatest potency...A charismatic leader is a

⁶⁴ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalisation of the Masses, Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (hereafter, *Nationalisation*) (New York, 1975) p. 202. Also see Albig, who describes how a leader can become, a “symbol of an idea...” William Albig, *Modern Public Opinion* (New York, 1956) p. 115

⁶⁵ One example among many is the 1937 Handbook of the Office of Culture of the Reich Youth Leadership which, in outlining the plan for a fortnight’s camp, made one day’s motto be “Hitler is Germany and Germany Hitler.” Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 358

⁶⁶ Cantril, *op.cit.*, p. 237

⁶⁷ *HTT*, p. 87, 117-118, 288

leader believed to be in some unusually intimate relation to supernatural power or to have some extraordinary qualities beyond the normally human.”⁶⁸ This was undoubtedly the case with Hitler. He was widely perceived as a saviour and a prophet. For example, when Frau Luise Solmitz, a Hamburg school teacher married to a former army officer, attended a rally in 1932, she wrote that

nobody spoke of “Hitler”, always just “the Führer”, “the Führer says”, “the Führer wants”, and what he said and wanted seemed right and good...There stood Hitler in a simple black coat and looked over the crowd, waiting - a forest of swastika pennants swished up, the jubilation at this moment was given vent in a roaring salute...When the speech was over, there was roaring enthusiasm and applause. Hitler saluted, gave his thanks, the *Horst Wessel* song sounded out across the course...How many look up to him with touching faith! as their helper, their saviour, their deliverer from unbearable distress - to him who rescues the Prussian prince, the scholar, the clergyman, the farmer, the worker, the unemployed, who rescues them from the parties back into the nation.⁶⁹

Another example is that of a young Nazi who came from a politically mixed family background. He said that “with such contrasting political views, it was not always peaceful in my parents’ home. Sometimes physical clashes were unavoidable because I was not about to give up my Nazi membership, since I believed Hitler to be Germany’s salvation.”⁷⁰ And indeed, Hitler himself believed that he

⁶⁸ Albig, *op.cit.*, p. 120

⁶⁹ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 104

⁷⁰ Merkl, *op.cit.*, p. 268

had a special insight into the inner workings of the world and of destiny.

He was fully convinced of his own genius and was well able to transmit this conviction - first to his own supporters and then to many of the rest of the German people. Again, he was well aware of the propaganda power in having himself thought of in these redemptionist terms. "The people", he said "needs a point upon which everybody's thoughts converge, an idol."⁷¹ Hitler was so intrinsically bound up with Nazi ideology and Nazi practice that, without him, it must be doubted whether the whole edifice of Nazism could have been maintained. Within Nazi ideology, the Führer was more than a mere human being - he was a symbol of Nazism, the people, Germany and Germany's future. Although he was the leader of the Nazi Party, he was much more than merely a party leader. Hitler was aware of how important it was to maintain and emphasise his superiority to traditional politics. This can easily be illustrated with reference to the 1939 directive which distanced Hitler from his function as Chancellor. This directive stated that "in future times Adolf Hitler can only be called 'Führer' and not 'Führer and Chancellor'."⁷² Although this was clearly because, as dictator, Hitler

⁷¹ *HTT*, July 1941, p. 14. Grunberger goes so far as to describe him as "the deity who gave meaning to the whole elaborate structure of Nazi ritual." Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (London, 1971) p. 83

⁷² Mueller, *op.cit.*, p. 31

was far above mere Chancellorship, it was also an enhancing of Hitler the symbol. Before this, Hitler - though the Führer - still had links with the pre-Nazi past. As Führer *and* Chancellor, he was still part of the existing political process, still a politician, still bound to some extent by the conventions and traditions of the past. Not only this, but as Chancellor he had a status position in accordance with the pre-Nazi social and political hierarchy. This was unacceptable on two levels. Firstly, the Nazi revolution was a revolution against both the established political order and the established social order. Therefore, the leader of such a revolution could not be bound by the values of these established orders. Also, within Nazism, Hitler was (or was purported to be) the source of *all* authority. As such he was too great to be contained within a post such as Chancellorship. This was a relic from the discredited system of party politics. Loyalty to the Führer was radically different to loyalty to parliamentary leaders. It had to be total and fanatical. In emphasis of this, the slogan, "Everything for our Führer, Adolf Hitler!", was a slogan widely used and widely accepted.⁷³

What the nation needed, according to Hitler, were "truly fanatical Germans, ready to sacrifice their private interests to the interests of the public."⁷⁴ These sorts of Germans - particularly

⁷³ *HTT*, p. 494

⁷⁴ *HTT*, November 1941, p. 134

among the youth - did not seem hard to find. Rauschning, for example, describes meeting a young S.A. leader by the name of Linsmayer who, he says, was “one of the many charming, honest and genuinely patriotic young men who joined the movement from the purest and noblest motives...Young fellows like Linsmayer felt genuinely that they were making the sacrifice of their youth in a great cause.”⁷⁵ He was by no means alone. Here is the testimony of a young clerk who joined the Nazi Party. “Misery, shame, hatred, lies, civil war”, he said, “imprinted themselves on our soul and made us mature early. So we searched and found Adolf Hitler. What attracted us like a magnet was precisely the fact that he only made demands of us and promised us nothing. He demanded of every person a total commitment to his movement and therefore to Germany.”⁷⁶ And a contractor’s son who joined the Party at the age of 18, said: “The Communists knocked us down, the police put us in jail, some of our comrades were shot from the back: none of this stopped us in our redoubled will to make Adolf Hitler’s idea prevail among the German people.”⁷⁷ This necessity for self-sacrifice was one of the mainstays of Nazi propaganda. Private interests were no longer to be considered in the Third Reich - the nation and its future were all. The Nazi “new

⁷⁵ Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks, A Series of Political Conversations with Adolf Hitler on his Real Aims* (London, 1939) p. 26

⁷⁶ Merkl, *op.cit.*, p. 236

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 260. According to Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth: “he who marches in the Hitler Youth is not one among millions but a soldier of an idea...” Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p354

order” was dependent on the willingness of the German people - and especially the German youth - to make these sacrifices. This was Hitler’s intention and ambition. If, he said, the National Socialist party can “succeed in inculcating into the German people, and above all into the German youth, both a fanatical team spirit and a fanatical devotion to the Reich, then the German Reich will once again become the most powerful state in Europe, as it was a thousand years after the collapse of the Roman Empire.”⁷⁸

The Nazi Party did, of course, have a lot of success in attracting the youth. However, not only did they have a wide section of support from the youth, but also “youth”, as a concept, was an important symbol in National Socialism. Hitler, indeed, declared that the “youth of to-day” would be, in ten or twenty years time, “the personification of the National Socialist idea...”⁷⁹ Herein lay the vital importance of the orchestration of the youth movement. However, despite this overt orchestration, it remains the case that Hitler and the Nazi Party strongly appealed to wide sections of the youth from the early stages of the movement. Speer, for example, in describing the first occasion that he encountered Hitler, makes this clear. He explains that he had been urged by his students to attend a meeting at which Hitler

⁷⁸ *HTT*, May 1942, p. 493

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, May 1942, p. 490. As Eatwell says: “Youth was radical, virile, strong, traits which were eulogised in Nazi ideology. Youth was also capable of being moulded more perfectly into the new ‘Nazi man’.” R. Eatwell, *Fascism, A History* (London, 1995) p. 127

was going to address the students of Berlin University and the Institute of Technology. When Speer arrived, he found that “the room was overcrowded. It seemed as if nearly all the students in Berlin wanted to see and hear this man whom his adherents so much admired and his opponents so much detested.” He explains this enthusiasm by saying that “the students were chiefly turning to the extremist for their beliefs and Hitler’s party appealed directly to the idealism of this generation.”⁸⁰

For Hitler, the mass meeting was the best way of inspiring this sort of idealism and fanaticism. Although Hitler had, of course, no hesitation in exploiting the medium of the written word, he was of the opinion that a good speaker could have a far greater effect on the masses than any amount of written material. Thus he said that “the power which has always started the greatest religious and political avalanches in history rolling, has from time immemorial been the spoken word and that alone.”⁸¹ For Hitler, the mass meeting was “the only way to exert a truly effective, because personal, influence on large sections of the people and thus possibly to win them...”⁸² This emphasis on the mass meeting and, in fact, mass-ism in general, was truly a fundamental and continuing feature of the National Socialist

⁸⁰ Speer, *op.cit.*, p. 15

⁸¹ *MK*, p. 98

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 97

movement. The meetings were highly contrived right from the beginning and, of course, became increasingly stage-managed and spectacular (not to say quasi-religious) as time passed. The uniforms, banked flags, tall red banners with their repetitive swastika symbol, the insignia, the flames, the red colour of the trappings, references to blood, the spotlights and searchlights playing over the gathered masses, the uniformity of the Hitler salute: these were all vital elements in both reaching out for new converts and also for entrenching adherents within the movement.⁸³ Much of the symbolism utilised in these meetings and rallies was derived directly from Communist symbolism. Hitler readily admits this. "After the War", he explains, "I experienced a mass demonstration of the Marxists in front of the Royal Palace and the *Lustgarten*. A sea of red flags, red scarves, and red flowers gave to this demonstration, in which an estimated hundred and twenty thousand took part, an aspect that was gigantic from the purely external point of view. I myself could feel and understand how easily the man of the people succumbs to the suggestive magic of a spectacle so grandiose in effect."⁸⁴ Hitler, then, was quite clear on the emotional impact of such spectacular mass demonstrations and it was an obvious step for the Nazis to appropriate such symbols for their own propaganda

⁸³ One example among many of this emphasis on blood is that the song planned for the 18 July 1937, Hitler youth camp was "unroll the blood-red flags..." Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 360. Also see Grunberger, *op.cit.*, p. 27 and Mosse (*Nationalisation*), p. 206

⁸⁴ *MK*, p. 448

purposes. For example, at an early stage, "I followed the example of the Marxist parties", said Hitler in *Table Talk*, "by putting up posters in the most striking red."⁸⁵

Posters were judged useful because they had an instant appeal. They were not intellectually demanding and they could put forward simple ideas in an eye-catching way. In this way they were able to attract non-adherents and even some of those from the enemy camp.⁸⁶ Speaking about the design of posters, flags, etc., Hitler said that "anyone who has to concern himself much with the masses will recognise these apparent trifles to be very important matters. An effective insignia, can in hundreds of thousands of cases give the first impetus towards interest in a movement."⁸⁷ In April, 1942, on looking back in conversation over his achievements, Hitler described the swastika flag, as "a symbol of the union of all Germanics, a new rallying-sign which was valid also inside our own national

⁸⁵ *HTT*, April 1942, p. 413. The Nazis placed a great deal of propaganda weight in the power of posters and would change the appearance of these depending on the circumstances. Thus for the 1932 election, the Reich Propaganda Department made minute description of the election poster and the way in which it was to be utilised. "The Hitler poster", it reported, "depicts a fascinating Hitler head on a completely black background. Subtitle: white on black - 'Hitler'. In accordance with the Führer's wish this poster is to be put up only during the final days [of the campaign]. Since experience shows that during the final days there is a variety of coloured posters, this poster with its so completely black background will contrast with all the others and will produce a tremendous effect on the masses..." Nazi instructions for the Presidential election of 1932, Reich Propaganda Department, signed by Goebbels, Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 103

⁸⁶ Hitler describes the propaganda considerations in the design of such posters: "We chose the red colour of our posters after careful and thorough reflection, in order to provoke the Left, to drive them to indignation and lead them to attend our meetings, if only to break them up, in order to have some chance to speak to the people." *MK*, p. 440

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 450

community.”⁸⁸ However, this idea was explicit even in *Mein Kampf*. “As National Socialists”, he said then, “we see our programme in our flag. In *red* we see the social idea of the movement, in *white* the nationalist idea, in the *swastika* the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token, the victory of the idea of creative work, which as such always has been and always will be anti-Semitic.”⁸⁹ Thus could the entire doctrine of National Socialism be condensed into one eye-catching and easily absorbed symbol. A symbol that stood - not just for National Socialism as a political movement - but also for the future of Germany and the way in which to achieve that promised future. “Just think”, Hitler proclaimed, “over a period of some two thousand years we can follow the German people in history, and never in the course of history has this people possessed this single formation both in the conceptions of its thought and in its action which it possesses to-day. For the first time since Germans appeared in the world there is a single Reich dominated by a single view of the world, protected by a single army and all that united under a single flag.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *HTT*, p. 404. In 1928, Feder described the swastika thus: “Forever young, shining and radiant, the sun-wheel, the swastika, rises before us, symbol of life which is once more awakening.” Gottfried Feder, “Let there be Light”, in *Fascism, an Oxford Reader*, edited by Roger Griffin (Oxford, 1995) p. 122

⁸⁹ *MK*, p.452

⁹⁰ *Speeches*, 8 November 1935, at Munich, p. 137

Hitler clearly comprehended the value of a potent symbol, both in mobilisation, and in pulling together Nazi ideology into a concise and easily understandable form. In the book, *Adolf Hitler - Pictures from the Life of the Führer*, originally published in 1936, almost every other page is adorned at the foot by a Nazi symbol. These include, for example: The Eagle, wings outstretched, atop the swastika; a quarter cog with a hand holding a swastika-adorned mallet; a swastika-emblazoned dagger fronting a National Socialist shield.⁹¹ The swastika was a very versatile symbol. Breiting's interview with Hitler can give an example of its ubiquity. He described being shown into Hitler's Head Quarters by Rudolf Hess, Hitler's private secretary:

The swastika flag flying from the roof can be seen a long way off. There are sentries on the door who check the papers of everyone entering; they give an impression of extremely strict martial discipline. All of them are fine large military figures, hard-faced, and one can well imagine them giving their lives for the movement...Hess led us into the marble entrance hall. A plaque bore the names of the thirteen National-Socialists who fell in front of the *Feldherrnhalle*; one wall was lined with standards and Hess explained that the other was reserved for a memorial which would carry the names of the three hundred National Socialists murdered or fallen in the cause of the Movement. The whole hall gave an impression of great solemnity and gravity. Swastika signs were everywhere, carved into the stucco ceiling and even introduced into the valuable glass of the windows.⁹²

⁹¹ *Adolf Hitler*, compiled by Maurice E. Kelly, translated by Inge Christl (London, undated)

⁹² Calic, *op.cit.*, p. 17-18

If, on the one hand, the swastika symbolised the National Socialist Party, it was to that extent, also a symbol of the ideology of Nazism. This meant that the various ideological tenets of National Socialism were also symbolised by the swastika - tenets such as Aryanism, racial purity, the *Führerprinzip*. Not only that but - in so far as National Socialism sought to identify itself with the nation and the German people - the swastika was also a symbol of Germany. Also, the swastika was a symbol of Nazi-promised national regeneration, a new order and world-leadership.⁹³ The swastika then was a symbol which was both overarching and large scale, and also detailed and intricate.

Hitler's forte was in the way he could directly appeal to the emotions, rather than to the minds of those he addressed. His personal charisma, linked with the Nazi flair for organised spectacle made the mass meeting an excellent vehicle for the dissemination of Nazi ideas. Not only could supporters be brought into the fold, but, additionally, already existing support could be maintained and assured. Hitler was well aware of the importance of the mass meeting in this regard. It was necessary, he said, "for the reason that in it the individual, who at first, while becoming a supporter of a

⁹³ Another example of the symbolism of the swastika can be seen in Hermann Rauschning's description of a picture hanging in the first Brown House in Munich. He says that "the picture was called 'Triumph of the Movement', or words to that effect. On a tremendous plain, a huge crowd was thronging, as though on the Day of Judgement, through storms and massed clouds towards a brightly shining swastika in the sky." Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 39

young movement, feels lonely and easily succumbs to the fear of being alone, for the first time gets the picture of a larger community, which in most people has a strengthening, encouraging effect.”⁹⁴ The following description of a torchlight procession of National Socialists and *Stahlhelm*⁹⁵ would undoubtedly not have surprised him. It was, declared the writer, “a wonderfully elevating experience for all of us...It was 10pm by the time the first torchlights came, and then 20,000 Brownshirts followed one another like waves in the sea, their faces shone with enthusiasm in the light of the torches...We were drunk with enthusiasm, blinded by the light of the torches right in our faces, and always enveloped in their vapour as in a cloud of sweet incense.”⁹⁶

In so far as the mass meeting was the tip of the Nazi movement, it allowed its participants to feel themselves more fully at one with the movement.⁹⁷ In this way, the mass meeting helped to legitimate their ideas because these ideas were patently shared by so many others - whether those actually at the meetings, or those who were part of the wider movement. This is one of the main services of any social movement to its members, says Toch. It can transform

⁹⁴ *MK*, p. 435

⁹⁵ The *Stahlhelm*, or “Steelhelmets”, was a nationalist group - initially allied with the National Socialists but latterly prohibited by them.

⁹⁶ Diary of Frau Solmitz, 6 February 1933, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 161-162

⁹⁷ Peukert describes the Nazi movement as “the combined outcome of the experience of crisis, the yearning for security and the desire for aggression all merged into a breathless dynamism...” Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany, Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, p. 42

“their unstable, individual beliefs into solid, authoritative norms.”⁹⁸

Further, it not only legitimates their beliefs, but can also help to repress any negative feelings they may be experiencing. The sense of unity fostered by the Nazi movement had the advantage of removing from the individual supporters the *personal* element of these feelings. By uniting in National Socialism, the Nazi supporters became part of the movement. This meant that they lost an important part of their unique individuality - that part which would make them responsible for their own failings. As Hoffer says: “When we renounce the self and become part of a compact whole, we not only renounce personal advantage, but are also rid of personal responsibility...when we lose our individual independence in the corporateness of a mass movement, we find a new freedom - freedom to hate, bully, lie torture, murder and betray without shame or remorse.”⁹⁹ The mass meeting was a device to encourage participation in the movement and, as well as entrenching support for Nazism among its early supporters, it also had the effect of attracting others to Nazism. By becoming united in National Socialism, its supporters became inspired to go out into the wider community, proclaiming the wonders of National Socialism and winning converts to the cause. Because of their dedication to, and their belief in, Nazism, these supporters were vital to the

⁹⁸ Toch, *op.cit.*, p. 137

⁹⁹ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer, Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York, 1951) p. 98. Also see Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols, Explorations in Cosmology* (Harmondsworth, 1973) p135, who argues that “the sense of sin is weakened as social control is strengthened.” p135

dissemination of National Socialism and to the mobilisation of the German people. The Nazi leaders were careful to make good use of them. They had seen how the Marxists had been successful in putting their ideas across through their supporters, and were determined to profit from their example. Hitler was well aware of the value of the ordinary Nazi supporter to the movement, particularly in the light of the example of Marxism. Indeed, he put the success of Marxism down to the “indefatigable and truly enormous propaganda work of tens of thousands of untiring agitators, from the great agitator down to the small trade-union official and the shop steward and discussion speaker...”¹⁰⁰ Hitler had no qualms about following the Marxist example in the promulgation of National Socialism. The Marxists offered the people a “glittering heaven”¹⁰¹, he said, and such a heaven could equally usefully be offered by Nazis.

However, if the promise of heaven was not enough to convince members of the population of the virtues of National Socialism, then there were other methods that could be used. Valuable though propaganda and Nazi agitators were, it was always possible to have recourse to the use of terror. The use of violence was, of course, frequently portrayed for propaganda purposes as having been instigated by the other side, the “enemy”. For example, by speaking

¹⁰⁰ *MK*, p. 429

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 432

of Social Democracy's "*brutality methods*" [emphasis in original]¹⁰², Hitler claimed to have achieved an understanding of "the importance of physical terror towards the individual and the masses."¹⁰³ His claim was that in all areas of life, violence was being used against Nazis and it would have to be combated by violence. Thus he declared that "*terror at the place of employment, in the factory, in the meeting hall, and on the occasion of mass demonstrations will always be successful unless opposed by equal terror.*"[original emphasis]¹⁰⁴ This "equal terror" would be exercised by the National Socialists in pursuance of their aims. Running right through Nazi ideology, of course, was a clear support of the idea that "might is right" and that strength was an indicator of the rectitude of your aims, methods and philosophy. "Only in the struggle between two philosophies", said Hitler, "can the weapon of brutal force, persistently and ruthlessly applied, lead to a decision for the side it supports."¹⁰⁵ Therefore, force was not only necessary - it was also an arbiter of the truth of your position and the rightness of your mission. Hitler used the employment of violence against Nazis (whether alleged or actual) to promote the positive use of violence in the achievement of political objectives. However, the use of violence was not only a practical measure, it was also intrinsic to Nazism. Kornhauser makes note of

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 40

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 41

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 41

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 158

this. "When political activism is taken to the extreme", he says, "it is expressed in violence against the opposition. This violence may be restricted to sporadic riots and mob action; or it may become embodied in the very principles of a mass movement."¹⁰⁶ That this was the case is obvious when the campaign against the Jews is examined. The Jews were, of course, portrayed as the enemies of the nation and the enemies of National Socialism. Hatred against them was whipped up until the use of terror against them seemed to Nazi supporters to be both legitimate and unavoidable. This can be well illustrated by Melita Masschmann's account of her reaction to *Kristallnacht*. "For the space of a second", she says,

I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened there. Something frighteningly brutal. But almost at once I switched over to accepting. What had happened was over and done with and avoiding a critical reflection. I said to myself: The Jews are the enemies of the New Germany. Last night they had a taste of what this means. Let us hope that world Jewry, which has resolved to hinder Germany's "new steps towards greatness", will take the events of last night as a warning. If the Jews sow hatred against us all over the world, they must learn that we have hostages for them in our hands.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Kornhauser, *op.cit.*, p. 46. Mosse agrees that, certainly against the Jews, "violence and cruelty ...became distinct and important parts of the mass ideology, geared as it was to the emotional expression of its revolutionary urge." George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology, Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (hereafter, *Crisis*), (London, 1966) p. 305. Dean sums it up when he says that "the genocidal policy pursued against the Jews was only the most extreme manifestation of an ideology which showed no respect for human life." Martin C. Dean (Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit, Scotland Yard) "The German *Gendarmerie*, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft* and the 'Second Wave' of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941-1944", *German History, The Journal of the German History Society*, volume 14, no. 2, 1996, p. 192

¹⁰⁷ Noakes and Pridham, *op.cit.*, p. 476

The amount of terror that the Nazis inspired in the hearts of their enemies seemed to them to be a gauge, both of their strength and also of the level of subjugation of these enemies.

The emotional correlation to the use of violence is a linkage of hate and fear. These emotions are powerful, and were ruthlessly and cynically exploited by the Nazis in mobilising the population. Hitler was wholly convinced of the power of hatred in moving people in a required direction. He again looked to the example of Marxism saying that the Russian Revolution was brought about "by the hate-fomenting oratorical activity of countless of the greatest and smallest apostles of agitation."¹⁰⁸ The unifying potential of these emotions was thoroughly recognised. A population unified in this way was a population that would be more amenable to Nazi manipulation. In order to exploit hatred and fear it was, of course, necessary to have an enemy, or to be more exact - a symbol of enmity, a symbol of threatening danger. This enemy had to be menacing enough to inspire genuine fear and, in order to instil the required emotions, it had to be presented to the people again and again. This necessity for a quintessential enemy was both a product of the unification process and also an impetus towards it. This is because the positing of an enemy produced a tangible entity against which the nation could

¹⁰⁸ *MK*, p. 432

unite. Hoffer may not be right when he says that "hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents"¹⁰⁹, but this was clearly the opinion of the Nazis. However, to make the enemy *totally* hateful, with no redeeming qualities that could give rise to some diversity of opinion about him, it was also essential that he should be contemptible. The Nazis worked assiduously towards the achievement of this end.

It must be remembered, however, that this hatred would have been unlikely to have taken hold as effectively if people had not already lost confidence in the existing society. There was high unemployment, leaping inflation, social disorientation, political instability, and widespread dissatisfaction with the way in which the government had handled the consequences of World War I. For example, when Fritz Hippler, a director of Nazi propaganda who joined the Nazi Party in its early years, was asked what the appeal of the Nazi party was for him, he replied: "The answer arises out of the facts of the Treaty of Versailles and its consequences. The appeal of the Nazi party was to bring liberty to the German people...to bring international justice on the one side and social justice on the other side."¹¹⁰ Social conditions such as these were all favourable to the growth of social or mass movements based on an aversion to, or a

¹⁰⁹ Hoffer, *op.cit.*, p. 89

¹¹⁰ Brown and Diski, *op.cit.*

condemnation of, the *status quo*. Many people had lost all awareness of their place in society, and for many there seemed little hope for the future. There was a gap in their lives into which it became possible to insert hatred. It became easy to hate those who were held up as being the causes of all the social ills, and to act against them, and in favour of any movement opposed to them. Hoffer again explains this well when he says that “passionate hatred can give meaning and purpose to an empty life. Thus people haunted by the purposelessness of their lives try to find a new content not only by dedicating themselves to a holy cause but also by nursing a fanatical grievance. A mass movement offers them unlimited opportunities for both.”¹¹¹

It was to the advantage of the Nazi movement that the Nazi leadership found enemies easy to discover. Jews, Bolsheviks, capitalists, were held together as “the enemy”¹¹². It was part of the tactics of Nazism, as well as being an actual necessity of the ideology, to condense all objects of hatred, derision or fear into one great symbol of enmity. This symbol was extremely potent because all

¹¹¹ Hoffer, *op.cit.*, p. 96

¹¹² These, of course were not the only ones to be oppressed. Homosexuals, Gypsies, Freemasons and Jehovah’s Witnesses were also among those who were persecuted. As Pine explains, “The National Socialists’ desire to create a perfect and ‘pure’ ‘national community’ meant the exclusion not only of the ‘racially alien’, but also of an extremely diverse group of people - largely of German ethnicity - who were described as ‘asocial’ or ‘socially unfit’. The term ‘asocial’ was used to categorise marginal groups of the German population that deviated from the norms of National Socialist society.” Lisa Pine, “Hashude: The Imprisonment of ‘Asocial Families’ in the Third Reich”, *German History, The Journal of the German History Society*, volume 13, no. 2, 1995, p. 182

opposition - or even just diverse groups - could be contained within it. As such, no opposition had a right to exist or had any legitimacy. Hitler always strove to collapse all perceived foes into one many-faceted "super-enemy".¹¹³ He had an almost Machiavellian clarity with regard to this point, as can be seen from his references to it in *Mein Kampf*. Here he wrote that

to achieve any success one should, on purely psychological grounds, never show the masses two or more opponents, since this leads to a total disintegration of their fighting power...In general the art of all truly great national leaders at all times consists among other things primarily in not dividing the attention of a people, but in concentrating it upon a single foe...It belongs to the genius of a great leader to make even adversaries far removed from one another seem to belong to a single category...Hence a multiplicity of different adversaries must always be combined so that in the eyes of the masses of one's own supporters the struggle is directed against only one enemy.¹¹⁴

Therefore, although within Nazi ideology there were many perceived enemies, ranging from parliamentarians to communists and beyond, it was part of the mobilising tactics of the Nazis to seek to link these enemies all together into one element. And the element which offered most success in this enterprise was the Jew. The Jew became the

¹¹³ He was not, of course, alone in linking the Jew with other enemies of Nazism. For example, in 1936, Werner Daitz said that "Marxism always follows capitalism like its shadow. Both grow from the same root - Jewish mercenariness which always finds a way of infiltrating Nordic economic thought once intellect has corrupted it." Werner Daitz, "Soldierly Economics", in *Fascism*, an *Oxford Reader*, *op.cit.*, p. 141

¹¹⁴ *MK*, p. 108

symbol of all ills,¹¹⁵ both of the nation and of individual people. For example, a school teacher who turned to Nazism explained that “years of observation and, at last, reading my Führer’s book *Mein Kampf* fully opened my understanding for the fateful mole-like activity of these corrupters of the earth [i.e. Jews].”¹¹⁶ And more than this, the Jew became dehumanised into a living incarnation of evil.¹¹⁷ This stereotyping and creation of a symbol of evil was an attempt to weld a unity of action against the Jew. A local police report from the Rhineland in February 1936 gives some indication of how this was going. “On 21 February of this year”, it recounts, “the funeral of a Jewess took place. The population held back and did not take part. A few women who wanted to attend were dissuaded from doing so by the other inhabitants.”¹¹⁸ It was a particular talent of the Nazis, based on a genuine hatred, that they could raise up enemies. They could show these enemies to the people and convince the people of their intrinsic evil and evil intent. And they could get the people to join together and act against them (or at the very least, fail to act in their defence). The Jew-as-enemy was the bedrock of Nazi

¹¹⁵ In Mosse’s words: “The Jew became the symbol of everything which had gone wrong with the modern world.” Mosse *Nazism*, p. 14

¹¹⁶ Merkl, *op.cit.*, p. 166

¹¹⁷ Mosse believes that this was essential to the momentum of Nazis, because “for the Jews to become the foils of a mass movement, they had to be converted into objectified symbols so as to become other than human beings. Moreover, mass agitation demanded simplicity and consistency and consequently did not readily countenance subtle distinctions which might have excluded some Jews from condemnation. Hitler followed the path of his *Völkisch* predecessors when he presented the Jewish evil not in its flesh-and-blood aspects but as an abstracted stereotype.” Mosse, *Crisis*, p. 302

¹¹⁸ Noakes and Pridham. *op.cit.*, p. 467

propaganda. No matter what other threats faced Germany - he was always the *main* threat.

In practice, the descriptions of these threats were always made with reference to unarguably real peril. The Nazi method was to combine symbolically all allusion to opposition with representations of danger. For example, Hitler rants about the “Marxist plague”¹¹⁹ and “pacifistic-democratic poisoning.”¹²⁰ Claus Mueller calls this tactic the “establishment of connections...”¹²¹ and it is by way of these connections that diverse realities can be linked together - even if in a totally erroneous way. Hitler was adept at mentioning indisputable dangers - threats that anyone could agree on (for example, plague, poisoning) - and then linking these with those areas he wished to *present* in dangerous or threatening ways. Thus he sought to establish an association in the public mind between real danger that no one could dispute - and areas of life *symbolised* as dangerous. This was both an intrinsic part of the ideology - in that the Nazis did, indeed, believe that there were real enemies menacing both Germany and the world - and also a clear mobilisation tactic. On the one hand, as Cantril explains, it “furnishes concrete or symbolic causes of trouble which people can conceptualise, thereby giving meanings and

¹¹⁹ *Hitler's Secret Book* (hereafter, *HSB*), translated by Salvator Attansio (New York, 1962) 2nd Edition, p. 3

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 27

¹²¹ Mueller, *op.cit.*, p. 17. Also see Albig, p. 45

interpretations to bewildered souls who seek some explanation...”, and on the other hand, it “unites people into a more closely knit ‘in-group’ by providing ‘outside threats’; it discourages dissension with the ranks by keeping interest centred on ‘common troubles’.”¹²² By uniting the people in fear and hatred against a single easily identifiable foe, the Nazis were enabled to promote their own aims as being the way of right as opposed to the way of evil.¹²³ The Nazi solution to the ills of society was portrayed, and became generally accepted as, the solution to the problem of the enemy. Therefore, the putative existence of the enemy was seen as a common justification for supporting Nazism; and action against the enemy was seen as right action against a legitimate foe. Hitler maintained that “the people at all times see the proof of their own right in ruthless attack on a foe...”¹²⁴ Thus the identification of the enemy and the promotion of action against him (in the form of attack) was a strong unifying factor and led to a popular unification in favour of the methods and

¹²² Cantril, *op.cit.*, p. 244-245

¹²³ Compare these comments by Mary Douglas, *op.cit.*, who says that “a closer look at the symbolism of witchcraft shows the dominance of symbols of inside and outside. The witch himself is someone whose inside is corrupt; he works harm on his victims by attacking their pure, innocent insides...The witch doctrine is used as the idiom of control, since it pins blame for misfortune on trouble-makers and deviants. The accusation is a righteous demand for conformity.” (p. 139) She also points out that “there are four general characteristics of the witchcraft cosmology: the idea of the bad outside and the good inside, the inside under attack and in need of protection, human wickedness on a cosmic scale, and these ideas used in political manipulation.” (p. 140) In addition, “the purity and goodness of one part of mankind, and the vileness of the rest” is also stressed. (p. 146) She adds that “these [witch-cleansing] movements [in central Africa] offer fantastic promises of a new golden age to be realised on earth by the ending of witchcraft.” (p. 141) It is also the case that “witch beliefs express a division within humanity: there are pure, good men, and utterly vile men who do not belong with humanity at all.” (p. 153) She explains that “the group boundary is the main definer of rights: people are classed either as members or strangers...Evil is a foreign danger introduced by foreign agents in disguise. Group members accuse deviants in their midst of allowing the outside evil to infiltrate.” (p. 169)

ideology of Nazism. Because Nazism identified itself with the battle against evil, it was exalted as a symbol of world survival. Thus Nazism was habitually referred to by Hitler and other Nazis in terms of deliverance, as the “National Socialist freedom movement of the German nation.”¹²⁵ National Socialism was symbolised as a liberating force - a force which could save Germany from its enemies and protect it from threats. “Extremes must be fought by extremes”, Hitler asserted, “against the infection of materialism, against the Jewish pestilence we must hold aloft a flaming ideal. And if others speak of the World and Humanity we say the Fatherland - and only the Fatherland!”¹²⁶

The race-nation unity was, of course, the ultimate “good” within Nazism. Thus any action that was to the benefit of, or in defence of, the nation (or could be portrayed as such) was taken to be essential and was above criticism. It inspired in the Nazi supporters an idea of strength, of uniformity of purpose, of shared community, of united *Weltanschauung*. Hitler was easily able to articulate this, to great effect. “Just think”, he proclaimed, “over a period of some two thousand years we can follow the German people in history, and

¹²⁴ *MK*, p. 307

¹²⁵ *HSB*, p. 4

¹²⁶ *Speeches*, 18 September 1922, in *Circus Krone*, p. 108. Materialism was frequently said to be a primary characteristic of the Jews. The growing antagonism towards materialism during the late nineteenth century led to hostility against the Jews. As Eatwell puts it: “Diffuse hostility towards material values became increasingly translated...into political anti-Semitism.” Eatwell, *op.cit.*, p. 6

never in the course of history has this people possessed this single formation both in the conceptions of its thought and in its action which it possesses to-day. For the first time since Germans appeared in the world there is a single Reich dominated by a single view of the world, protected by a single army and all that united under a single flag.”¹²⁷ The nation - though consisting of individual people - was above these individuals, for, it was said, without the nation, the people, the race, would be doomed. Again the emphasis was on the enemy, the Jew, whose object was to “denationalise” other peoples.¹²⁸ “There are only two possibilities”, prophesied Hitler, “either victory of the Aryan or annihilation of the Aryan and the victory of the Jew.”¹²⁹ This Aryan victory could be ensured by the obliteration of “alien” racial elements. Therefore it was essential for the survival of the people that National Socialism fought to ensure racial purity. For this survival, it would be necessary both to strengthen the nation and to destroy the enemy - each of these tasks having a reciprocal effect upon the other.

The pursuit of *Lebensraum* in the East was symbolised as a necessary strengthening of the nation. This was done with the aid of the biological symbolism that so pervaded National Socialism. The

¹²⁷ *Speeches*, 8 November 1935, at Munich, p. 137

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 213. This “denationalisation” was tantamount to destruction, according to Nazis, because of the indispensability of the race-nation unity.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, 12 April, 1922 at the Conference held in Genoa, p. 14

necessity of biological survival was said to be the essential touchstone of all social processes and structures. National Socialism applied this argument to the survival of the nation.¹³⁰ According to Nazi ideology, physical territorial expansion was essential to this survival. It was in keeping with the nation's "struggle for existence"¹³¹ and the winning of this struggle was to the Nazis a holy cause - a cause which brooked no opposition. The pursuit of *Lebensraum* was a "holy right".¹³² The "holiness" of this "right" was deeply underlined by the mystical qualities associated with blood within Nazi ideology.

Although the race-doctrine was usually portrayed in scientific terms (as Hitler put it, with "the knowledge and scientific insights of race theory..."¹³³), much of it rested on the blood mystique. The blood was said to harbour mystical forces that would enable the German people to achieve all that had been promised them by National Socialism. Therefore, it was the duty of National Socialism to ensure that the spirit of the blood was given full rein and was not fenced in by the failed ideas associated with bourgeois morality. To this extent, blood was also a symbol of the Nazi revolution against the (Nazi-defined) cold logic and inner decay of the era of bourgeois parliamentarianism and spirit-destroying liberal democracy. In Nazi

¹³⁰ This was possible only because the nation was thought of as a discrete, living organism.

¹³¹ *HSB*, p. 15

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 15

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 103

ideology, blood symbolised vigour, intensity, fanaticism, the love of battle, health and success.¹³⁴ Like the nation, Aryan blood was a positive symbol. Blood was, in some ways, a more fundamental symbol than even that of the nation, because the nation was said to rise or fall on the purity of its blood stock. In other words, as Glaser puts it: “The propaganda of the National Socialist was ‘blood conscious’.”¹³⁵ And Mosse explains that “purity of blood had become a symbol for the purity of the race and for its vigour.”¹³⁶ Hitler utilised this symbolism to its fullest when he appealed to his followers in what can only be described as messianic terms: “You are the living Germany of the future, not an empty idea, no mere formula: you are blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh, spirit of our spirit, you are our people’s future.”¹³⁷ Blood was a symbol of purity and of strength, but it was also a symbol of continuity, success and cultural and national superiority.

¹³⁴ HSB, p. 23

¹³⁵ Hermann Glaser, *The Cultural Roots of National Socialism* (London, 1978) p. 152. Glaser notes that “new standards were blessed with the ‘blood banner’ which had been carried during the demonstration of 1923 at the *Feldernheller* and ‘dipped’ into the blood of the fallen.” p. 152. He also points out that the dead of the World War and of the Nazi movement were described as “blood witnesses”, p. 152

¹³⁶ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution, A History of European Racism* (London, 1978) p. 104

¹³⁷ *Speeches*, September 1933, at *Parteitag* in Nuremberg, p. 538. Interestingly, the “German Christians” “ascribed a mission to the Führer willed by God [and] sought to change the religious preachings and the ecclesiastical organisations in accordance with National Socialist principles.” Gerhard Weltig, “Totalitarian Control in the light of Christian Tradition”, *Aussen Politik, German Foreign Affairs Review*, volume 47, Quarterly Edition, no. 1, 1996, p.7

It can be seen, then, just how fundamental to Nazi ideology this complex use of symbolism was. It was essential to the mobilisation of the population and, by any standards, it had a significant degree of success. The use of propaganda was intrinsic to Nazi methods of gaining and maintaining control. The Nazis made full use of a wide range of propaganda, from the feature-length cinema film to the use of peripatetic agitators. However, although there was a self-aware practical use of symbolism in the mobilisation of the German people, the use of symbolism was also very much ideological. This was because Nazi ideology was heavily reliant on its symbolism to cohere. These symbols were geared to an emotional impact and the population's emotions were, to an important extent, successfully manipulated through them. Therefore, the Nazis mobilised a significant proportion of the German people in favour of, or at least in passive acceptance of, Nazi aims, by the complex use of symbols. Danger was contrasted with salvation, health with corruption, good with evil. Clear dangers were linked with supposed threats; definite benefits with ill-defined goals. Certain elements took on near-magical properties or, at any rate, were certainly assigned a totality of parts much greater than their whole. The Nazis dealt in reality, but much of their symbolism had only tenuous links with objective reality - if any at all.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that in order to understand the phenomenon of Nazism, it is essential to focus on its ideology. It is only through an examination of this ideology and its symbolic functions that Nazism and its manifestations can be adequately understood. This chapter has been concerned with the composition of Nazi ideology and the way in which its followers sought to popularise and impose it. However, the history of Nazism has so far remained unconsidered. It is, of course, essential to look at and consider the inception of the ideology. Questions as to its cause, origins and antecedents must be addressed. In the next chapter, the work of Zeev Sternhell will be examined as an aid to resolving these questions.

Chapter Four

Zeev Sternhell - the crisis of liberalism
and Nazi ideology

Zeev Sternhell

the crisis of liberalism and Nazi ideology

In this chapter, Sternhell's theory on the origins of fascist ideology will be examined. His thesis was that changing social conditions precipitated a crisis in both Marxism and liberalism; that the turn of the century saw a rejection of the materialism and values of the Enlightenment; that the rise of nationalism, and the concomitant disillusion with the revolutionary qualities of the masses, lead to the synthesis of a non-materialist socialism with a radical nationalism; and that this synthesis was the foundation of a "Third Way" - a radical political option which was neither of the right nor of the left. I will here consider Sternhell's thesis, and argue that Sternhell's rejection of the inclusion of Nazism in his account of

fascism (because of its biological determinism) is neither valid nor useful.

In exploring Nazi ideology, it is necessary to consider the *generation* of this ideology. It is important to look at how an ideology comes into being, because this can be essential to its analysis. Thus, an examination of its origination can be an aid to understanding whether it was an unexpected phenomenon, or whether it was predictable, given its antecedents. It can also help to clarify ambiguous points and answer questions about the reasons why certain ideological traits arose. This is the value of the work of Zeev Sternhell. Although there are other models of fascism that could have been used for this purpose, Sternhell's has been chosen here because of its usefulness as an effective entry-point into a discussion of the intellectual history of fascism. His work presents a view of fascism that plausibly explains many aspects of it. His explanation gives insight into the intellectual background of fascism and permits acknowledgement that fascist ideology possessed an internal coherence. By illustrating the intellectual precursors of fascism, fascism's developmental history is exposed. This enables fascism to be placed in the context of the history of ideas in Europe, rather than being seen simply as a localised (German) aberration bereft of ideological moorings. I will argue that Sternhell's theory advances a

convincing reason for the development of fascism and fascist ideology and one which, it will be contended here, can be used effectively to examine Nazi ideology and its intellectual precursors.

Sternhell's thesis has not gone unchallenged. There has been criticism, for example, that his thesis overstates the left-wing dimension; does not sufficiently allow for the actual political diversity in inter-war France; and places too much emphasis on the role of ideas while neglecting the existing socio-economic conditions.¹ This is not the occasion to debate these criticisms. My own particular criticism of Sternhell is that his rejection of Nazism from the generic fascism which he describes, on the grounds of its biological determinism, is flawed,² as is his assertion that fascism was wholly antithetical to the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, it remains the case that by its very breadth and originality and by the enormous

¹ For example, Eatwell criticises Sternhell's emphasis on the influence of left-wing thought in the development of fascism as being lacking in sufficient acknowledgement of the role of *right-wing* thought. See R. Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1995) p. 278. Also, Griffin reports that Sternhell has been criticised for his division of the political thinkers of inter-war France into those *either* of the left *or* of the right, while failing to take into sufficient consideration other political traditions which did not fit into these two categories. See R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p. 6

² In the essay, "Fascist Ideology", Sternhell specifically excludes the case of Nazism because, in his view, it cannot be dealt with as "a mere variant of fascism", for its "emphasis on biological determinism rules out all efforts to deal with it as such." He argues that "even if one regards Nazism as an exacerbated form of fascism", this very intensification changes it into a "new and different phenomenon." Thus, he says that "the evidence obliges us to concede that there comes a point when the degree of extremism in a political movement radically alters the very nature of that movement." Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology" (hereafter "FI"), in Walter Laqueur (editor), *Fascism, A Reader's Guide: Analyses, interpretations, bibliography* (Harmondsworth, 1979) p. 328

influence it has exerted in this field, Sternhell's work remains essential in any study of fascist ideology.

In examining Sternhell's ideas on the origins of fascism, their applicability to those of Nazism will be demonstrated. As previously mentioned, there is much debate over whether Nazism and fascism are the same. I do not intend to engage with this debate in an exhaustive fashion.³ It will be sufficient for my purposes to demonstrate that Nazism formed part of a larger ideological universe, and that - *contra* Sternhell's own claims - *his account of the origins of Fascism, can also be extended to Nazism.*

In his *Birth of fascist Ideology*, Sternhell argues that, before fascism became a political force, it was first a cultural movement. In addition, he contends that the rise of fascism would not have been possible were it not for the way in which this cultural movement interacted with the prevailing "political, social, and psychological conditions that came into being at the end of the First World War."⁴ In other words, fascism had a specific history, it was not a movement which suddenly - and without antecedents - appeared. In fact,

³ In examination of this debate, it is useful to refer to Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship, Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1985) especially pages 18-40

⁴ Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology, From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, translated by David Maisel (Princeton, 1994) p. 3

fascism grew out of a rejection of the dominant culture.⁵ In his “Fascist Ideology” essay, Sternhell indicates how wide the appeal of fascism was.⁶ After the war, there was considerable reluctance, in political debate, to concede that fascism had any properly defined ideology at all. And, even where an ideology was acknowledged, there was often an insistence that it was wholly subordinate to the opportunism of the political leaders. This summation is rejected by Sternhell, who argues that, although all political ideologies need at some time to bow to pragmatic considerations, this does not stop them being ideologies and worthy of study. The unavoidable shifts in emphasis between the ideology in power and the ideology before power is attained, between fundamental principles and practical exigencies, must be acknowledged.⁷ Fascists “insisted not only on the continual adaptation of ideologies to meet practical necessities, and the constant evolution of ideology insofar as the realities changed, but also on the importance of supplying ideological cover to such sectors of political reality as were lacking in it.”⁸ Nevertheless, Sternhell argues that, when studying fascist ideology, in order to get a purer view of it, it is essential to examine it before political power is

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6

⁶ “*FI*”, p. 325-326

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 326-328

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 331

entrenched. Therefore he directs the focus of his attention towards the roots of the ideology.⁹

Prior to the First World War, a distinct “fascist atmosphere”¹⁰ (consisting of a growing together of nationalism and non-materialist socialism) had arisen in France,¹¹ which quickly spread throughout Europe. However, even before this, in the decade of the 1880s, the ideological roots were strong because, he says, of a “crisis that had overtaken democracy and liberalism and bourgeois society in all its fundamental values.”¹² Both the right and the left reacted against bourgeois society and sought to put a radical alternative in its place. Therefore, in order to understand fascism (and, it is contended here, Nazism also) it is essential to consider the intellectual climate pertaining to the latter part of nineteenth century Europe.

There appeared at this time, according to Sternhell, “a radical, popular, and socialistically inclined right, which heralded and prepared the way for the fascism of the twenties and thirties.”¹³ It embarked upon an “intellectual revolution” against reason, against

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 332

¹⁰ *ibid.* (in the words of Pierre Drieu La Rochelle) p. 332

¹¹ Sternhell describes France as the “real birthplace of fascism.” Zeev Sternhell, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology, From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (hereafter, *BFI*), translated by David Maisel (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994) p. 4

¹² *ibid.*, p. 333

¹³ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (hereafter *NRNL*), translated by David Maisel (Berkeley, 1986) p. 6

materialism and against liberal democracy.¹⁴ In rejecting this materialism, not only liberalism but also Marxism was rejected. This rejection of Marxism enabled the joining together of men from the traditional left and those from the right. The revolutionary syndicalists of France were the first to reject “the materialist and mechanistic aspect of Marxism”.¹⁵ There was a loss of faith in the revolutionary capacity of the working class.¹⁶ In 1926 Henri de Man published his very successful and influential *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus*, the purpose of which was, in his own words, “the liquidation of Marxism”.¹⁷ Although Marxism was rejected, the desire for revolution was not.¹⁸ Marxism was seen by De Man as being an ideology of a particular period which had now passed.¹⁹ In the inter-war period a socialism completely separated from Marxism was produced.²⁰ Sternhell says that “the demolition of Marxism gave birth

¹⁴ “FI”, p. 333-334

¹⁵ Zeev Sternhell, “The ‘Anti-materialist’ Revision of Marxism as an Aspect of the Rise of Fascist Ideology”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, volume 22 (1987) p. 379

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 380

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 381

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 382. In *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, Sternhell points out that “the notion of class struggle now represented an ideology in which vitalism, intuition, pessimism and activism, the cult of energy, heroism, and proletarian violence - sources of morality and virtue - had replaced Marxist rationalism.” *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 24

¹⁹ Sternhell points out that at the end of the nineteenth century came “a period of unprecedented expansion and prosperity. This new prosperity, which seemed to last, created an environment in which political and economic phenomena were very different from those which Marx had been able to observe. Socialist thought consequently had to confront a series of new problems that were hard to explain in terms of orthodox Marxist analyses. With this new situation began the celebrated ‘crisis of Marxism’.” *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 13

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 391

to a new conception of a state in the service of a directed revolution carried out in the name of the nation as a whole".²¹

Democracy for its part was condemned as the "mortal enemy" of socialism, and the bringer of the nation "to the verge of extinction."²² Many of the intellectuals of the time deplored the routine and the corruption they claimed to see in bourgeois society. They were opposed to the "rationalistic individualism of liberal society"²³; and they favoured instinct and heroism. Sternhell explains that

the belief in the dominance of the unconscious over reason, the stress on deep, mysterious forces led, as a natural and necessary consequence, to an extreme anti-intellectualism. To rationalism, to the critical spirit and its manifestations, the rebels of the end of the nineteenth century opposed intuitive feelings, emotions, enthusiasms, an unthinking spontaneity welling from the depths of the popular subconscious...This anti-intellectualism was paralleled, moreover, by a demagogic populism that decried intelligence and the use of words and glorified action, energy and force.²⁴

Even at this time, the reliance on anti-rationalism, on instinct and sentiment, was already entrenched.²⁵ Following the war and the

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 395

²² *NRNL.*, p. 19

²³ "FI", p. 334. He says that the "generation of 1890...was violently opposed to the rationalistic individualism of the liberal order...and to the 'materialism' that prevailed there." *NRNL.*, p. 33

²⁴ *NRNL.*, p. 36

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 33

ensuing economic problems, this intellectual climate was exacerbated, allowing fascism “to burgeon and grow into a powerful mass movement.”²⁶

These ideas were compounded by the growth of the new social sciences at the beginning of the century.²⁷ Sternhell explains that “these new social sciences, particularly psychology and anthropology, which in turn influenced sociology, political science, and historical research, provided both the anti-liberal and the anti-Marxist reactions with their conceptual framework.”²⁸ Science and pseudo-science played a large part here. Social Darwinism paved the way for modern racialism with its emphasis on behaviour being governed by the struggle for survival rather than rational choice. Reason was rejected in favour of intuition and feeling. There was a “new view of man...as an essentially irrational being, confined by historical and biological limitations and motivated by sentiments, associations, and images, never by ideas.”²⁹ This, in turn, led to a dismissal of political systems founded on reason (i.e., democracy). There were calls for an authoritarian race-leader who would rid the world of the evils of a “corrupt” civilisation. These ideas were, to a surprising

²⁶ “FI”, p. 335

²⁷ *NRNL.*, p. 35

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 35

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 36

extent, accepted within society. Nationalist sentiment, along with *völkisch* ideology, which emphasised nature and described the soul of a people as being linked to the land, flourished. (These ideas were used to disparage Jews, who were portrayed as soul-less nomads.³⁰) The nation was said to be a living organism within which the individual was unimportant compared with the “national consciousness”³¹ of the collectivity. International socialism became undermined and failed to make a complete recovery of its lost ground. Instead, nationalism bred patriotism and a zest for war - war which would bestow glory.

At first, this nationalism was strongly tied to the liberal tradition, but with economic conditions engendering world competition, it slowly changed its nature. Defeat in war was blamed on “the fundamental weakness of liberal democracy”³² and the nationalist movement became entwined with a general social and intellectual revolt against the values of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.³³ This “revolt”, as Sternhell terms it, “led to a glorification of the institution that was felt to represent the element of

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 337

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 338

³² *ibid.*, p. 339

³³ “The growth of fascism would not have been possible without the revolt against the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.”, *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 3

unity - the nation.”³⁴ Nationalism went hand in hand with criticism of social injustice, and nationalists sought to mobilise those sections of society badly affected by modernisation, in the name of authoritarian group solidarity.³⁵ A synthesis was being created between “a certain type of socialism and...the nationalists’ political authoritarianism...”³⁶ This synthesis represented the attempt to find a political “third way”, being neither of the right nor of the left.³⁷ By the turn of the century certain groups and parties were being formed which were committed to this synthesis and they were strongly peppered with anti-Semitism. Sternhell explains that “the ideological trend that expressed the new intellectual climate in the most tangible way and in a manner accessible to the greatest number was anti-Semitism...the first national socialists discovered its revolutionary power and its capacity to mobilise the masses.”³⁸ This anti-Semitism was not prejudice alone because “as an instrument of unification of the people, anti-Semitism was a political concept...”³⁹ The Jew was portrayed as being at odds with the nation, as being internationalist,

³⁴ *NRNL.*, p. 33

³⁵ “FI”., p. 339. Sternhell explains that, although fascism “rebelled against the dehumanisation that modernisation had introduced into human relationships”, it was nevertheless “very eager to retain the benefits of progress and never advocated a return to a hypothetical golden age.” *BFI, op.cit.*, pages 6-7

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 340

³⁷ Sternhell explains that the antimaterialism of these rejecters of Marxism and liberalism “represented a third revolutionary option between the two great systems that dominated the political life of the period and that, over and above all their differences, nevertheless remained the heirs of the eighteenth century...Fascism was antimaterialism in its clearest form.” *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 8

³⁸ *NRNL.*, p. 44

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 45

cosmopolitan. The Jew, in fact, says Sternhell, “symbolised the anti-nation...”⁴⁰ This anti-Semitism was used both as a mobilising device and, as Sternhell puts it, as “the perfect tool for the integration of the proletariat within the national community...”⁴¹

This synthesis of nationalism and socialism was yet to “benefit” from the economic problems that were to follow World War I. Despite this, there was complete agreement on the deficiencies of the parliamentary system and liberal democracy. This led eventually to numbers of radicals shifting from left to right in an attempt to find solutions to social problems. An important and fundamental feature of this popular right was its rejection of the existing socio-political order. It was this “total rejection of the established order,” says Sternhell, which “motivated one of the most important factors in the rise of fascist ideology: the transition from left to right.”⁴² Large numbers of working people were prepared to accompany them. This was the first hint of an opening door to fascism. Not the would-be harmonious internationalism of socialism, but rather international *struggle* was the concept presented to the proletariat in order to stir

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 46 During 1898-99, Sternhell points out, anti-Semitism “was a genuine mass movement, and the anti-Semitic disturbances of that period were extremely serious.” *ibid.*, p. 47

⁴¹ “FI”, p. 341

⁴² *NRNL.*, p. 15

them to activity.⁴³ In this way, as Sternhell puts it, socialism would be “transcended in National-Socialism.”⁴⁴

Many nationalists saw all social problems as being exclusively the result of parliamentarism and liberal democracy. The state was seen as having “lost” all national feeling, and therefore it was essential to remodel it in the authoritarian mould. A new élitist sociology arose which contended that it was in keeping with the reality of natural selection in human society that an authoritarian élite should rule over a passive majority. These views overturned the concept of egalitarianism that had come with the French Revolution - a concept once seen to have been in harmony with the natural sciences.⁴⁵

Revolutionary socialists were also strongly opposed to liberal-democracy.⁴⁶ Not only was democracy considered to be anti-national, but also, both to the nationalists and the revolutionary syndicalists, it was an agent of destruction. As Sternhell says: “To both, it had no legitimacy, it was contrary to nature - it symbolised evil.”⁴⁷

⁴³ “FI”, p. 342

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 343

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 344

⁴⁶ Charles Maurras of the *Action française* said, in 1900, that “a pure socialist system would be free of any democratic element...It would submit to the rules of the hierarchy inscribed in the constitution of nature and the spirit.” *ibid.* (“Sur le nom de socialiste”, *L’Action française*, 15 November 1900) p. 62

⁴⁷ *NRNL.*, p. 60.

Democracy meant only that there was nothing more in society than “a process of continual rotation of élite groups”⁴⁸ (of which the present bourgeois parliamentarians were one), any of which might stir up the masses to satisfy their own ends. The revolutionary socialists wished for a minority of workers to lead the masses. Many of these socialists later became fascists or militant nationalists.⁴⁹ Those who favoured victory by way of universal suffrage were condemned as playing by the bourgeois rules. The emphasis within the far left was on “violent rebellion” being instigated by a “minority of informed activists.”⁵⁰ They strove to insert within the proletariat a rejection of all forms of bourgeois or liberal values including respect for the law, and instead an embracing of “the warrior virtues.”⁵¹ Society was portrayed - not in terms of class struggle, but rather in terms of an antagonism between two blocs in society - the revolutionary versus the reactionary. The revolutionary socialists and nationalists were in the first bloc - the liberal-democrats in the second. Thus, says Sternhell, “revolutionary syndicalists and nationalists, as well as anti-democrats and anti-liberals of every colour, had now found common ground...”⁵² This common ground was the destruction of democracy and its replacement by a new order - a new order that would soon be

⁴⁸ “FI”, p. 345

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 346. Roberto Michels, Hubert Lagardelle, Marcel Déat, Henri de Man, are examples.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 347

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 348

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 348

discerned via fascism. “A combination of circumstances”, says Sternhell, “contributed much to undermining the foundations of democracy, pluralism, and of a certain view of the world generally associated with the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.”⁵³

There was a new cure proposed for the ills of bourgeois society. That cure was war. It was argued that social unity could be catalysed by war. To Valois, war ensured that the importance of blood and sword would become overriding.⁵⁴ It would ensure the opposition of “the law of blood” to the socially divisive “law of gold.”⁵⁵ War was portrayed, as Sternhell explains, as a “glorification of heroic virtues.”⁵⁶ To ensure that these virtues were allowed full rein, it was essential that society should be “run by men who had this fighting spirit.”⁵⁷ War would encompass the entire nation and so do away with intra-national schisms. In this, the far left socialists and syndicalists and the nationalists of the new right were in agreement.

⁵³ NRNL., p. 273

⁵⁴ G. Valois, *La Revolution nationale*, [Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1924], quoted in NRNL, p. 95

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 95

⁵⁶ NRNL., p. 95

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 96

The advent of war showed clearly that the masses were more inclined to national than to class solidarity. In the aftermath of the war, conditions combined to ensure that this “consensus” soon was turned into a “true political force.”⁵⁸ The interwar generation had “lost faith in the revolutionary virtues of the proletariat...”⁵⁹ and had instead put their faith in the nation as an agent of revolution. This led many on the left to become fully converted to nationalism (Mussolini being a notable example) and to become strongly anti-Marxist. The idea of class had given way to the idea of nation.⁶⁰ Class solidarity became switched to national, cultural solidarity. De Man, for example, emphasised that “the workers have the same intellectual foundations, the same cultural heritage, and the same national institutions as all the other members of society.”⁶¹ It was essential to understand the importance of “ideas common to all the nation...”⁶² According to De Man, says Sternhell, “the most miserable of unskilled workers was linked in his daily existence by as many bonds of solidarity with the national community as with the class to which he belonged.”⁶³ “The nation replaced the proletariat”, says

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 352

⁵⁹ *NRNL.*, p. 17-18

⁶⁰ “FI”., p. 353

⁶¹ Henri De Man, *La Leçon de la guerre*, quoted in *NRNL*, p. 162

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 163

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 163

Sternhell, “and the transition from revolutionary syndicalism to national socialism took place quite naturally.”⁶⁴

According to Sternhell, fascism was the direct result of this crisis in liberal-democracy and in Marxism.⁶⁵ Fascism was a revolutionary movement that was a synthesis of ideological elements from the past brought together after the war. In other words, it was the “full flowering of the movement of revolt at the end of the nineteenth century.”⁶⁶ Fascists were convinced that they were heralding the start of a new era with “a new type of society and a new type of man.”⁶⁷ Their ideology was a radical alternative to liberal democracy, rationalism, individualism and materialism; all of which were seen to be the result of the outdated ideas of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸ Sternhell describes it thus:

A classic ideology of rejection, fascism implied the repudiation of a certain political culture associated with the eighteenth century and the French Revolution, and sought to lay the foundation of a new civilisation, a communal, anti-individualist civilisation that alone would be capable of perpetuating the existence of a human collectivity in which all layers and classes of society are perfectly integrated. The

⁶⁴ *NRNL*, p. 18. He believes that “from the very beginning national socialism was a mass movement.” *ibid.*, p. 41

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 2

⁶⁶ “FI”, p. 359

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 355

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 356

natural framework for such a harmonious, organic collectivity was the nation...⁶⁹

Youth was seen to be a motive force of the new way - youth in revolt against the decadence of the old bourgeois civilisation.

“Fascism was a revolt against materialism, a revolt of the spirit, the will, the instincts; it was a revolt of youth”, says Sternhell. And not only was it a “revolt of youth”, it was also a “cult of youth.”⁷⁰ Even from the 1890s, this “call to youth” was very pertinent because “modern civilisation was associated with corruption, vice, decadence,”⁷¹ which had to be overturned and replaced by something new, youthful and certain. “To pessimism and doubt”, says Sternhell, “were opposed the certitudes of history, of the national collectivity, of the race; to the artifice so prevalent in the cultural life of the period was opposed a cult of energy and vitality; to an ageing civilisation, a cult of youth; to disintegration and individualism, a sense of discipline and the powers of the instinct.”⁷² The sword would be raised - the Barbarian would triumph. Idealism and spiritualism would come before materialism. The solution to this materialistic and

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27. Sternhell also explains that “the fascist movements - all the fascist movements - had the same lineage: a revolt against liberal-democracy and bourgeois society, and an absolute refusal to accept the conclusions inherent in the general outlook, in the explanation of social phenomena and human relations, of all the so-called ‘materialist’ schools of thought. The rise of fascism appears to have been one of the by-products of the crisis of Marxism and the crisis of liberalism, one of the consequences of the enormous difficulties encountered by both Marxism and liberal democracy before the realities of the twentieth century.” *NRNL.*, p. 27. Also see *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 6

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 249

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 251

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 251

degrading society was, it was believed, to be found in fascism. "Fascism", says Sternhell, "satisfied both a longing for revolution and a desire to preserve the past, the national history, and the cultural paraphernalia of society. wanted to do away with democracy, liberalism, and Marxism; it wanted to end the immobility and materialism of bourgeois society, yet without endangering the national collectivity."⁷³ Liberalism, democracy, Marxism - all were seen as destroying the spirit of the nation and making society decadent. The goal of the opposition - whether fascist or quasi-fascist was, as Sternhell puts it, "to save the spirit and to regenerate the body of modern society."⁷⁴ This could only be done by recognising that liberalism, democracy, Marxism and socialism were, as Sternhell puts it, "only different aspects of one and the same evil - materialism."⁷⁵ The solution to the threat had to consist of the destruction of all these evils.⁷⁶

A reliance on emotion and feeling would lead to health and vigour that would regenerate the nation.⁷⁷ This was the fascist mission and the youthful fascist would "be prepared to make any

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 229

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 229

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 232

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 241

⁷⁷ "FI", p. 357

sacrifice”⁷⁸ to attain this goal. To do this it was essential to abjure softness and weakness.⁷⁹ It was necessary to be tough, to be disciplined. As Sternhell explains, “meant replacing ‘the incentive of lucre by the incentive of duty’; it required ‘a disposition to sacrifice, a will to fight’...”⁸⁰ The young fascist had this disposition.⁸¹ Fascist ideology celebrated danger. It celebrated “strength, willingness to serve, obedience, authority, self-denial...”⁸² Fascists named themselves, in the words of Leon Degrelle, “political soldiers.”⁸³ proclaimed itself to be synonymous with action, and the presence among its supporters of ex-servicemen who praised the absence of class division at the front, helped to transfer the idea of action into the public mind, while at the same time reinforcing the antagonism against the bourgeois system.⁸⁴

The fascists had a well-defined idea of the role of the individual. “fascist ideology”, says Sternhell, “was born of a political tradition

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 358

⁷⁹ *ibid.* Sternhell says that “fascism thus appeared as a rejection of comfort...”, p. 257

⁸⁰ Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste*, quoted in “FI”, p. 257

⁸¹ “FI”. In the words of Brasillach, “the young fascist, exulting in his race and in his nation, proud of his vigorous body, his clear mind, scorning the cumbersome goods of this world...” *ibid.*, p. 259. De Man also railed against the bourgeois emphasis on material possessions, criticising the “utilitarian platitude of an education directed exclusively toward profit as an oppression of the heroic instincts of struggle, adventure and sacrifice, and the constraints of scholastic life and urban civilisation as a hindrance to the natural instinct for travel and sport.” De Man, *L’Idée Socialiste*, quoted in “FI”, p. 261

⁸² “FI”., p. 358

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 363

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 362

that considered the individual a function of group life.”⁸⁵ It rejected the idea of individual human rights and, to this extent, was consistent with classic anti-revolutionary thought. As Sternhell says, “the new importance given to historical values and various idealistic factors amounted to a condemnation of rationalism and individualism. The role of the individual was made subordinate to that of society and of history.”⁸⁶ Mussolini summed it up when he said: “is therefore opposed to all individualistic abstractions based on eighteenth-century materialism.”⁸⁷ It did not simply reject the idea of individual human rights, however, it also elevated the importance of the State over the individual.⁸⁸ Community or racial spirit or *Geist* was more valid. Individual freedom was neither possible nor desirable without a strong state - a state based on a community of blood, a state that would provide “a solution to alienation”.⁸⁹ Under there would be unity rather than diversity, and this unity would be presided over by a leader who embodied the spirit of the nation.⁹⁰ would produce, said Valois, “a state that does not belong to one class

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 364

⁸⁶ *NRNL.*, p. 33

⁸⁷ quoted in “FI”., p. 365. Sternhell explains this in even more detail in his *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*: “In its essence, fascist thought was a rejection of the value known in the culture of the time as materialism. For fascism, liberalism, which at the end of the nineteenth century developed into liberal democracy, and Marxism, one ramification of which was democratic socialism, represented one and the same materialistic evil. In the sense in which it was understood at the end of the nineteenth century, antimaterialism meant the rejection of the rationalistic, individualistic, and utilitarian heritage of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 7

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 366

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 367

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 368

but to all, and that is national; a unified state with a leader; a state in which the leader represents the action of authority..."⁹¹

The political structures of the nineteenth century were invalidated by the political realities of mass society in the twentieth century. They were seen as being based on outdated notions of rational choice rather than the modern view of the irrationalism of mass politics. In this modern view it was contended that mass politics demanded shared feelings in order to forge unity. Instinct was praised over reason and every kind of irrationality over the rationality of democracy.⁹² A new reliance on mass instinct was promoted. Sternhell argues that it was this failure on the part of nineteenth century institutions and doctrines to be adapted to changing conditions, plus the strand in socialism that demanded a strong state to stand against the power of money interests that pointed the way towards . As the neo-socialist ideology rapidly became truly fascist, the Marxist conception of class struggle was condemned as being an ideology well past its day. The middle classes - prey to the economic crises - shared the proletariat's hostility to "the capitalist system and the liberal state."⁹³ It was necessary for the

⁹¹ Valois, "Le fascisme, conclusion de mouvement de 1789", quoted in *NRNL*, p. 106. He also called for a national leader "who would be above all classes, above all parties..." Valois, "Les Relations de l'État", quoted in *NRNL*, p. 109

⁹² "FI", p. 370

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 375

unity of the nation to ensure that class conflict was surmounted by a drive by “workers of all classes”⁹⁴ against the ravages of capitalism. According to Sternhell, “this desire to bring socialism up to date and adapt it to the modern world ultimately resulted in .”⁹⁵

In summary: Sternhell traces the growth of to a crisis of liberalism. This crisis arose for a number of reasons, not least of which was the defeat in World War I, which was blamed on democratic parliamentarians. It was also the case that radical socialists lost faith in the ability of the masses to act. This meant that the idea that social classes would be the instrument of social change, gave way to the idea that, instead, it would be the nation. This emphasis on the importance of the nation led to a situation where the State was seen as having primacy over the individual. The idea of nationalism grew and became powerful. World economic competition and the accompanying ever-present threat of war helped it to grow. Both the left and the right became disillusioned with bourgeois society and its lack of impetus. It was no longer believed that mass politics was based on reason, but rather on irrationalism. This led to a emphasis on the importance of emotions and instincts. Populist politics came to the fore. This in turn led to the belief that

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 376

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 376

the rule of an authoritarian élite in a strong state was the best political system. Bourgeois society was seen as being under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment. These ideas were condemned. Bourgeois society was seen as being unable to change and being, therefore, destined to perish in the struggle for survival.

Although in his work, Sternhell's specific area of interest is the rise of , it seems undeniable that his ideas are applicable also to the rise of Nazism. Indeed, his descriptions of the thought of the radical and authoritarian nationalists serve as illustration of the ideological history of Nazism. It becomes clear that the ideas of the Nazis were neither plucked out of thin air nor were solely the ideas of Hitler, but rather that they had a long and logically cohesive history. There were reasons why certain ideas came about and why certain ways of thinking changed. For example, the reaction against the ideas of the Enlightenment that Sternhell emphasises is mirrored in Nazi ideology's rhetoric of opposition to reason and liberalism. In all Sternhell's evidence, the route taken in the growth of could also be the route taken in the growth of Nazism. The ideas, the themes, are all very similar. Just as the proto-fascists rejected liberalism, so did the Nazis. Just as they lauded the nation, authoritarianism, revolution and action, so did the Nazis. Indeed, Hitler, himself, declared: "When I read the history of , I feel as if I am reading the

history of our movement...”⁹⁶ Although Sternhell specifically excludes Nazis from his thesis on the grounds that the race-emphasis separated it significantly from , even in his own evidence, many of his proto-fascists were anti-Semites and the race element was far from insignificant.

Therefore, it is clear that there are many parallels between the beliefs of the revolutionary socialists and radical nationalists described by Sternhell, and the ideology of Nazism. Sternhell's thinkers detested democracy and it has been seen that a abhorrence of democracy was fundamental to Nazi ideology. Hitler was in every way an opponent of it. In his view, it was a system that could only fail, because the masses neither wished nor were able to rule themselves. Instead they needed a strong leader to rule them, rather than the weak and corrupt parliamentary system with which democracy had endowed them. In connection with this rejection of democracy, he describes in *Mein Kampf*, how “men of national and patriotic mind became rebels. Rebels, not against the nation and not against the State as such, but rebels against a kind of government which in their conviction would inevitably lead to the destruction of their own nationality.”⁹⁷ Democracy was founded on the false values

⁹⁶ *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944, His Private Conversations*, translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London, 1973) 5 August 1942, p. 614

⁹⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Mannheim (London, 1989) p. 87

of liberalism, containing a bogus premise of equality. It was clear to Hitler that, because of this, democracy was the predecessor of Marxism and was ripe for take-over by the Communists. Also, because of the inherent falseness of democracy, it was very dangerous to the health of the nation. It laid the nation wide open to the corruption of its parliamentary leaders who only operated in their self interests. In addition, it exposed the nation to cowardly rule by the leaderless masses. As Sternhell has explained, it was also believed by the revolutionary socialists, many of whom would eventually become fascists, that democracy was the enemy. This was because it was seen as being a mere sop for the masses, allowing them to believe themselves to have power, whereas in reality being manipulated by a powerful élite. In this way, they too believed that democracy was a destroyer of the nation and enemy of socialism.

Sternhell explains how those radicals who were the precursors to denied the importance of individual human rights and, again, this was a theme of Nazi ideology. Nazism dismissed individual human or civil rights. The nation was all. Each individual only had worth in so far as he could save the nation. Conversely, a human being was only truly human when he was within the community of race and nation. Individualism was hated on another level - it was seen as a product of liberalism. From the time of the Enlightenment the prevailing idea of

a human being was of an individual governed by reason. The Nazis instead adhered to a more organic view of society - with the individual being seen as merely one part of the whole. They stressed homogeneity rather than variety, and in a homogenous community there was no room for individualism. The rational individualism of the Enlightenment period was disregarded. As with Sternhell's proto-fascists, it was argued that the individual was not ruled by his reason - but rather by his instincts and his emotions. Therefore, the Enlightenment idea of the rational person was inherently flawed. In addition, if the idea of rational human beings was allowed, then it permitted the idea of democracy. In Nazi eyes, this was where society had erred. By attempting to allow the people to rule, instead of strong leaders, the nation had been critically weakened. Human beings were governed - not by their reason - but by their desires and this should be understood by the participants in any political system.

Although it has been made clear that there were many intellectuals within the Nazi movement (indeed in some ways one could say that intellectuals were the backbone of Nazism), yet the anti-intellectual rhetoric of Hitler and the other Nazis was sustained and repetitive. They lauded the idea that certain truths were only known by race - through the blood, instinctively. Part of the distaste for intellectualism was due to the Nazi reliance on the idea of action.

Action was what was felt to be lacking in Germany. Again this was partly due to the Versailles treaty and the feeling of helplessness and paralysis that had gripped German society. The war had also exacerbated this feeling for the need for action. There was an overriding belief that while soldiers were at the Front fighting and dying for their country - the politicians and intellectuals at home were pontificating and taking no action and so losing the war. In addition, intellectualism was rejected because of its links with the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thought had welcomed reason, had welcomed a world run by reason, therefore by the intellect. If reason was rejected, if the Enlightenment was rejected, it was certain that those who held to the intellect and to reason would also be rejected.

Nazis instead stressed the beauties of instinct. This had the advantage of negating the need for explanation. If something could not be instinctively felt - then it was no good trying to explain it by reason, for it was not explicable in that manner. If you were able to grasp something instinctively, you had proof of your community spirit, your race consciousness, your vitality as a human being and your distance from the false doctrine of liberalism with its depleting emphasis on intellectualism. It was essential that the population - through racial purity and Nazism should develop a similar instinct. Hitler thoroughly believed in his powers of intuition. Hitler believed

that he embodied the will of the nation and through himself, the whole population would be brought together by Nazism. Every member would be part of the whole. Systems based on reason would no longer run society. Instead action would be taken, and force employed if necessary, to achieve desired goals. Just as those nineteenth century opponents of reason turned to force - so too did the Nazis. In Hitler's interview with Richard Breiting, he openly admitted his preparedness to use force in pursuit of his aims. "I have brought the concept of National Socialism into the world", he declared, "and I shall carry through its ideas brutally and, if necessary, by force."⁹⁸ Indeed, the Nazis revelled in terror. In common with the radicals described by Sternhell, their inclinations were to vanquish the rules and laws of bourgeois society. On many occasions, Hitler decried the rule of law as meaningless bureaucratic regulations.

Just as the economic problems following the war allowed the rise of , so did these problems permit the development of Nazism. Even in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler railed against the Treaty of Versailles. He spoke of poverty, of homelessness, of jobless men. These conditions contributed to the full development of anti-Semitism, because many

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, quoted in Edouard Calic, *Unmasked, Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931*, translated by Richard Barry, p.22

Jews were seen as being well off and in positions of prestige and power. The economic problems which aided the development of , also aided the development of Nazism.

Sternhell mentions the growth of the new sciences at the beginning of the century. In particular, he mentions psychology and anthropology. Psychology was, of course, important to the Nazis regarding their attitude to the masses and to propaganda. Anthropology had its roots in the Enlightenment and its importance in Nazi ideology cannot be overestimated. Many German anthropologists were Nazi supporters.⁹⁹ Indeed, as Müller-Hill makes clear, much of the “racial science” so much a part of Nazi ideology was already well in place before they came to power. The Aryan type was seen as the prototype of perfection. The Nazi interpretation of anthropological studies was that they legitimised Aryan superiority and the inferiority of others. Nazis made great play of physical features being proof of superiority or inferiority. Much was made of “noble profiles” and specifically shaped craniums. Measurements were taken to show that some people were more akin to animals than to humans. The Jews fared particularly badly out of this. Many degrading stereotypes were appointed to them concerning their

⁹⁹ see Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science, Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and others, Germany 1933-1945*, translated by George R. Fraser (Oxford, 1988)

physical features. The virulently anti-Semitic *The Poisonous Mushroom*, written by the editor of the *Stürmer* paper, gives an example of this stereotyping of physical features: "A Jew is usually recognised by his nose...The Jew is also recognised by his lips...And the Jew is also recognised by his eyes...The look of the Jew is sly and sharp..."¹⁰⁰ These physical features were said to be a total representation of their moral impurity. Just as Social Darwinism became important to the revolutionaries at the turn of the century, so was Social Darwinism important within Nazism.

The idea of the struggle for survival was a highly important aspect of Nazism. The idea of race struggle legitimised the persecution of the Jews and other groups. It legitimised the invasion of other countries and, ultimately, it backed the programmes of euthanasia and racial breeding implemented by the Nazis. It even had a role to play in the legitimisation of the *Führerprinzip* - the leader being seen as one of the fittest. It could legitimise any ruthless action that one wished to take. The ideas contained within Social Darwinism, inculcated racism, fear and hostility. As with those of the nineteenth century, Nazis believed the human beings were instinctively governed by this struggle for survival and that therefore

¹⁰⁰ Ernst Hiemer, *The Poisonous Mushroom*, published in 1938 in *Der Stürmer*, quoted in *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945*, edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (New York, 1974) p. 470

reason could have no real part to play in humanity. Moreover, if these authoritarian radicals called for an authoritarian race-leader who would rid the world of corruption - then Hitler was he. The destruction of corruption was an often-repeated slogan of his. He claimed to be the natural leader of the German people because they were his *Volk*. Sternhell points out that the *völkisch* philosophy, so adhered to by the early nationalists, had its origins in a linking of race and territory and, again, this was also fundamental to Nazi ideology.

Also fundamental to Nazism was the idea that the race was a living organism and that the individual was only important in so far as he was part of this organism. Sternhell explains how this conception of the nation was important in leading the way towards a burgeoning of nationalism and patriotism. This radical nationalism led, almost inevitably, to a glorification of war. In just such a way was Hitler always extolling the virtues of war and, indeed, concluded by bringing the German nation to war. As far as the warrior virtues are concerned, this was fundamental both to Nazi ideology and also to Hitler's own personal beliefs. He was a great believer in the values of *Fronterlebnis*. He praised military virtues. The *Führerprinzip* was, of course, a principle fundamental to army life. In the ideology itself there was emphasis on war and battle. Again, the proto-fascists also

espoused the values of the Front, they wished to establish a new society based on these values. Sternhell explains that it was considered important that the leaders of society should be persons who were imbued with this type of fighting spirit. There can be no doubt that this is identical to the thought of the Nazis. That Hitler had been a front-line soldier was very important to many of his supporters. These people and Hitler, too, believed that wars would unify the nation and that such unity was vitally important.

The thinkers of the right described by Sternhell, glorified the nation and believed in its essential unity. This remained totally unchanged right up to the Nazi era when it was embraced in its entirety by the Nazis. The unity of the nation was one of the basics of Nazism. During the nineteenth century, Sternhell describes the linkage that took place between nationalism and socialism. With belief in the nation aligned with this concern for social problems, it was inevitable that such a link could take place. Certainly, Hitler describes his route to National Socialism in similar terms.

Sternhell explains that it was at the turn of the century that anti-Semitism began to become an important revolutionary force within society. The value of it as a revolutionary force was perceived by political activists. Anti-Semitic rhetoric was openly used as a

mobilising force. Although Hitler's anti-Semitism was something deep within himself, he of course also realised its propaganda value. Indeed, Goebbels explicitly stated that, in his opinion, "the Jewish question is the next best propaganda horse in the stall, after Bolshevism."¹⁰¹ Anti-Semitism is so identified with the Nazi movement, that it cannot be separated. Its significance at the turn of the century reinforces the idea that the crisis of liberalism to which Sternhell attributes the development of , also worked in favour of the growth of Nazism.

At the turn of the century, one of the main complaints about the Jew was his internationalism and cosmopolitanism. This internationalism was seen as a great threat to the nation. In the pursuit of nationalism, the threat of the Jew was used as a device to integrate the nation and the proletariat. In a similar way, the Nazis were also opposed to internationalism¹⁰² and they also associated the Jew with this internationalism. They also used the concept of the "Jewish alien" to disparage democracy. As early as 1922, Hitler was linking democracy with Jewishness and opposing it to Aryan values. "Democracy", he declared, "is fundamentally not German: it is

¹⁰¹ Joseph Goebbels, quoted in Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945* (Michigan, 1965) p. 389

¹⁰² Hitler declared that internationalism "destroys our folk value..." *Hitler's Secret Book*, translated by Salvator Attansio (New York, 1962) p. 79

Jewish...this Jewish democracy with its majority decisions has always been without exception only a means towards the destruction of any existing Aryan leadership.”¹⁰³

With the emphasis on the unity of the nation, came a disapproval of class conflict since it was divisive to the nation. The Nazis believed that class conflict was fermented by Communists to fracture the unity of the nation and thus destroy the community of the people. Like those early upholders of *völkisch* traditions, Nazis believed that the *Volk* were united by bonds of blood and nationality, which were far stronger and more important than ideas of class. They were convinced that a new age containing a new type of human being was about to begin. The revolutionary socialists and radical nationalists found common ground in their attempt to overthrow the existing bourgeois system and establish a new order.¹⁰⁴ This idea of a new order achieved its most powerful expression in Nazi ideology.

This new order would be founded on idealism and spirit rather than on materialism.¹⁰⁵ Hitler frequently railed against materialism,

¹⁰³ *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922 -August 1939*, volume 1, edited by Norman H. Baynes (London, 1942) 12 April 1922, in Genoa, p.13

¹⁰⁴ However, although they wished to “destroy the existing political order and to uproot its theoretical and moral foundations”, they did not wish to discard “all the achievements of modern society, fully exploiting the power that was in it.” *BFI op.cit.*, p. 7

¹⁰⁵ As Sternhell puts it: “From the last decades of the nineteenth century, this fight against materialism had sapped the moral legitimacy of an entire political culture.” Zeev Sternhell, “The ‘Anti-materialist’ Revision of Marxism as an Aspect of the Rise of Fascist Ideology”, *op.cit.*, p. 396

often referring to it as a Jewish trait. He often referred to his idealism and the values of idealism. According to Sternhell, both fascists and quasi-fascists were equally opposed to materialism. To achieve the destruction of materialism, youthful fascists would have to be prepared to make any sacrifice in their fight against it. This does not differ from Nazi ideology. As has been seen, the idea of sacrifice was intrinsic to it. The belief was that, under there would be unity rather than diversity, a strong leader who embodied the spirit of the nation, rather than a class-based society governed democratically. This belief is typical of Nazism. In the "Secret Pamphlet for Industrialists", Hitler states that the Nazi movement, "categorically rejects any division into estates or classes, and in their place proclaims an all-embracing German outlook, the movement thereby consciously and deliberately substitutes a sharply defined nationalistic orientation; in place of democracy's worship of the masses, the unconditional authority of the individual personality; and in place of the plague of pacifism, training to resist and struggle."¹⁰⁶ Class division was despised within Nazi ideology, unity was a major ideological component and almost the whole ideology was geared to towards the unification of the nation.

¹⁰⁶ "Hitler's Secret Pamphlet for Industrialists" (1927) reprinted in *Journal of Modern History*, volume 40, 1968, introduced by Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., p. 372

The crisis of liberalism caused the development of lines of thought that inspired revolutionary socialism and radical nationalism. These came together in a synthesis of nationalism and socialism, which was the predecessor of .¹⁰⁷ This crisis of liberalism was equally important in the development of Nazism. As has been seen, the ideological themes and elements which characterised the thought of these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers, was also characteristic of Nazi ideology.

In conclusion, this chapter sought to reinforce the argument that has a coherent ideology with a traceable intellectual history and is not a meaningless combination of indiscriminate notions. By examining Sternhell's work on the origins of fascism, it has become apparent that was structured on clearly perceptible ideological foundations. In addition, by comparing Nazi ideology with the ideological elements that he discerns in , it is evident that Nazism can be equally explained by using his work. To get a more specific view of pre-Nazi thought, in the next chapter some thinkers who can be described as intellectual precursors to Nazi ideology will be examined.

¹⁰⁷ Sternhell gives a concise summary of this process in his introduction to *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*. There he says that "in the form that it emerged at the turn of the century and developed in the 1920s and 1930s, the fascist ideology represented a synthesis of organic nationalism with the antimaterialist revision of Marxism. It expressed a revolutionary aspiration based on a rejection of individualism, whether liberal or Marxist, and it created the elements of a new and original political culture." *BFI, op.cit.*, p. 6

Chapter Five

Precursors of Nazi Ideology

Gobineau, Chamberlain, Treitschke
and Moeller van den Bruck

Precursors of Nazi Ideology

Gobineau, Chamberlain, Treitschke
and Moeller van den Bruck

In this chapter, the ideas of Arthur de Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Heinrich von Treitschke and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck will be examined. These thinkers will serve as an illustration of Nazism's intellectual precursors. To this end, the race-doctrine of Gobineau will be considered, including his pessimistic view of the on-going degeneration of the Germanic race. Then the work of Chamberlain will be examined, including his analysis of history in race terms. Next the work of Treitschke will be considered, with reference to his views on the nation and militarism, and finally the work of Moeller van den Bruck will be examined including his nationalism and anti-liberalism.

In the previous chapter, Sternhell's views on the rise of fascism were considered. As has been seen, his main argument is that fascism had its roots in the crisis of liberalism. This crisis occurred because there was, both in certain intellectual and revolutionary circles and also in society at large, a growing discontent with bourgeois society and the system of capitalism inherent in it, and an equivalent desire for radical change. This led to modes of thought being engendered that were nationalist, authoritarian, revolutionary and, most importantly of all, profoundly anti-liberal. Despite there being significant similarities between these modes of thought and Nazi ideology, Sternhell specifically excludes the rise of Nazi ideology from his argument. He contends that, as Nazism contained an extreme emphasis on biologism, this made it wholly different from fascism. However, it is argued here that, when these pre-fascist modes of thought are examined in detail, the differences appear to be of far less significance than the similarities. It seems that the ideological history of fascism is, in all important respects, also the ideological history of Nazism.¹ In order to examine this, it is now intended to look at the above-mentioned thinkers, whose work can be said to exemplify thought that would later be contained within Nazi ideology and who may be said to have had influence on the

¹ For recent discussions of the origins of fascist theories, see *The Nature of the Right, European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789*, edited by Roger Eatwell and Noel O'Sullivan (London, 1989). Chapter 3, "The Rise of "Left-Right Terminology: The Confusions of Social Science", by Roger Eatwell gives a useful précis of the historical origins of "Left" and "Right". See particularly pages 33-37

formulation of Nazi ideology. It must be stated immediately that there is no intention here to indicate that these individuals were Nazis, or even proto-Nazis. It is simply that these writers anticipate two major streams in Nazi ideology which at a cursory glance may seem far apart, but on closer view have many connections.

On the one hand, there is the racialist, biological and slightly mystical conception of the world that is so intrinsic to Nazi ideology. This *Weltanschauung* encompasses the notions of racial struggle for survival, Aryan racial superiority and the necessity for racial purity, among other elements. Then, on the other hand, there is what might be termed, the more hard-edged side of Nazi ideology. This is the pre-eminently militaristic and directly political side, which lays great emphasis on the value of dominance (both military and political), the benefits of martial training and the superiority of the state over the individual. These two apparently disparate streams flowed together within Nazi ideology in such a way that, although contradictions and paradoxes existed, they were capable, without difficulty, of being brought into a coherent relationship with the whole ideology. That this was possible is because, as has been seen, Nazi ideology was a total world view - self-confirming in all areas.

Of the first, racialist, stream, Gobineau and Chamberlain are the examples to be considered. Gobineau (1816-1882), a native and

resident of France, concentrated on a theory of race that explained the development and destruction of civilisations. His theory was a pessimistic one in that he believed modern society to be irredeemably degenerate. This he saw as being due to an excess of race-mixing, which had led to a disastrous diminution of the blood-purity of the superior white race. Chamberlain (1855-1927) was an Englishman by birth, who had lived most of his life on the Continent and who took German citizenship. He followed Gobineau's ideas in many ways, with the main exception that Chamberlain's racial theory was more positive.² It asserted that with careful racial monitoring, civilisation, under the dominance of the Aryan race, could be saved and, indeed, enhanced. Of the other, militaristic orientation, the two protagonists are Treitschke and Moeller van den Bruck. Treitschke (1834-1896), a native of Germany, was a military historian and ardent nationalist. He set great store on the role of the state, the value of the military and the worthiness of the German nation, and advocated the necessity of German expansion into colonies. Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925) was a Prussian by birth who travelled through Europe for a decade before returning to Germany. He was also a firm and dedicated nationalist who despised the existing bourgeois political order and wished it to be replaced by an

² Indeed, Chamberlain said that "if Gobineau was right and Race is an original creation that then inevitably degenerates to a final cataclysm, then the only answer is to put a bullet through one's own head." Martin Woodroffe, "Racial Theories of History and Politics: The Example of Houston Stewart Chamberlain", in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, edited by Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London, 1989) p. 144

authoritarian state, guided by military principles. By looking at these writers in more detail it is intended to examine the extent of overlap in their thought, and also to show the similarities between much of their thought and Nazi ideology.

Here, the question must arise as to the extent of Hitler's familiarity with these writers. Nolte, for example, states that "there is no certainty that Hitler ever read Gobineau and H.S. Chamberlain thoroughly..."³ He goes even further to suggest the possibility that Hitler was only "superficially acquainted" with their doctrines. Nevertheless, he believes it to be "reasonably likely" that Hitler read Gobineau.⁴ What he considers certain, however, is that "Gobineau and Chamberlain were his masters, and never at any time did he retreat from the foundations they laid or the atmosphere they created."⁵ Although Pois argues that the "development of the Aryan myth [was] something for which the Frenchman Gobineau was to

³ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism, Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, translator, Leila Vennewitz (New York, 1969) p. 353. However, also see Toland, who informs the reader that, during Hitler's imprisonment at Landsberg, "he had leafed through almost everything in print he could get his hands on: Nietzsche, Chamberlain, Ranke, Treitschke and Marx." John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976) p. 187

⁴ Nolte, *op.cit.*, p. 634, note 1.

⁵ Nolte, *op.cit.*, p. 353. Hitler certainly makes reference to them in several places. See, for example, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Mannheim (London, 1989); *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, translated by N. Cameron and R. H. Stevens (London, 1973); and Edouard Calic's *Unmasked, Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931*, translated by Richard Barry (London, 1971). In addition to Hitler, other Nazis were also familiar with Chamberlain's work, as Field points out: "Hess, Goebbels, Eckart, Himmler, von Schirach, and above all Rosenberg had read Chamberlain and professed to have been influenced by him." Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race, The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, 1981) p. 452. Indeed, Rosenberg considered Chamberlain to be "a pioneer and spiritual forerunner, and viewed himself as Chamberlain's true successor." *ibid.*, p. 1

some extent responsible...”⁶, and McGovern claims that Gobineau may be regarded as the founder of the modern racialist school⁷, Nolte sees Gobineau’s race theory as itself being almost wholly structured by the philosophies of past thinkers. He nevertheless agrees that for many years after Gobineau’s death “this theory was regarded as one of the most modern, and was incorporated in the strongest and most effective nationalist movement of the twentieth century...”⁸ Nolte also asserts that “despite some points of contact”, Gobineau’s doctrine (as well as that of Chamberlain) “stood outside the highly differentiated main strand of European thinking. And this extreme doctrine was waiting for the extremist who would be able to pursue it to its most acute and radical form and, armed with this weapon, to intervene in reality.”⁹ Nolte argues that, although Gobineau had great influence in many areas, his “German imitators (except for the most radical among them, such as Hitler) were bound to reject Gobineau’s statement that the bulk of the German people was un-Germanic...”¹⁰ However, McGovern reports that, despite Gobineau being “if anything, anti-German rather than pro-German”,

it was in Germany that his main doctrines awakened the most vociferous applause, and it was in Germany that he found the most eloquent and influential apostles. It was in Germany, and

⁶ Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London, 1986) p. 58

⁷ William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler, The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London, 1946) p. 500

⁸ check ref. Nolte *op.cit.*, p. 355

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 364.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 356

not in France, that a Gobineau club was founded with a view to popularising and disseminating the Gobineau creed. Among the more important members of this club was the well-known musician Richard Wagner...Even more important was the support given to Gobinism by Chamberlain.¹¹

Gobineau is a firm believer in the importance of race. He says that the key to maintaining the strength of a civilisation is racial purity because, "the purer a race keeps its blood, the less will its social foundations be liable to attack; for the general way of thought will remain the same."¹² He declares that every civilisation, every "assemblage of men", indeed, contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. Sooner or later, it is "doomed to perish."¹³ However, he sees the causes for this "Disease of Civilisations"¹⁴ as being not necessarily the same as that which is generally accepted. It is the general tendency, says Gobineau, to cite the existence of excess or fanaticism, luxury, immorality and irreligion as causing the downfall or "ruin" of societies. But, he contends, many societies that have exhibited high degrees of these qualities have remained vital and, therefore, there can be no direct link. Similarly, bad government does not cause the ruin of societies. In fact, asserts Gobineau, "societies perish because they are degenerate, and for no other reason."¹⁵ And this degeneration is a racial degeneration, caused by

¹¹ McGovern *op.cit.*, p. 504

¹² Arthur de Gobineau, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, in *Gobineau, Selected Political Writings*, edited by Michael D. Biddiss (London, 1970) p. 90

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 44

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 42

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 58

an over-mixing of blood between differing races. An excess of blood mixing will inevitably produce this debasement. “The word degenerate”, explains Gobineau,

when applied to a people, means...that the people had no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it has no longer the same blood in its veins, continued adulterations having gradually affected the quality of the blood. In other words, though the nation bears the name given by its founders, the name no longer connotes the same race; in fact, the man of a decadent time, the degenerate man so properly called, is a different being, from the racial point of view, from the heroes of the great ages.¹⁶

In these cases of degenerate peoples, he says, there had been an “influx of foreign elements” that had broken up the “primordial race-unit...”¹⁷

Gobineau relates, however, that although excessive racial mixing will eventually destroy all civilisation, it is, nevertheless, true that a basic requirement for the birth of any civilisation is that a certain amount of racial mixing takes place - else all that exists consists of small, isolated tribal units, unable to be civilised. A number of such units do exist in the world because they have found themselves unable to “overcome the natural repugnance, felt by men and animals alike, to a crossing of blood.”¹⁸ However, when a strong

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 59

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 59

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 62

and vigorous race enters into the lives of a lesser nation (usually by conquest), then civilisations are formed, although the new race that will eventually emerge from the mixing of these two races will be “less powerful certainly than the better of its two ancestors, but still of considerable strength.”¹⁹ However, this civilisation, with its tendency towards annexing lesser nations, contains the seeds of its own destruction, in that the more blood mingling that takes place, the less becomes the original racial impulse. As Gobineau puts it: “The blood of the civilising race is gradually drained away by being parcelled out among the peoples that are conquered or annexed...”²⁰ This eventually leads to the death of the civilisation.

Despite this, it must be remembered, says Gobineau, that “most human races are for ever incapable of civilisation, so long as they remain unmixed...”²¹ In other words, although high levels of racial purity are essential for the maintenance of civilisation, for the *creation* of civilisation, some blood mixing is necessary. Gobineau’s own civilisation, he tells us, was created “by the mingling of the Germanic tribes with the races of the ancient world...”²² If there had been no mixing between what Gobineau terms “the three great types” of races (the black, the white, and the yellow) then, “the superiority of

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 66

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 67

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 79

²² *ibid.*, p. 91

the white race would have been clearly shown, but it would have been bought at the price of certain advantages which have followed the mixture of blood...Artistic genius, which is equally foreign to each of the three great types, arose only after the intermarriage of white and black.”²³ However, just as human beings are born, grow, and decline into old age and death, so too, can civilisations. Gobineau is of the opinion that “the most decisive influences in this are the different kinds of intelligences allotted to different races and racial mixtures.”²⁴ “Omnipresent and everlasting racial mixture”, he declares, “...is the clearest, most inevitable and lasting product of our great societies and powerful civilisations...”²⁵

Despite this, Gobineau is pessimistically convinced that the races have now over-mixed, and that degeneracy has come in the wake of this over-mixture. “Viewed objectively”, says Gobineau,

the white race has disappeared from the face of the earth. It has lived through the age of the gods, when it was absolutely pure; the age of the heroes, when intermixture was restricted in strength and scope; and the age of nobility, in which its capacities, though still considerable, could not be replenished from barren sources. It then progresses more or less immediately (varying according to the particular areas concerned) towards the definite blending of all its principles as a result of its heterogeneous intermixture. Consequently, it is now only represented by hybrids; those who occupy the

²³ *ibid.*, p. 138

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 163

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 168

territory of the first mixed societies have naturally had most time to become degenerate.²⁶

Aryan blood is now almost totally absorbed, Gobineau declares, and when this finally happens there will begin in the world what he calls “the age of unity...”²⁷ This is an age of degenerate, low-grade humans who are totally undifferentiated from each other in any way - none having greater strength, intellect, beauty - or any other quality. It will be a unity of mediocrity. Gobineau thus sees man’s time on the earth as being divided into two periods: one of “youth, vigour and intellectual greatness...”, and the other of “waning and inevitable decline.”²⁸ In his novel, *The Pleiads*, one of the characters, Nore, seems to describe this situation. He categorises the masses in to three groups - the brutes, the scoundrels and the fools. The masses encompass, he claims, “complete barbarity.” But, he insists, this is not “the brave, bold, picturesque, happy barbarity of the young, but a sinister, sullen, churlish, ugly savagery which will kill everything and create nothing.”²⁹ His solution to this “ugly savagery” seems equally savage. He would destroy “however much is necessary” of the brutes. The “scoundrels” would fare somewhat less badly perhaps, with a few of them being hanged from time to time. The “fools” on the other

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 172

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 172

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 175

²⁹ *ibid.*, *The Pleiads*, p. 190

hand - "the sole and detestable agents of universal decay" do not deserve to live and would, therefore, also be destroyed.³⁰

In Gobineau's world-view, the world is split between two racial elements - the Latin and the Germanic. The Germanic is portrayed as representing youth, vigour and action, while the Latin only represents decadence. He explains that, unfortunately, during the eighteenth century, the Germanic elements had been swamped because "the liberals overran all countries...and the Germanic genius was smothered by sheer weight of numbers."³¹ This led to the domination of the modern world by the "Latin mentality" which was disastrous for civilisation because of "the moral degeneration and political ruin which constitute the very essence of the Latin race."³² He points out that, though race-mixing is an essential requirement for the development of a civilisation, an eventual consequence of this race-mixing is that, within civilisations, a belief in the equality of human beings arises. In his words: "The absolute principle of the inequality, and hence the mutual hostility, of races [becomes] questioned and undermined."³³

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 191. It can be seen that this is analogous to Hitler's comments on the punishments to be meted out to lawbreakers.

³¹ *ibid.*, *Foreword* to the 2nd Edition of the *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, p. 236

³² *ibid.*, *Events in Asia*, first published by Richard Wagner in *Bayreuther Blätter* (1881) p. 238

³³ *ibid.*, p. 70. Gobineau held the very pessimistic view that the mixing of the races led to a destructive equality. See Nolte, *op.cit.*, p. 355

Gobineau describes world history as being the direct consequence of the existence of race and of the inequality of races.³⁴ He dismisses the suggestion that the reason why some peoples produced great civilisations and others did not is because of environment. He points out as example, the abundance of many parts of North Africa and contrasts that abundance with the dearth of civilisation that he finds there. He also uses the example of the Jews, who, he says, although living in a barren and inhospitable environment, became “a people that succeeded in everything that it undertook, a free, strong and intelligent people...”³⁵ It was not environment, but racial inequality which caused these differences in civilisation. Gobineau has, of course, very clear ideas on the inequality of the races. He categorises the main aspects of what he considers to be the three basic races - as he puts it - black, yellow and white, in order of value. He starts with the black: “The negroid variety,” he states, “is the lowest and stands at the foot of the ladder.”³⁶ He then goes on to discuss the “yellow race”, which is also considered to be inferior to the white race.³⁷ But then he comes to the white peoples. He extols them as being gifted with “reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence.”³⁸ Nevertheless, to put this in perspective, he explains that “the immense superiority of

³⁴ *ibid.*, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, p. 41

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 78

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135

³⁷ *ibid.* “The yellow man”, he says, “has little physical energy, and is inclined to apathy...”, p. 135-136

the white peoples in the whole field of intellects is balanced by an inferiority in the intensity of their sensations.”³⁹

It is also clear to Gobineau that there is a strong link between physical beauty and what he considers to be superior race. “The human groups to which the European nations and their descendants belong,” he declares, “are the most beautiful.”⁴⁰ Beauty is wholly an attribute of the white race in that “the peoples who are not of white blood approach beauty, but do not attain it.”⁴¹ The races who are nearest to the white race are also nearest to beauty - the further their blood is from being of the white race - the further they then are from beauty. “As these races recede from the white type”, he announces, “their features and limbs become incorrect in form; they acquire defects of proportion which, in the races which are completely foreign to us, end by producing an extreme ugliness.”⁴² Gobineau is certain also, that the differing intellectual capacities of various races can clearly be perceived by examining the features of the non-white races.⁴³ This examination provides Gobineau with certain conclusions, as can be seen from the following declaration: “The animal character that appears in the shape of the pelvis, is stamped

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 136

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 137

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 112-113

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 113

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 113

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 116

on the Negro from birth, and foreshadows his destiny. His intellect will always move within a very narrow circle...his mental faculties are dull or even non-existent..."⁴⁴

Despite the intellectual superiority of the white race, the racial purity of this race remains an unrealisable ideal. "It would be unjust", Gobineau declares,

to assert that every mixture is bad and harmful. If the three great types had remained separate, the supremacy would no doubt have always been in the hands of the finest of the white races, and the yellow and black varieties would have crawled forever at the feet of the lowest of the white. Such a state is so far ideal, since it has never been beheld in history, and we can imagine it only by recognising the undisputed superiority of those groups of the white races which have remained the purest.⁴⁵

High among these groups, figures the Aryan. Gobineau maintains that "there is no true civilisation, among the European peoples, where the Aryan branch is not predominant."⁴⁶ He tells of the entry of Aryan peoples into already existing cultures, and of the invigorating effect that they had upon these cultures.⁴⁷ He gives as an example the injection of Teutonic blood into the culture of northern Italy in the 12th century - this gave the people of this culture "vigour and

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 135

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 138

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 144

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 145

energy.”⁴⁸ In order to turn the nascent European civilisation into the great society that it was to become, it was essential that some strong “ethnic agent”⁴⁹ should be introduced. This would be “the product”, as Gobineau puts it, “of a new union between the best human variety and races already civilised.”⁵⁰ For this, the Aryans were needed. He goes on:

The Germans thus appeared in the midst of Roman society. At the same time they occupied the extreme north-west of Europe, which gradually became the pivot of their influence. Successive unions with the Celts and Slavs, and with the Gallo-Roman peoples, increased their strength without prejudicing too seriously their natural instinct for initiative. Thus modern society was born...⁵¹

Gobineau declares that “the Germanic race was endowed with all the vitality of the Aryan variety and needed it in order to fulfil the role to which it was destined.”⁵² This role was the creation of a new civilisation to supersede the dying Roman one, by acting as a racial catalyst to ensure a dynamic new racial mixture. In *The Pleiads*, another of the characters, John Theodore, speaks of the inevitable decline of ancient civilisation. “The ancient world was dying”, he says, “not because it was in the wrong, but because it had come to the end of the time allotted for its life-span and its body, withered

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 149

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 165

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 169

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 169-170

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 170

with age, was being trampled upon by youthful vigour from a different source.”⁵³ Existing cultures could only be similarly invigorated “through the agency of a relatively pure and young race.”⁵⁴ Although Gobineau argues that the degeneracy of civilisations in the past was reversed by the infusion of new, vigorous racial types, he is wholly pessimistic about the same thing happening again. This is because the dominant race is always the over-riding influence on the form that a civilisation takes. The Germanic race he believes to have had a significant effect on the form that European civilisation has taken, which effect can be more clearly noticed in the absence of the Germanic element. In other words, “where the Germanic element has never penetrated, our special kind of civilisation does not exist.”⁵⁵ In any case, “the active element distinguishing any civilisation is identical with the most striking quality, whatever it may be, of the dominant race. The civilisation is modified and transformed according to the changes undergone by this race...”⁵⁶ In such a way will civilisation and race always be linked.

⁵³ *ibid.*, *The Pleiads*, p. 196-197

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, p. 162

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 92

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 97

Chamberlain, too, interested in the relationship between civilisation and race.⁵⁷ As will become clear, in many of his ideas Chamberlain was a follower of Gobineau in that he also attributed great importance to the historical role of race. In *Evangelist of Race*, Geoffrey Field analyses a period of German history, through an examination of the ideas of Chamberlain.⁵⁸ Field explains that the latter half of the nineteenth century was a period much affected by change,⁵⁹ and that Chamberlain's work, with its emphasis on a racial dimension of history, caught the growing nationalist mood.⁶⁰ Its popularity shows that ideas about race were already culturally-situated and that anti-Semitism was well established in society.⁶¹ Field accepts that Chamberlain did not promote the idea of Jewish destruction, yet claims that his work allowed certain conditions to arise which led to the possibility of such destruction coming to pass. "Chamberlain never explicitly advocated violence towards Jews, let alone their extermination", he avers, "but the germs of violence were undeniably present in his rhetoric before 1914, and in the reception of his writings we find ominous signs of that attitude which later made so many Germans insensitive to the sufferings of Jews."⁶²

⁵⁷ According to Field, it could be argued that he was "the most influential race publicist in Central Europe around the turn of the century..." Field, *op.cit.*, p. 10

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 1

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 3

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 5

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 12

In *Idealism Debased*, Stackelberg has a different emphasis, placing Chamberlain's work in the context of the modernising changes that were taking place within society.⁶³ Stackelberg argues that Chamberlain's main aim was to preserve society from the changes associated with this modernisation.⁶⁴ To this extent (and also with regard to his racial interpretation of history) Chamberlain had a substantial influence on Nazism, because the advent of Nazism was an "extreme manifestation of that widespread maladjustment to modernization for which there is so much evidence in the works of nineteenth-century intellectuals."⁶⁵ According to Stackelberg, Chamberlain was a "virtuoso of eclecticism and synthesis, blending Wagnerian idealism, racial anthropology, and social Darwinism into an imperialistic doctrine perfectly fitted to promote quietism in domestic politics and expansionism abroad."⁶⁶ Indeed, with regard to the importance of race in Chamberlain's explanation of historical change, he describes it as "a political ideology disguised as a scientific theory."⁶⁷

Nolte is another who emphasises the race aspect of Chamberlain's work. He points out that Chamberlain was "the first

⁶³ Roderick Stackelberg, *Idealism Debased, From Völkisch Ideology to National Socialism* (Ohio, 1981) p. ix

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. x

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. xi

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 107

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 125. According to Stackelberg, "race is the explanatory key to Chamberlain's interpretation of historical change." *ibid.*, p. 124

writer anywhere...who undertook an interpretation of history...on the basis of the race doctrine..."⁶⁸ The nature of Chamberlain's works leads Woodroffe to describe him as a "precursor and source of much of National Socialist ideology..."⁶⁹ To Pois, also, he is one of the "hoary precursors" of National Socialism.⁷⁰ Stackelberg goes even further, saying that Chamberlain "personified the ideological link between the Second Empire and the Third Reich."⁷¹ And Field maintains that "his life and writings attest to the prominence of racialism and anti-Semitic thinking in German political culture before the fascist era and contribute to our understanding of the social and intellectual context of such prejudice."⁷² In addition, J. Sydney Jones argues that he was "one of the first to turn the Social Darwinian

⁶⁸ Nolte, *op.cit.*, p. 339.

⁶⁹ M. Woodroffe, "Racial Theories of Politics and History", in *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, edited by P. Kennedy and A. Nicholls (London, 1981) p. 143. And Field says that "Chamberlain's loathing for liberalism and Marxism, his attacks on finance capital and bourgeois materialism, and his obsessive focus on the sinister power of Jewry all foreshadowed the accusations of Nazism." Field, *op.cit.*, p. 449. Stackelberg agrees, saying that, in Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, "Chamberlain expounds the racial doctrine that became such a vicious instrument of destruction under the Nazis." Stackelberg, *op.cit.*, p. 113

⁷⁰ Robert Pois, *op.cit.*, p. 45. Nolte points out, however, that Hitler was not above criticising Chamberlain's views. Nolte, *op.cit.*, p634, note 1. See *Hitler's Table Talk, op.cit.*, where Hitler says: "In my view, H.S. Chamberlain was mistaken in regarding Christianity as a reality upon the spiritual level." p. 144

⁷¹ Stackelberg, *op.cit.*, p. 106

⁷² Field, *op.cit.*, p. 1. He also argues that "with Chamberlain, popular racism reached a new stage: more than any other writer he synthesised the various strands of German racism around 1900, endowing his books with a scientific and scholarly aura, dissociating himself from vulgar prejudice, and offering an apparently balanced and informed judgement. His public success provides an example of the ways in which racism and anti-Semitism, under the guise of a search for truth, penetrated social circles that found more popular ethnocentrism too crude and radical. It also reminds us that race thinking is a central theme not an aberration or minor byroad in the intellectual history of Europe from the French Revolution to the Nazi Reich." *ibid.*, pages 4-5. Stackelberg, too, points out that "with the trappings of science and scholarship, *The Foundations* transformed anti-Semitism into a doctrine that educated people could accept." Stackelberg, *op.cit.*, p. 125

approach to a rationale for Aryan, German supremacy.”⁷³ Bullock tells of a 1923 meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain:

Hitler visited Wahnfried, the home of the Wagner family in Bayreuth. For Hitler this was holy ground. He impressed Winnifred Wagner and captivated the aged Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who had married one of Wagner’s daughters and who wrote to him afterwards: “My faith in the Germans had never wavered for a moment, but hope, I must own, had sunk to a low ebb. At one stroke you have transformed the state of my soul.”⁷⁴

McGovern argues that Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, despite the many absurdities contained within it, must “be declared to be epoch-making, as it exerted an enormous amount of influence throughout the length and breadth of Germany.”⁷⁵

⁷³ J. Sydney Jones, *Hitler in Vienna, 1907-13, Clues to the Future* (London, 1983) p. 119. Woodroffe, however, points out that Chamberlain was a critic of Darwin’s evolutionary theory: “Chamberlain, however, for all his expressed respect for Darwin as an empirical scientist, became an increasingly committed and at times passionate anti-Darwinist, denouncing, what he termed the ‘dogma’ of Natural Selection. In part, no doubt, he was disturbed by the obvious contradiction between a Race theory that postulated *innate* qualities within certain ethnic groups that guaranteed superiority and the purely arbitrary and *external* forces that governed Natural Selection...” Woodroffe, *op.cit.*, p. 145 And even more important, according to Woodroffe, was the fact that “the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, in which survival itself was the only criterion for fitness, was clearly at odds with a racial theory that warned of the imminent destruction of the fittest.” *ibid.*, p. 146. However, although Chamberlain could certainly not be described as a Darwinist, there is a significant difference between being a Darwinist and being a proponent of Social Darwinism. The ideas contained within Social Darwinism were narrow and slanted selections from Darwin’s theories, which had an influence on society separate from the actual influence of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. The idea of the “survival of the fittest” was as often *misinterpreted* as not. It seems clear from the emphasis on racial struggle which permeates so much of Chamberlain’s work that he had adopted many of the tenets of Social Darwinism.

⁷⁴ Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth, 1984) p. 80

⁷⁵ William Luther McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 504. In the introduction to Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, Lord Redesdale informs the reader that it went through eight editions in Germany and sold 60,000 copies.

Chamberlain's avowed intention in the writing of the *Foundations* was, as the title suggests, "to reveal the bases upon which the nineteenth century rests..."⁷⁶ In order to understand the present world, he believed it to be essential that the role of races as well as that of individuals was comprehended. This was because the nineteenth century was a "century of races, and that indeed is in the first instance a necessary and direct consequence of science and scientific thinking."⁷⁷

Central to what Chamberlain terms the "study of race problems", but also essential to a "true comprehension of the nineteenth century", is the question: "Who were the heirs to antiquity?"⁷⁸ In looking at antiquity, we are looking, according to Chamberlain, at a "Chaos of Peoples." This raceless chaos was the polar opposite of racial purity and reached high proportions at the time of the "decaying Roman Empire."⁷⁹ Chamberlain argues that the race chaos of the late Roman Empire was a "sin against nature"⁸⁰, and indeed that unsuitable race-mixing of any type is a "sin against race."⁸¹ However, he declares, "out of the midst of the chaos towers, like a sharply defined rock amid the formless ocean, one single

⁷⁶ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, translated by John Lees, introduction by Lord Redesdale (London, 1913) p. lxiii

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. xciii

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 251

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 299

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 320

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 390

people, a numerically insignificant people - the Jews. This one race has established as its guiding principle the purity of the blood..."⁸² To Chamberlain, the Jews are a perfect example of where a "community of blood testifies to a common past and gives a guarantee for a common future."⁸³ This purity of race is one of the strengths of the Jews. It is a strength, however, which poses a threat because, according to Chamberlain, the Teutonic races and the Jews will always stand against each other as "alien forces."⁸⁴

Nevertheless, he praises the racial nobility of the Sephardic Jews. This, he says, "is nobility in the fullest sense of the word, genuine nobility of race!" He describes them as having "beautiful figures, noble heads, dignity in speech and bearing." The Sephardic Jews possess, according to Chamberlain, "the highest Power to which man is heir, the might of personality."⁸⁵ He contrasts this nobility with the lack of nobility that he perceives in the Ashkenazim (German Jews).⁸⁶ Although Chamberlain takes some care to profess admiration for the Jews, his clear intention is to point out the danger that he perceives to be associated with them as race-polluters. This intention is illustrated by his attempt to show how Jews can

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 253

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 334

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 257

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 273

⁸⁶ Another distinction he makes is between what he terms Germanic Slavs, who are racially worthy, and "inferior 'Slavonics'." *ibid.*, p. 529

simultaneously keep their race pure and “mix their blood” with other races: “Consider”, he says,

with what mastery they use the law of blood to extend their power: the principle stem remains spotless, not a drop of strange blood comes in,...in the meantime, however, thousands of side branches are cut off and employed to infect the Indo-Europeans with Jewish blood. If that were to go on for a few centuries, there would be in Europe only one single people of pure race, that of the Jews, all the rest would be a herd of pseudo-Hebraic mestizos, a people beyond all doubt degenerate physically, mentally and morally.⁸⁷

Chamberlain considers the Jewish prohibition against mixed marriage as “nothing if not brilliant” because it helped to create a pure and “noble” race “from the helplessly mongrel Israelite.”⁸⁸

Chamberlain makes the distinction between mixed and what he terms “mongrel” races, to which category he now claims the Jews belong. “All historically great races and nations”, he says, “have been produced by mixing; but wherever the difference of type is too great to be bridged over, then we have mongrels...the Jewish race is in truth a permanent but at the same time a mongrel race which always retains this mongrel character.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pages 330-331. According to Chamberlain, the speaking of a Germanic language has no independent bearing on the race, and language spoken is no indication of race. *ibid.*, p. 529. “There are hundreds of thousands of people in Europe”, he says, “who speak our Indo-European tongues, wear the same clothes, take part in our life, and are excellent people in their way, but are just as far removed from we Teutons as if they lived on another planet...” *ibid.*, p. 571

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 485. But note how Chamberlain claims that “in antiquity” the Jews were the rocks of racial purity. *ibid.*, p. 253

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 389

Chamberlain follows Gobineau in believing that it is good for a race to have a controlled mixture of other blood within it. In fact, says Chamberlain, "the origin of extraordinary races is, without exception, preceded by a mixture of blood."⁹⁰ He contends that if the contribution to civilisation made by blood-mixing is not acknowledged, then one is left with only an "airy abstraction"⁹¹, instead of a constructive idea of race. He is convinced that "mixture of blood supplies particularly favourable physiological conditions for the origin of noble races."⁹² It must be noted, however, that only limited and very specific blood mixing is intended because "as a rule mixture of blood leads to degeneration."⁹³ For example, "by crossing with each other Germanic peoples suffer no harm - rather the reverse; but when they cross with aliens they gradually deteriorate."⁹⁴

The northern Teutonic tribes were of pure race. Although on first examination, they seem to be racially chaotic, in fact, on closer inspection, it is clear that "it is only the political relations that are

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 278. As Woodroffe puts it: "Prior to Chamberlain racial theories had tended to concentrate on the question of origins. With the breakdown or at least questioning of monogenist Christian assumptions, simple assertions of common ancestral descent gave way during the nineteenth century to attempts to establish polygenist theories of human origins." Woodroffe, *op.cit.*, p. 144

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 281

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 283

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 284

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 522

chaotic there; the nations are genuine, pure-bred races..."⁹⁵ And here, again, can be seen, says Chamberlain, the difference between these pure races and the racial mixtures of the chaos: between, indeed, "the innate decency, taste and intuition of rough but pure, noble races and the moral barbarism of civilised mestizos."⁹⁶ "The Teuton", he declares,

is the soul of our culture. Europe of today with its many branches over the whole world, represents the chequered result of an infinitely manifold mingling of races: what binds us all together and makes an organic unity of us is "Teutonic" blood. If we look around, we see that the importance of each nation as a living power to-day is dependent upon the proportion of genuinely Teutonic blood in its population...⁹⁷

Chamberlain describes the European races as those "who mould the history of the world..."⁹⁸ He declares that "true history...begins at the moment when the Teuton with his masterful hand lays his grip upon the legacy of antiquity."⁹⁹ It is quite clear to Chamberlain that all races are not equal. "The Germanic races", he declares, "belong to the most highly gifted group, the group usually termed Aryan." For him, "physically and mentally the Aryans are pre-eminent among all peoples; for this reason they are by right...the lords of the world."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 321

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 322

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 257

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. lxxxiii

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 257. As he puts it, this "steel-hardened people, working almost like a force of nature." *ibid.*, p. 122. Chamberlain agrees that progress is not a feature of an undifferentiated humanity, but is always linked with a definite racial type. *ibid.*, p. lxviii

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 542

The Teutonic races “posses a rare power of expansion”¹⁰¹, he concludes. Equality between peoples is a total myth, because “inequality is a state to which nature inclines in all spheres...”¹⁰² Race is “an organic living thing”¹⁰³ which can degenerate or be ennobled. “A noble race...becomes noble gradually...and this gradual process can begin at any moment, as soon as accident of geography and history or a fixed plan...creates the conditions.”¹⁰⁴

Chamberlain is very concerned to emphasise the possible physical differences between peoples and races, because he is convinced that the outer physical form is a direct indication of the inner being. As he puts it, “the form of the head and the structure of the brain exercise a quite decisive influence upon the form and structure of thoughts...” In other words, “form is...an expression of the innermost being.”¹⁰⁵ Despite this, however, Chamberlain does acknowledge that there is a possibility that too much emphasis can be put on questions of race. This is because such an overemphasis can “detract thereby from the autonomy of personality and run the risk of undervaluing the great power of ideas...”¹⁰⁶ This seems to

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 371

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 261 Chamberlain states that even when the “pre-eminently noble races” in the animal and vegetable kingdoms are referred to, these are the races which are “endowed with exceptional strength and vitality...” *ibid.*, p. 259

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 297

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 263

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 210

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 211

suggest that ideas are not wholly a function of race. Nevertheless, he repeats his view on the linkage between personality and race. "The nature of the personality", he declares, "is determined by the nature of its race, and the power of the personality, dependent upon certain conditions of the blood."¹⁰⁷ Not only, however, is race a physical and intellectual concept, it also covers the moral domain. It involves, according to Chamberlain, "a sacred law." And this because race "is found everywhere in nature", and "sacred" "in so far as it is left to our free will to ennoble ourselves or to degenerate as we please." Says Chamberlain, "this law teaches us to look upon the physical constitution as the basis of all that ennobles."¹⁰⁸ There is, he says, such a thing as a "definite, characteristic national soul..."¹⁰⁹ He goes on to say that when examining the (as he puts it) "genuine" Celt, Slav and Teuton, it is clear that there is only "one uniform soul" within them.¹¹⁰ He declares, in addition, that the physical and the intellectual are "fundamentally...manifestations of the same thing."¹¹¹

In his consideration, therefore, of the physical characteristics of the genuine Germanic type, it is taken for granted that this is also a consideration of the inner worth. He notes that though some genuine Germanics are dark-haired - fair hair is often taken as a determining

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 260

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 317

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 259

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 516

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 518

criterion.¹¹² Another clear indication of Germanic race to Chamberlain is the phenomenon of “long skulls.” The inclusion of many short skulls within otherwise recognisably Germanic types, Chamberlain regrets as being the result of miscegenation with inferior racial types due to the aforementioned “Race Chaos”. Chamberlain proposes a method of racial classification. He says “we must ascertain precisely what groups actually exist as individualised, morally and intellectually distinguishable races, and then see whether there are anatomical characteristics which will aid us in classification.”¹¹³ In discussing what would be seen were it possible to look back in time to when the Celts, Teutons and Germanic Slavs were still “unmixed”, Chamberlain gives a clear exposition of his ideas of the ideal race:

Probably there would not have been a single individual who united in himself all the specific characteristics of this plastic idea of race (in the way in which it would have appeared to my thinking brain) in the highest potentiality and in perfect harmony: the great radiant, heavenly eyes, the golden hair, the gigantic stature, the symmetrical muscular development, the lengthened skull (which an ever-active brain, tortured by longing, had changed from the round lines of animal contentedness and extended towards the front), the lofty countenance, required by an elevated spiritual life as the seat of the expression - certainly no single individual would have possessed all these features. Were one feature perfect the other would be merely indicated.¹¹⁴

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 526

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 533

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 535-536

There is another quality which Chamberlain says is particular to the German race - loyalty (*Treue*). This quality distinguishes the Teutons from “mongrel races”, although it can be found in other “purely bred races.”¹¹⁵ However, “in the construction of the Germanic character loyalty is the necessary perfection of the personality...”¹¹⁶ This means to Chamberlain that “freedom and loyalty...are two roots of the Germanic nature, or, if you will, the two pinions that bear it heavenwards.”¹¹⁷

Chamberlain is of the opinion that the strict adherence to national types is essential for man to “attain his zenith...”¹¹⁸ The “noble” animal races which he admires so much can be produced, he claims, “only under definite conditions, which restrict the begetting of new individuals.”¹¹⁹ These “noble” animal races are not produced by “chance and promiscuity”, but by “artificial selection and strict maintenance of the purity of the race.”¹²⁰ Chamberlain is convinced that the same tactics must be used to ensure the development of noble human races and it is therefore a procedure which he recommends for the human race. However, this nobility of race is not achieved easily, but rather, he says, “it is only forced activity that can

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 547

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 549

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 574

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 258

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 259

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 261

bring it about; under other circumstances it may completely degenerate.”¹²¹ The racial struggle, for example, can improve the race by wiping out weak elements. When Chamberlain looks again to antiquity he lauds the example of the Greeks, Romans and Teutonic peoples in the exposure of weak infants which, he pronounces, had a positively beneficial effect on the race. Chamberlain strongly disapproves of the asceticism which arose at the time of the “decay” of the Roman Empire - blaming it on “bastardised” races. “It always took firm hold”, he says, “whenever blood was most mixed...”¹²² The important point for Chamberlain was that society should not adopt the ascetic aversion to procreation as this would mean that the most mixed and degenerate elements could be allowed to increase at the expense of the noble elements. He reiterates the idea that there are no original pure races, but only races formed by specific mixing, “followed by in-breeding...”¹²³ Likewise, he believes that periods of hard times can ensure the survival of the better elements in a race.¹²⁴ He claims that all his ideas on race are solidly founded on animal experiments dealing with artificial selection. He regrets that animal experiments will have to be enough, as human experiments are “unfortunately” not feasible.¹²⁵

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 276

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 314

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 354

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 277

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 281

However, when looking at the physical emanations of race, declares Chamberlain, one cannot rely on figures and measurements to show these aspects. Rather one should rely on one's inner feelings. "Darwin himself," he reports, "who worked all his life with compass, ruler and weighing machine, is always in his studies on artificial breeding calling attention to the fact that the eye of the born and experienced breeder discovers things of which figures give not the slightest confirmation, and which the breeder himself can hardly ever express in words..."¹²⁶ "The hieroglyphs of nature's language", he goes on to say, "are in fact not so logically mathematical, so mechanically explicable as many an investigator likes to fancy."¹²⁷ Chamberlain has the view that much experimental research is over-valued and, indeed speaks of the "dross of empiricism..."¹²⁸ He holds instinct to be of high importance - more valid and reliable than mere "learned proof" - because it can be directly felt.¹²⁹

To Chamberlain, it is clear that the story of race, is the story of racial struggle. "The struggle which means destruction for the fundamentally weak races steels the strong; the same struggle,

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 536. Despite this, he nevertheless claims to find Darwin's ideas rather less credible than they are generally accepted to be. p. lxxxviii.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 537

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 566. Nolte, however, claims that Chamberlain was a defender of "empirical science against dogmatism and superstition." *ibid.*, p. 360.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 518. Note that Gobineau says that "instinct has a capacity that raises it almost to the dignity of reason." *Essays, op.cit.*, p. 123. The existence of such instinct proves, to Chamberlain, "the great advantages of crossing between nearly related peoples..." p. 522

moreover, by eliminating the weaker elements, tends still further to strengthen the strong.”¹³⁰ When the ancient Romans instinctively destroyed the Semitic Phoenicians, it was what “any cool, calculating politician gifted with the eye of the prophet would have been bound to urge them to destroy for the salvation of mankind.”¹³¹ Without the actions of Rome in striking down the Semitic Phoenicians (“this fatal branch of the Semitic family...”)¹³², Chamberlain says, the Germanic race would never have been able to prepare itself as it has “for the salvation of mankind.”¹³³ He discusses the Roman Empire and declares that he does not believe that the Romans can be termed conquerors. He feels that they were forced to expand their empire purely in order to defend their fatherland which was under threat from “close at hand masses of related races constantly warring against each other, farther afield an ever threatening unexplored chaos of barbarians, Asiatics and Africans.” He likens this to “how in our century the most peaceful of nations, like Germany, have had unceasingly to increase their military power, but only in the interests of their independence.”¹³⁴

However, the Jewish influence must never be overlooked.

According to Chamberlain, the Jews constitute a very serious threat

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 276.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 11

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 117

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 121

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 105

within the nation.¹³⁵ He tells us that the Jews are wholly alien to the Teutonic “work of culture”¹³⁶ and to that extent their adverse effect should be recognised. Chamberlain declares that in addition Jews have been very closely connected via their financial operations with “all the wars of the nineteenth century”.¹³⁷ Not only this, but the Jews, instilled an “un-Aryan spirit” into Christianity.¹³⁸ This un-Aryan spirit also infected the Aryan race itself. “The Indo-European”, he declares, “moved by ideal motives, opened the gates in friendship: the Jew rushed in like an enemy, stormed all positions and planted the flag of his, to us, alien nature - I will not say on the ruins, but in the breaches of our genuine individuality.”¹³⁹ Jews are alien, says Chamberlain, in that they have a different spirit, a different soul from Indo-European people. Although Chamberlain states that we cannot judge between good and bad individuals, he is equally certain that this is possible with regard to races. This is because some races, in his view, are clearly worthy and others clearly the opposite. The Jewish race is certainly considered to be very much in opposition to the Indo-European or Aryan race. This hostility could lead to dire consequences. “If the Jewish influence were to gain the upper hand in Europe in the intellectual and cultural sphere”, says Chamberlain,

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 116

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. lxxviii

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 344

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 329

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 330-331

“we should have one more example of negative, destructive power.”¹⁴⁰
In considering the differences between Teuton and what Chamberlain terms “Anti-Teuton”¹⁴¹, Chamberlain reflects that “it is clear that, in a certain sense we may regard the intellectual and moral history of Europe from the moment of the entry of the Teuton to the present day as a struggle between Teuton and non-Teuton, between Germanic sentiment and Anti-Germanic disposition...”¹⁴² Particularly now, in the nineteenth century, says Chamberlain, there exists danger to this Germanic nature. Europe consists of “the chaos of half-breeds, relics of the former Roman Empire...the Jews - and the Germans, whose contamination by mixture with the half-breeds and the descendants of other Non-Aryan races is on the increase. No arguing about ‘humanity’ can alter the fact that this means a struggle...this struggle, silent though it may be, is above all others a struggle for life and death.”¹⁴³

When Chamberlain sets himself to answer the question, “Who were the heirs of antiquity?”¹⁴⁴, he considers that the final days of the “decaying” Roman Empire were nothing more than an “unfortunate intermediate stage” between the present and the racial heyday of the

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 492

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 552

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 563

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 578

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 251

distant past.¹⁴⁵ Positive power, on the other hand, was evinced by the barbaric Germanic peoples who set themselves against the Romans who had fallen into “bestial” race-chaos. To this extent “the entrance of the Germanic tribes into the history of the world” signified “the rescuing of agonised humanity from the clutches of the everlastingly bestial.”¹⁴⁶ However, Chamberlain does not claim that the Germanic tribes have remained unpolluted by racial mixing. On the contrary, “only a portion”, he says, is like this.¹⁴⁷ Chamberlain explains that the Teutons entered an already formed world stage that affected them as much as they affected it. Before the Teutons came “under the influence of Rome”, he states they were “tolerant, evangelical, morally pure.”¹⁴⁸ However, agonises Chamberlain, they then fell prey to race-mixing. “When we see”, he declaims,

those splendid “barbarians” glowing with youth, free, making their entry into history endowed with all those qualities which fit them for the very highest place, when next we realise how they, the conquerors...contaminate their pure blood by mixture with the unpure races of the slave-born; how they...force their way with untold toil out of the night of this Chaos towards a new dawn; then we have to acknowledge the further fact that every new day adds new enemies and new dangers to those which already exist - that these new enemies, like the former ones, are received by the Teutons with open arms, that the voice of warning is carelessly laughed at, and that while every enemy of our race, with full consciousness and the perfection of cunning, follows his own designs, we - still great, innocent

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 299-300

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 495

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 497

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 555

barbarians - concentrate ourselves upon earthly and heavenly ideals...¹⁴⁹

Chamberlain is explicit that he is writing in order to effect an understanding of the mission of the Teutonic peoples as being “founders of a completely new civilisation and culture...”¹⁵⁰ The nineteenth century, says Chamberlain, is a century which should be construed as a middle point between the “barbarism which followed upon the downfall of the old world”¹⁵¹ and a “new harmonious culture” which the Teutonic peoples are advancing towards.¹⁵² Within nations, says Chamberlain, “race formation...must daily increase” because “the sound and normal evolution of man is...from racelessness to ever clearer distinctiveness of race.”¹⁵³ The fundamental importance of race is that it can always give people a sense of something greater than themselves to which they belong. “The man who belongs to a distinct, pure race, never loses the sense of it”, he says.¹⁵⁴ In his discussion of the probability or otherwise of the existence of a discrete Aryan race, Chamberlain writes in a footnote that “though it were proved that there never was an Aryan race in the past, yet we desire that in the future there may be one. That is the decisive standpoint for men of action.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 576

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. lxxv

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. cvii

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. xcvi

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 296

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 269

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 266

Chamberlain says that although “one of the most admirable characteristics of the Jews...was their care to keep the race pure...”¹⁵⁶, ever since antiquity they have exercised a pernicious influence. The Jews, according to Chamberlain, are not only the born enemies of every system of government, but are also dogmatic and fanatical. They would banish “all freedom of thought and faith” from the world.¹⁵⁷ Although there may be some individual differences between Jews, for example, in intellect or morality, fundamentally they are governed by their race. This Chamberlain sets forth as: “the inborn tendencies of thought and action, the definite bent, which the mind takes from the habits of generations.”¹⁵⁸ In spite of saying that the inclination to make Jews the scapegoats for all ills is not acceptable, he is not averse to quoting Herder as saying that “the Jewish people is and remains in Europe as Asiatic people alien to our part of the world...”¹⁵⁹ However, asks Chamberlain,

Are we for that reason to revile the Jews? That would be as ignoble as it is unworthy and senseless. The Jews deserve admiration, for they have acted with absolute consistency according to the logic and truth of their own individuality and never for a moment have they allowed themselves to forget the sacredness of physical laws because of foolish humanitarian daydreams which they shared only when such a policy was to their advantage.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 205

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 120

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 482

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 330

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 330-331

In the past, continues Chamberlain, the Jews were protected by the rulers and the nobility because they needed the money and financial expertise that the Jews could supply. And this was permitted despite the “disintegrating activity of the Jews.”¹⁶¹ However, he claims, Jewish influence has now pervaded society to such an extent that the materialist view of life is taking ascendancy. This materialism, he declares, is wantonly spread by Semites. “Wherever the Semitic spirit has breathed”, he proclaims, “we shall meet with this materialism.”¹⁶² Chamberlain at first appears to suggest that he does not agree with people such as Gobineau, whom he quotes directly as saying that the Jews have always had a “disintegrating influence upon all peoples.”¹⁶³ However, he goes on to say that “the Semitic dogma of materialism” is responsible for depriving “noble human races of all soul...”¹⁶⁴ Chamberlain says that the nineteenth century can be truthfully categorised as the century of materialism as opposed to idealism.¹⁶⁵ This is due to the adverse influence of the Jew. The press, for example, is “at the same time a

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 347

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 422. As Stackelberg points out, here Chamberlain is pandering to the stereotype of Jewish “materialism”. Stackelberg, *op.cit.*, p. 125

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 254

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 256

¹⁶⁵ Stackelberg points out that German intellectuals tended to see the French Revolution as a triumph of pure materialism. Stackelberg, *op.cit.*, p. 2 Not only that, but idealists saw themselves as morally superior to materialists and rationalists. This anti-materialism could lead to a situation where “equalitarian reform could be discredited as the neglect of spiritual values in favour of materialistic aims.” *ibid.*, p. 3

political, and social power of the very first rank..." Not only this, but it is "the most powerful ally of capitalism..."¹⁶⁶ That it has become a powerful "New Force"¹⁶⁷ in society is owing partly to the "emancipation of the Jews which led to the inroad of Jews into the life of the European races..."¹⁶⁸

Chamberlain claims that if the Romans had not prevented the spread of Jewish influence then the "flatly materialistic view of God would have been our religion, pettifoggery our philosophy."¹⁶⁹ All the ills which Chamberlain perceives in Christianity, he puts down to the influence of Judaism. In addition, because of the important influence that Judaism has had on Christianity, Chamberlain views his own era as a "Jewish age."¹⁷⁰ In examining Christ as an historical figure, Chamberlain feels it necessary to enquire as to whether or not Christ was a Jew "by race".¹⁷¹ He argues that "in that whole region [i.e. Galilee at the time of Christ] there was only one single pure race, a race which by painfully scrupulous measures protected itself from all mingling with other nations - the Jewish..."¹⁷² Additionally, the region in which Christ was born was said by Chamberlain to consist

¹⁶⁶ Chamberlain, *op.cit.*, p. lxxxii

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. lxxxi

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. lxxxiii

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 121

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 330

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 210

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p. 212

of a “medley of races”¹⁷³ due to much in-migration. To Chamberlain, this meant that there was almost certain to be some quantity of people with “purely Aryan blood” there.¹⁷⁴ He distinguishes between race and religion and suggests that it can be far from certain that “Christ’s parents were of Jewish descent.”¹⁷⁵ This, he says, can be illustrated by showing the way in which Galileans were portrayed, i.e. as being - unlike those of the Jewish race - “hot-heads, energetic idealists, men of action.”¹⁷⁶ There were also, Chamberlain claims, significant differences in language and accent. In fact, he declares, the accents were so very different (between the Galilean dialect of Aramaic and the Judean one) that there is a strong indication of a “physical difference in the form of the larynx [which] would alone lead us to suppose that a strong admixture of non-Semitic blood had taken place...”¹⁷⁷ He feels it necessary to add that “whoever makes the assertion that Christ was a Jew is either ignorant or insincere...”¹⁷⁸ For Chamberlain: “That Jesus Christ did not belong to [the Jewish race] can be regarded as certain.”¹⁷⁹

It is obvious that Chamberlain considers the Jew to be no friend, but rather an enemy, to non-Jews. He goes so far as to insist

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 204

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 205

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 206

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 207

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 209

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 211

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 212

that the “demoniacal power” of the Jew be recognised.¹⁸⁰ He, again, quotes Herder as saying: “What a prospect it would be to see the Jews purely humanised in their way of thinking!” However, he doubts that this would be possible for “a purely humanised Jew is no longer a Jew because, by renouncing the idea of Judaism, he *ipso facto* has left that nationality which is composed and held together by a complex of conceptions, by a ‘faith’.”¹⁸¹

Chamberlain once more reverts to antiquity as a base for his arguments. Roman politics, he alleges, always worked better when they relied on instinct rather than when they were “in the hands of professional politicians.”¹⁸² On the other hand, the nineteenth century is a century that illustrates the triumph of the “democratic principle”, which allows the possibility of everyone contributing to humanity, rather than - as in the past - only geniuses.¹⁸³ Despite this, however, Chamberlain does despise liberalism - but from the racial angle.¹⁸⁴ There still lingers in some areas, he says, the remnants of those “ideas of the eighteenth century” which posited the “so-called unity of the human race.”¹⁸⁵ However, he declares, this is

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 488. The Jew is also linked to magic, as Chamberlain tells us in a footnote. “It is known”, he says, “that Cabal is a Jewish word and a Jewish thing: The impulse common to all men, which in our case leads to mysticism, leads in the case of the Semite to magic.” p. 477

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 492

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p. 122

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. xcix

¹⁸⁴ As Field puts it: “Chamberlain’s repudiation of liberal norms and institutions was couched in the language of race...” Field, *op.cit.*, p. 84

¹⁸⁵ Chamberlain, *op.cit.*, p. xciv

now recognised as having no scientific or material foundation; although, he remarks parenthetically, the Socialists still cling on to it.

Treitschke¹⁸⁶ is in agreement with Chamberlain that the Jews were tolerated in Germany because of their proficiency in handling finance. However, like Chamberlain, he now considers that they have become unnecessary since “the Aryan races learnt how to manage their own finance themselves.”¹⁸⁷ Nolte, however, maintains that racism is not a significant factor in Treitschke’s works. “It is doing a man like Treitschke an injustice”, he affirms, “to pin him down solely on the basis of the remark, ‘The Jews are our misfortune.’”¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Treitschke does express his worry that, now the Jews are socially redundant, “a dangerous disintegrating force lurked in this people who were able to assume the mask of any other nationality.”¹⁸⁹ This is a danger which is not mentioned in the press, says Treitschke, because of “the abuse which the Jewish press pours upon what is a simple historical truth.”¹⁹⁰ He wonders how to solve this problem and considers the question of baptism of Jews. There are, he declares,

¹⁸⁶ According to Metz, “no German intellectual living in the second half of the nineteenth century influenced German public opinion to the same extent as he did, except Karl Marx.” Karl H. Metz, “The Politics of Conflict: Heinrich von Treitschke and the idea of *Realpolitik*”, *History of Political Thought*, vol. III, No. 2, Summer 1982, p. 276

¹⁸⁷ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*, volume I, translated by Blanche Dugdale and Torben De Bille, introduction by A.J.Balfour (London, 1916) p. 300

¹⁸⁸ Nolte, *op.cit.*, p. 635, note 3

¹⁸⁹ Treitschke, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 300

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 301

unbaptised Jews who are good Germans...and there are others who are not, although they have been baptised; the legal aspect of the question is therefore a difficult one. If legislation were to treat the Jews simply as sojourners in the country, allowing them to ply civil trades, but withholding political and magisterial rights, it would be an injustice, because it would not fulfill the purpose for which it was designed. A baptised Christian cannot be legally regarded as a Jew.¹⁹¹

Treitschke sees the presence of the Jews in Germany as a problem which can be solved by “only one means...and that is to arouse an energy of national pride, so real that it becomes a second nature to repel involuntarily everything that is foreign to the Germanic nature.”¹⁹² The solution, according to Treitschke, is that the German must understand the alien nature of the Jew. “Whenever he finds his life sullied by the filth of Judaism the German must turn from it, and learn to speak the truth boldly about it. The party of compromise must bear the blame for any unsavoury wave of anti-Semitism which may arise.”¹⁹³

McGovern is of the opinion that the “widespread popularity of Treitschke’s *Politics* was an important factor in preparing the German public to accept the later Nazi ideology.”¹⁹⁴ In this work, Treitschke “was consistent in being an ardent nationalist and a devoted advocate

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 301

¹⁹² *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 301-302

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 302

¹⁹⁴ McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 387

of a strong unified state.”¹⁹⁵ Treitschke explains that each distinct nation has its own special worth. Despite this, however, there are grave differences between nations that are revealed by their courage. “Brave peoples alone”, he says, “have an existence, an evolution or a future; the weak and cowardly perish, and perish justly.”¹⁹⁶

Treitschke turns his attention to the intrinsic qualities of the nation. He is of the opinion that certain nations have creative qualities that others lack. It is clear to him that “all the true masterpieces of Poetry and Art have originated in the atmosphere which belongs to great nationalities.”¹⁹⁷ It is also clear to him that great nations are hardened by adversity. Moreover, to Treitschke, it is an unfortunate truth that nations may be dangerously softened by prosperity, especially if the “corroding influence of peace”¹⁹⁸ begins to act. War is the optimum hardening agent or, as Treitschke puts it, “war is the one remedy for an ailing nation.”¹⁹⁹ This is partly because of the unifying effect war has upon the nation: “Forgetting himself, the individual must only remember that he is a part of the whole, and realise the unimportance of his own life compared with the common weal.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 360. In “*Die Freiheit*” of 1861, he said that “the real basis of liberty is not the individual and his so-called human rights, but the state. Without the state there is no liberty, but if there is a state, there is at least the possibility of personal freedom.” Quoted in Metz, *op.cit.*, p. 273

¹⁹⁶ Treitschke, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 21

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 38

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 50

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 66

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 66

Treitschke declares that, "if a nation has the power to preserve itself and its nationality through the merciless race struggle of history then every progress in civilisation will only develop more strikingly its deeper national peculiarities."²⁰¹ As Treitschke puts it, the state's "very personality is power...its highest moral duty is to uphold that power"²⁰² of which the highest aim is "self-maintenance."²⁰³ When looking at this question of self-preservation, Treitschke considers the tension between abstract morality and the means a state employs to ensure its safety.²⁰⁴ He decides that "the maintenance of its power then is a task of incomparable grandeur for the State..."²⁰⁵ However, he points out the difference between self-preservation and "the crude land-grabbing which Napoleon I practised is not only thoroughly immoral, but unpolitical in the highest degree."²⁰⁶ He calls this "a sin against the spirit of history which strove to turn the rich diversity of nations knit by a bond of brotherhood into the empty form of a single World Empire. This policy of unabashed robbery destroyed its self at the finish."²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Treitschke, quoted in McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 366

²⁰² Treitschke, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 94

²⁰³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 94

²⁰⁴ Metz points out that Treitschke held to the opinion that if the state "was threatened in its very existence, it must break the law, provided this was necessary for its survival." Metz, *op.cit.*, p. 276

²⁰⁵ Treitschke, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 97

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 97

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 97

Treitschke, unlike Gobineau, believes that geographical conditions *are* a significant factor in the lives of nations. Geography, he maintains, has “contributed towards different developments of national civilisation.”²⁰⁸ Also, climatic “influences very closely both economic life and the life of the intellect.”²⁰⁹ With regard to geographical factors, Treitschke is of the opinion that “the great river-valleys are usually the principal abodes of civilisation.”²¹⁰ Witness the Rhine, he says. It remains, according to him, the “King of Rivers.”²¹¹ Nevertheless, despite all these boons to civilisation, Treitschke is convinced that Germany should put more effort into the drive towards colonisation. He is very concerned that the emigration to America by Germans should be halted. In Treitschke’s view, this emigration has meant to Germany that “thousands of her best sons have turned their backs upon their fatherland because they could not earn their living at home. They are lost to us forever...”²¹² If Germany had colonies - people could go to these colonies rather than having to emigrate to a foreign country. Therefore, says Treitschke, “the outcome of our next successful war must be the acquisition of colonies by any possible means.”²¹³ In the future, he says, “the goal

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 207

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 210

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 215

²¹¹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 215

²¹² *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 118

²¹³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 119

of human civilisation will be the establishment of the aristocracy of the white races over the whole globe..."²¹⁴

The state, as has been mentioned before, must practice self-preservation. And in this thrust towards self-preservation "weakness must always be condemned as the most disastrous and despicable of crimes, the unforgivable sins of politics."²¹⁵ A position of strength has to be maintained. This means that any thought of world-wide disarmament is no more than an unrealisable ideal. The state can never dispense with armed force. Says Treitschke: "It is then the normal and reasonable thing for a great nation to embody and develop the essence of the State, which is power, by organising its physical strength in the constitution of the Army."²¹⁶ The maintenance of an army is advantageous to a nation, "not only in possession of a means to serve the ends of foreign policy, but further because a noble nation with a heroic history can for a long time use its Army as a civilising instrument, because it finds in it a school for the real manly virtues which are so easily lost in an age of commerce and luxury."²¹⁷ Therefore, "it is then the normal and reasonable thing

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 448

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 95

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 395. According to McGovern, Treitschke "spoke passionately" in favour of the annexation of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. "Those provinces", he said, "are ours by the right of the sword..." McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 367

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 394. To Treitschke, there is a vital difference between using bodily exercise in sports training and using it in the martial arts. In his view, although athletic sports breed "the athletic spirit", with its "barbarism and its instinct for external things, which leads it to strive to carry off the prize." *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 395

for a great nation to embody and develop the essence of the State, which is power, by organising its physical strength in the constitution of the Army. We live in a warlike age...so that we can once more join hands with Clausewitz in calling war as forceful continuation of politics.”²¹⁸ If the political powers are in disagreement at any time, declares Treitschke,

the sword will be the only arbiter. We have learned to perceive the moral majesty of war through the very processes which to the superficial observer seem brutal and inhuman. The greatness of war is just what at first sight seems to be its horror - that for the sake of their country men will overcome the natural feelings of humanity, that they will slaughter their fellow men... Man will not only sacrifice his life, but the natural and justified instincts of his soul; his very self he must offer up for the sake of patriotism; here we have the sublimity of war. When we pursue the thought further we see how war, with all its brutality and sternness, weaves a bond of love between man and man, linking them together to face death, and causing all class-distinctions to disappear. He who knows history knows also that to banish war from the world would be to mutilate human nature. There could be no freedom without military power ready to sacrifice itself for freedom's sake...A State which neglects its physical strength and only cultivates its intellectual powers perishes.²¹⁹

To Treitschke, “war and the administration of justice...”²²⁰ are two of the fundamental objects of the state. In his opinion, this proves the impossibility and undesirability of a world-state because war and justice necessitate the existence of distinct nations. War

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 395

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 395-396

²²⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 19

brings out “the full magnificence of the sacrifice of fellow-countrymen for one another. In war the chaff is winnowed from the wheat...It is war which fosters the political idealism which the materialist rejects.”²²¹ Treitschke also declares that “the individual must sacrifice himself for the community of which he is a member...Weakness must always be condemned as the most disastrous and despicable of crimes, the unforgivable sin of politics.”²²² In addition he announces that “the grandeur of war 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.”²²³

Treitschke warns that nations should not link themselves by sentiment to foreign nations “as we Germans have often done to England.”²²⁴ Rather the connections should be by way of voluntary treaties that maintain individual sovereignty and achieve “a harmonious comity of nations...”²²⁵ These treaties, of course, would not be set in stone. “No State”, Treitschke avers, “can pledge its future to another.”²²⁶ It is useful in all cases to have a strong leader.

²²¹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 67. However, although wars inspire bravery and are strong medicine for nations, Treitschke does not deny that “the progress of culture must make wars both shorter and rarer...”

ibid., vol. I, p. 69

²²² *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 94-95

²²³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 66-67

²²⁴ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 24

²²⁵ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 28

²²⁶ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 28. He also notes that, by the same token, “the establishment of a permanent international Arbitration Court is incompatible with the nature of the State...” *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 29

“Statecraft”, says Treitschke, “demands a man of iron nerve...”²²⁷ To Treitschke, Bismarck, that “soldier hero”²²⁸, epitomises this type of man. Treitschke is a great believer in the benefits of heroism and links these benefits with the advantages of war. The materialist perspective is again condemned for encompassing only the practicalities of war. “What a disaster of civilisation it would be”, says Treitschke, “if mankind blotted its heroes from memory. The heroes of a nation are the figures which rejoice and inspire the spirit of its youth...”²²⁹ Nowhere is this more true than in the land of the Aryans. As Treitschke says, “To Aryan races, who are before all things courageous, the foolish preaching of everlasting peace has always been vain.”²³⁰ The common person from the lowest stratum of society has in his blood “the joy in heroic deeds...”²³¹ However, states Treitschke, the heroes that are needed to reinvigorate the nation must be popular ones. With the sole exception of Bismarck - mere statesmen will not do.²³² In order to instil national pride and vigour into Germany, declares Treitschke, it is necessary to “come down to the lowest stratum of society...” Although this stratum contains “the worst elements in society...”, it also contains the “rejuvenating and revivifying force of every nation.”²³³ This is because “every people

²²⁷ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 98

²²⁸ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 324

²²⁹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 67

²³⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 67

²³¹ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 324

²³² *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 324

²³³ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 322

renews itself from beneath; the worn-out elements sink back, the new young ones rise upwards..."²³⁴

Treitschke recognises the shortcomings of the party system, but maintains: "An unprejudiced study of history shows that Party is a political necessity for a free people. It draws the countless opinions of individuals together into one average, and crystallises the confused judgement of each into definite form."²³⁵ The unfortunate aspect of parties, however, says Treitschke, is that "every party must be one-sided. There can only be a really national party in countries that are still struggling for their independence and freedom from an anti-national power."²³⁶ Democracy, too, says Treitschke, is "the most easily comprehended and the most beloved by the people. Its fundamental idea is the natural equality of all mankind. This notion has something of the sublime, and it not hard to understand why it has often had an intoxicating effect." However, he continues, "we know well enough that it is only a half-truth which can never be completely realised, but it strikes its roots deep into human nature."²³⁷ For Treitschke, the distribution of power within society

²³⁴ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 323. Also note that, in looking at forms of the state, he turns his attention to Venice, which he castigates for its fault in having "a tendency to despise all men, and still more all talents, whose origin was humble. Here lay the real canker at the root of the proud Republic..." *ibid.*, vol. II, p.265-266

²³⁵ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 143

²³⁶ *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 143

²³⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 273

was vital and there would always be inequalities in this. The important thing was that the State should be strong.²³⁸ And, within the State, he believed that there would always be an elite who ruled, and a mass who *were* ruled.²³⁹ Because of this, he maintained that “the function of parliamentary representation was to represent those who were powerful in society; it had to express the social structure of power. The granting of male suffrage by Bismarck was in his eyes a grave mistake, for it gave political weight to the class of have-nots, whose power was not political and which could only be made political by turning the established order upside down.”²⁴⁰

Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was also an ardent nationalist. O’Sullivan reports that Hitler had met him in 1922 and had “responded enthusiastically to the encounter: ‘You have everything I lack’ (he told Moeller) ‘You create the spiritual framework for Germany’s reconstruction. I am but a drummer and an assembler. Let us work together.’”²⁴¹ Moeller’s fundamental conviction, asserts O’Sullivan, was “the belief that the only relevant form of conservative doctrine in the modern world is one which begins by accepting and embracing revolution, instead of by rejecting or suppressing it.”²⁴²

²³⁸ This strength was necessary, says Metz, because only the state could be a neutral arbiter between the competing interests of various groups. Metz, *op.cit.*, p. 272

²³⁹ To Treitschke, as Metz points out, “social order comes from dominance: there is always a minority that rules and a majority that obeys.” Metz, *op.cit.*, p. 281-282

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p281-282

²⁴¹ Noel O’Sullivan, *Modern Ideologies, Fascism* (London, 1983) p. 144

²⁴² *ibid.*, p. 144

Moeller's big enemy was liberalism and the "spirit of rationalism." However, as O'Sullivan tells us, Moeller realised that the "notion of rationalism was too abstract to mobilise mass political sentiment, and he therefore concentrated his attack upon...parliamentary democracy, the capitalist economic system and the danger of Bolshevik socialism..."²⁴³ For Moeller, says O'Sullivan, "it was this failure to win the active support of the masses which had been the main weakness of the Second Reich..."²⁴⁴ Herf considers Moeller to be "the single most important figure of the conservative revolution..."²⁴⁵ However, he notes that Moeller "did not place anti-Semitism and the centre of [his] *Weltanschauung*."²⁴⁶ However, as O'Sullivan points out: "all that was required in order to recast this wholesale attack upon Weimar in Nazi terms was to substitute anti-Semitism for 'rationalism' as the basis of the conspiracy theory which was to be used to mobilise the masses."²⁴⁷

Liberalism, as Stern points out, was loathed by Moeller above all - it was seen by him as the source of all social ills. Moeller's hatred of liberalism was matched by his contempt for pacifism. To

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 145

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 147

²⁴⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism, Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 37. Although Moeller's works were largely unnoticed prior to the war, after 1918, Stern reports, "he became the leading figure of the conservative revolution..." Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair, A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961) p. 183

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 35

²⁴⁷ O'Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p. 146

him, battle and struggle were important for the well-being of the nation and more than this even, they were valuable in their own right. Stern contends that it is hardly then surprising that "Moeller came to believe that the virtues of struggle could ennoble a whole people and that war itself could have the same liberating and invigorating effects as spiritual self-conquest."²⁴⁸ Moeller travelled in his youth and these travels, as Stern remarks, "clinched his view that each people had its own definable national character, and that the peoples of the world were divided into young peoples and old peoples - roughly, those that still had a future and those that did not."²⁴⁹ His love of battle and youthfulness turned on an admiration of heroism for its own sake. However, this attitude created a problem when he looked at Germany because, as Stern points out, "there was nothing heroic about imperial Germany, and implicitly this vision of the heroic life was a denunciation of bourgeois life and an affirmation of an authoritarian or Caesarist society."²⁵⁰ In Moeller's view, "only heroes should govern and such born leaders"²⁵¹ would guarantee the unity of the nation. He admired Bismarck and what Bismarck had tried to achieve, but felt that Bismarck's attempt had foundered "because of the growing gulf between the uncreative, 'official' element of German society, that is, the army and bureaucracy, and the

²⁴⁸ Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 189

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 191

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 195

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.195

creative popular element.”²⁵² This creative element was finely honed by hardship and struggle - especially so in war. Liberalism, on the other hand, could only be socially destructive. Stern maintains that “in the final retreat from the republic and from parliamentarianism, Moeller’s ideas were involved time and time again.”²⁵³ He also reports that Goebbels had been “deeply moved by Moeller’s *Das Dritte Reich*: ‘So calm and clear, yet gripped by passion, he writes everything that we, the young people, have long known in our hearts and instincts.’”²⁵⁴ Goebbels is also quoted as saying: “I welcome the dissemination of Moeller’s work which is so very important for the history of National Socialist political ideas.”²⁵⁵

For Moeller the battlefields of World War I not only honed the creative element, but also allowed the youth to gain a consciousness of their national-political purpose.²⁵⁶ “Fighting is magnificent”, he declared, “and more worthy of man than self-indulgence and smug comfort. Battle gives us, especially when it is of spirits and passions, our greatest kings and best heroes...”²⁵⁷ And more than this, “war has always been the national expression of the struggle for survival.”²⁵⁸ He says that both the French and the English - peoples

²⁵² *ibid.*, p. 196

²⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 264

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 266. (*The Goebbels Diaries*, p. 58, 18 December 1925)

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 296

²⁵⁶ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich* (Hamburg, 1931) p. 31

²⁵⁷ Moeller van den Bruck, *Die Moderne Literatur* (1902) in Stern, *op.cit.*, pages 188-189.

²⁵⁸ Moeller, *Entscheidende Deutsche*, in Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 210

whom he declares to be older than the Germans - have had their revolutions, which allowed them to become politicised nations. This made it easier for them to win the war for they had but one aim - victory. The Germans lost the war, he declares, to the political spirits of the French and English people - spirits which they had achieved through their revolutions. In Moeller's opinion, the Germans lost the world which the world war should have opened up to them. Their revolution succeeded in inflicting upon them nothing but a narrow existence, penned-in on all sides.²⁵⁹ Now Germans, he avers, want to make war and revolution a means of bringing to a political solution the problem of their history. A problem which, he continues, will never be soluble without such war and revolution.²⁶⁰ He believes it to be necessary for Germans to make a revolution in order to win that which was lost by the war. It is essential to recognise, he says, why the German people, having won the world war militarily - lost it politically.²⁶¹

Moeller admired Bismarck, particularly for his determination to create a great people once more. However, he says, Bismarck's plans passed away with him because no adequate political tradition had been left behind. The fate of the German people, says Moeller, now

²⁵⁹ Moeller, *Das Dritte Reich, op.cit.*, p. 32

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 33

²⁶¹ *ibid.* ("um zu erkennen, warum wir diesen Weltkrieg, den wir militärisch gewannen, politisch verloren haben...") p. 16

depends in the first instance, on the strength of their spirit (*Geist*).²⁶² There is truth in the old saying, he continues, that this German race is damned²⁶³, but there is one more chance, he contends, to save Germany from this fatal destiny. That is by instigating a fundamental alteration of the people - by permitting, if not insisting upon, the creation of a new German race.²⁶⁴ People who recognise the "Treaty of Versailles", he declares, are not of this race. The German race has been subject to a resurrection which, he avers, begins the new German revolution. However, this revolution will be either a breakthrough into an altered state of mind and an accompanying self-recognition; or it spells "our doom".²⁶⁵

He goes on to say that Germans should not compare what they were before 1914, with what they are since 1918. Instead it is necessary to look for a third standpoint. The German people may still find, he says, that they are capable of a long *völkisch* history.²⁶⁶ It is the case that Germans became materialistic people in a materialistic age. Although the Germans won the world war on every battlefield²⁶⁷, the political system - resting on the previous generation's spiritual

²⁶² *ibid.*, p. 18

²⁶³ *ibid.* ("*dieses ganze Geschlecht ist verflucht*") p. 20

²⁶⁴ "One thing, and one only, can save us: a human, spiritual renewal: the evolution of a new race of Germans who shall make good all that we have wrecked." Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire*, English edition by E.O. Lorimer, introduced by Mary Agnes Hamilton (New York, 1971) p. 23

²⁶⁵ *ibid.* ("*unser Untergang*") p. 21

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 30

²⁶⁷ *ibid.* ("*auf allen Schlachtfeldern*") p. 19

neglect²⁶⁸ ensured that final victory was lost to them. It was now necessary for the German people to wait for that which again inflames the genius of the nation - a political spirit.²⁶⁹

In order to achieve a future for the German people, it is indispensable that the political shape should be given a national form. Germans will not be able to act as a political people until their nation is politicised. The German people must agitate to ensure political nationalisation or else their nation will cease to be.²⁷⁰ Fortunately, he says, since the war there has been a definite change in the people. Despite the existence of enemies, despite the overt class-struggle fostered by the German parties - a feeling of solidarity has been created within the German people - a *Volk* wants to become a nation.²⁷¹ However, at this time, Germans are a *Volk* without reality - still possessing only possibilities, announces Moeller. The revolutionaries of 1918 lost the war of 1914, because their Revolution was not a German revolution. They thought, he explains, that it was enough to simply copy the West. They failed to understand that a people's revolution can only be a national one. They were too concerned with classes and not concerned enough with the nation.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.* ("geistige Vernachlassigung des letzten Menschenalters") p. 19

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 25

²⁷⁰ *ibid.* ("die Nation wird nicht mehr sein) p. 31. "We must as a people complete our transformation into a politically-minded nation: or as a nation we shall cease to exist." Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire*, *op.cit.*, p. 35

²⁷¹ *ibid.* ("ein Volk eine Nation werden will") p. 31

Although they looked to the future, their vision was flawed. In this connection, Moeller had hard words to say about Karl Marx:

Some prophecies come true. There are some men gifted with a sensitivity towards the present, so acute, so penetrating, so far beyond the normal that they become, as it were, confidants of the future and they possess powers enabling them to help to mould the future. Such men may be allowed to prophesy, but they must be men physically and mentally at one with the people. Marx was not such a one. He was a Jew, a stranger in Europe who nevertheless dared to meddle in the affairs of European peoples. He was not intimately in touch with their history; their past was not his past, and the traditions which had determined their present, were not his. He had not lived through the centuries with them, his feelings were different, his thoughts were different. Marx is only comprehensible through his Jewish origins...Jew that he was, national feeling was incomprehensible to him; rationalist that he was, national feeling was for him out of date...It did not occur to him that perhaps national socialism might be a condition precedent of universal socialism; that men can only live if their nations live also.²⁷²

Moeller insists that the German people need a strong and determined leader. Part of the reason for the lack of world success of the German people, he contends, is the absence of such a leader. In order to remember success, he says, thoughts must turn to the Second Reich. Then the German people had a statesman - Bismarck - who used the power of his will to achieve his aims. He stood against his opponents and, when necessary, when opposition came from the pure contrariness of the German *Volkscharakter* - he would act against this "contrariness" too. He waited upon the right

²⁷² Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire*, op.cit., p. 43-44

moment, but if this moment did not arise - then he brought it about: "He forced conditions into his service..."²⁷³ He could be seen, in many respects, as a real hero of the German people, and heroes are what Moeller believes the German nation needs. For Moeller, heroes and born leaders "incarnate the spirit, the great urge, and the yearning of their people...Their people follows them and moves toward the unity which alone it could never have achieved."²⁷⁴ Bismarck owed his greatness in part to his ability to recognise that quality of self-sacrifice (*Opferfähigkeit*) which existed within the *Volk*.²⁷⁵ The German people miss their goals through half-measures, says Moeller.²⁷⁶ Therefore, they must always be forced to keep their resolutions.

Moeller explains that the *Volk* did not want the 1918 revolution - but they made it because there was a pretence to *völkisch* ideals.²⁷⁷ The revolutionaries of that time claimed that they were assuming their inheritance. However, it is clear to Moeller that - if the old system was responsible for Germany's breakdown - then the new system was responsible for the iniquitous peace. The ideas of these revolutionaries were simply, he says, the outdated ideas of the nineteenth century and it is to these ideas that the German people

²⁷³ Moeller, *Das Dritte Reich*, *op.cit.* ("Er zwang die Verhältnisse in seine Dienste...") p. 17

²⁷⁴ Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 195 (from Moeller, *Führende Deutsche*, volume II of *Die Deutschen*, p. 5)

²⁷⁵ Moeller, *Das Dritte Reich*, *op.cit.*, p. 17

²⁷⁶ *ibid.* ("durch Halbheit ihre Ziele verfehlten") p. 19

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 24

owe their current tragic yet banal fate.²⁷⁸ Now, within the *Volk*, says Moeller, there is a feeling of democratic self-respect that is defending itself against the mistakes of the past. The revolutionaries of 1918 did not realise that the West - with its liberalism - had learned only to deceive the people. They called this deception democracy, says Moeller, although it rapidly became clear how little freedom, equality and brotherhood was actually contained within this democracy. Despite this, continues Moeller, the German revolution remained a liberal revolution. The 1918 revolutionaries neither wanted to, nor could, prevent this - although they called themselves socialists.²⁷⁹ Moeller believes that the role of liberalism must be understood. Thus he says that "liberalism has undermined cultures. It has annihilated religions. It has destroyed nations. It is the self-dissolution of humanity."²⁸⁰

There is an old saying, Moeller relates, that if God wants to ruin Germany - he chooses Germans to do it. This can be illustrated, he says, by looking at the actions of, firstly, the Social Democrats who, he claims, acted without any experience of foreign politics; secondly, pacifists, who must bear the responsibility of the German *Volk* giving up their arms; thirdly, German *Doktrinäre*, who trusted their country to the good will of their enemy - despite the enemy's record of broken

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 32

²⁸⁰ quoted in Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 259

promises. The German people were unpoliticised, says Moeller, and believed their *demagogischen Führern* when they spoke of peace and of ending the war by raising the red flag high. But, he continues, it was really the white flag of submission. It was, declares Moeller, the intellectuals who must take the blame for this. While proclaiming world democracy, peace on earth, inter-state *Regelung*, the end of war - they refused to see the result of these proclamations - a suffering people robbed by foreign powers.²⁸¹ The German people succumbed to a criminal swindle.²⁸² The German republic declares Moeller, has as its basis the "Treaty of Versailles", and it is the Francophile tendency that has enslaved Germans to their enemies. The nation must politicise itself in order to cast off the yoke of foreign power and to be free.²⁸³ The German people appeased the Western powers and are still appeasing them.²⁸⁴ They are subject to the impossible demands of their enemies because they signed the peace treaty. They try to compromise, Moeller says, between the possibilities and impossibilities inherent in this treaty.

The revolutionary democracy did not admit that its politics had been a mistake. It sought to suppress any voice that rose up against its politics and persecuted the nationalist and radical opposition

²⁸¹ Moeller, *op.cit.*, p. 22

²⁸² *ibid.* ("verbrecherischen Schwindel") p. 23

²⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 24

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26

instead of acting against the common enemy of the German nation.²⁸⁵

Moeller declares that the German people chose the most unsuitable moment for the revolution, as they were directly threatened by external politics. Their hope was to change the external situation by altering the internal one. However, this led to a situation where they are standing in the face of ruin²⁸⁶, which those who brought it about cannot deny.

It is appropriate to end here on Moeller van den Bruck's wholesale condemnation of the existing system. By examining the various ideas of Moeller, Gobineau, Treitschke and Chamberlain, it is hoped that the ways in which they participated in creating the atmosphere within which Nazi ideology came to fruition, have been shown.

In examining these four writers, the similarities between their thought and the ideology of Nazism cannot fail to be observed. These correspondences are evidence of the ideological history of Nazism. In looking at these four writers, it was intended to illustrate the sort of ideas that were at large before Hitler and the Nazis became prominent. As has been seen, these ideas were very close to many of the ideas of Nazism. They are actual examples of the response to the crisis of liberalism, in that so many liberal ideas were roundly

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 27

²⁸⁶ *ibid.* ("Jetzt stehen wir in Angesicht eines Verderbens") p. 28

rejected. Instead, ideas on race, ideas on authoritarian leadership, on the development of militaristic nationalism, are all here. These thinkers - and others like them - prefigured Nazi ideology. This chapter sought to show the influence that these thinkers had both in creating and also in responding to, a general intellectual atmosphere that was conducive to the development of Nazi ideology. Their characteristic rejection of aspects of thought associated with the period of the Enlightenment bears closer attention.

Chapter Six

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment

In this chapter, some of the main aspects of Enlightenment thought will be examined. This will be in order to provide foundations for the thesis that Nazism cannot be seen purely as a reaction against the thought of the Enlightenment, but rather that it must be seen as having paradoxical and ambiguous links with the Enlightenment. It is intended to show that Nazism was not an inexplicable socio-political aberration, specific to Germany, but was, in fact, in close relationship with the intellectual history of Europe. By examining the thought of the Enlightenment it is intended to show that Nazi ideology - although ostensibly rejecting all aspects of the Enlightenment - was, in fact, imbued with fundamental elements of Enlightenment thought such as, for example, its rationalism, its

materialism, its opposition to religion and its faith in science. It is also intended to argue that certain developments within the Enlightenment - such as, its linking of reason with science, its rejection of spirituality in favour of materialism, and its faith in the ability of science to give the answers to all human questions - had consequences which, although unintended, nevertheless contributed to the development of Nazism.

Writers have elucidated the relationship between fascism and Nazism and the Enlightenment in a variety of ways. In his *Fascism: A History*, Eatwell analyses the role of the Enlightenment in the rise of fascist ideology. He is of the opinion that in any understanding of the origins of fascist ideology "it is most fruitful to begin by looking briefly at the Enlightenment..." This is because the Enlightenment "ushered in the era of 'modernity'" and thus made significant and far-reaching changes in society. The Enlightenment emphasised "reason, progress and material interpretations of the world". Gradually, the idea of spiritual development was superseded by an emphasis on material progress. In addition, there was a celebration of "the power of reason and science over the previously dominant monarchical or religious authority." These changes and emphases were rejected by many. For fascists and those who were to become fascists, they were "anathema" because such material values were associated with "the

alienating pursuit of money” which “created a dangerous division between classes, and between government and people.”¹ “In this sense”, continues Eatwell, “fascism was a negation of the Enlightenment, part of a counter-revolution which rejected the basic assumptions of ‘modernity’.”² Nevertheless, despite this explicit antagonism toward the Enlightenment, he asserts, the relationship of fascism to the Enlightenment was, in fact, contradictory. Although fascism categorically rejected the rationalism and materialism of the Enlightenment, yet in many ways, it actually arose from the Enlightenment. “Paradoxically,” says Eatwell, “in terms of ideas, fascism was both a product of the Enlightenment and a reaction to it.”³ This was because many of the ideas that were intrinsic to fascism had emanated from ideas that were originally produced during the Enlightenment.⁴

¹ R. Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1995) p. 4. In addition, he says, “diffuse hostility towards material values became increasingly translated during the late nineteenth century into political anti-Semitism. The Jew was pilloried as the epitome of capitalist materialism...” *ibid.*, p. 6

² *ibid.*, p. 4

³ *ibid.*, p. 5. Eatwell points out that many of fascism’s “central arguments were based on ‘reason’ - though the conclusions contradicted the Enlightenment’s most optimistic and ‘modern’ assumptions.” *ibid.*, p. 7

⁴ Eatwell gives as an example the way in which the liberal nationalism of the period of the Enlightenment became imbued with *völkisch* values, wholly altering it and eventually allowing it to be incorporated within fascism. *ibid.*, p. 6. He also describes the way in which the Enlightenment emphasis on the sovereignty of the people was transformed into “the belief that violence might be necessary to purge the existing order, and that only a mass-based form of politics could incorporate the will of the people - ideas which fascism was clearly to echo.” *ibid.*, pages 4-5

Baumann's work, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, also makes a link between the rationality celebrated by the Enlightenment and the development of Nazism, although it emphasises the connection between the processes engendered by modernity, and the genocide carried out by the Nazis. The main premise of the work is that "the Holocaust was a characteristically modern phenomenon that cannot be understood out of the context of cultural tendencies and technical achievements of modernity..."⁵ The Enlightenment was the beginning of modernity, establishing a reason-based view of the world. The overwhelming belief in the power of reason during this period, led to the conviction that - through the medium of science - man would be able to manipulate nature according to his own desires.⁶ As Bauman says: "From the Enlightenment on, the modern world was distinguished by its activist, engineering attitude toward nature and toward itself. Science was not to be conducted for its own sake; it was seen, first and foremost, as an instrument of awesome power allowing its holder to improve on reality, to re-shape it according to human plans and designs, and to assist it in its drive to self-perfection."⁷ Reason and modern science were united in such a way that modern science could be described as the institutionalisation of

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989) p. xiii

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 68

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 70

“the cult of rationality”.⁸ Bauman argues that this conjunction of science and rationality undermined society’s functional morality. He maintains that “the civilising process is, among other things, a process of divesting the use and deployment of violence from moral calculus, and of emancipating the desiderata of rationality from interference of ethical norms or moral inhibitions.”⁹ In other words, if society is guided by the principles of rationality alone, there are no moral safeguards. “At no point of its long and tortuous execution”, says Bauman, “did the Holocaust come in conflict with the principles of rationality.”¹⁰ He concludes that “as far as modernity goes, genocide is neither abnormal nor a case of malfunction. It demonstrates what the rationalising, engineering tendency of modernity is capable of if not checked and mitigated...”¹¹

Bauman’s work has echoes of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this work, they, too, link the rationality of the Enlightenment to the excesses of Nazism. They argue that the Enlightenment’s reliance on reason and empirical science, at the expense of theoretical science, led to a relationship with nature which was one of systemised domination, where both nature and humanity were controlled. Because the system of domination was so all-

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 110

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 28

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 114

encompassing, human beings feared to deviate from it, and also had a fear of those aspects of nature which they sensed were unconstrained. Further, this meant that humanity's perception of reality was already structured by the system, leading to a situation where aspects of reality not amenable to empirical analysis could not be recognised.

Adorno and Horkheimer submit that there is a dialectical link between enlightenment and domination, a link which arises out of the way in which rationality acted upon nature. According to the rationalist approach to the world only empirical science was the legitimate method of understanding. There was nothing in nature which could not be explained by this method. There had, therefore, to be an *absolute* understanding of nature - an understanding which would allow no mystery of nature to be left unanalysed. Perceiving nature through the processes of empirical science meant that nature became dominated: by classifying and categorising nature, control was exerted over it. This rationality was all-encompassing - nothing could be outside its boundaries. To this extent, enlightenment had a totalitarian ethos.¹² Enlightened society was a society systematically structured by rationalism and empiricism. Just as nothing in nature

¹² Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (London, 1992) p. 6

was seen as being outwith the limits of reason, neither was any deviation allowed from the systematised society. Integration between the individual and the system was essential. This unity of society and domination¹³ prohibited any variance between individual behaviour and the social norm.¹⁴ Such prohibition reached its apex under fascism.

Society subjugated nature and at the same time, subjugated the individual. Domination led to the individual's alienation from nature. This caused him to become both unhappy and fearful. However, the reasons for the alienated individual's unhappiness were not apparent to him, because the system of empirical rationality did not permit such reflective or theoretical thought that would have revealed the reality of his situation - his lack of freedom.¹⁵ Rather, nature became seen as the source of unhappiness. The individual came to fear those aspects of nature that he perceived as being unrestrained: those hidden parts of nature not controlled by empirical science;¹⁶ those parts of himself which are alienated from nature. He feared a return to a state of nature.¹⁷ He projected his

¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer declare the "ideal" of the Enlightenment "is the system from which all and everything follows." *ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 30

¹⁵ Theory or reflective thought was dismissed as being "only a belief." *ibid.*, p. 12. The individual fails to recognise his domination because in his mind "domination appears to be the universal: reason in actuality." *ibid.*, p. 22

¹⁶ As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: "Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything left unknown." *ibid.*, p. 16

¹⁷ "Pure natural existence...[was]...the absolute danger." *ibid.*, p. 31

unhappiness onto nature and wanted to preserve himself from nature. This projected urge towards self-preservation is exacerbated under fascism. Under fascism, this projection is transferred onto the Jews. Fascism equates Jews with the horror of nature and Jews thus become perceived as the source of all ills and the font of all dangers. Under fascism, this false equivalence of the Jew with the horror of nature becomes the norm.¹⁸ Although this projection is false, rational argument cannot prove it so.¹⁹ Indeed, the unquestioning application of rationalism to the whole of society is at its root. Fascism is the ultimate result of the Enlightenment desire to make everything subject to the *rules of rational empiricism*. Adorno and Horkheimer argue then that - due to the very nature of empirical science and rationalism - enlightenment and domination become united. In their argument, the development of fascism was almost inevitable, given the overwhelming integration of this system of domination.

While the argument about instrumental rationality is broadly accepted here, the influence of rationalism and empirical science will be considered in this thesis as part of a wider discussion of the connecting-points between Enlightenment and Nazi ideology. This

¹⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer maintain that the Jews “share the fate of the rebellious nature as which fascism uses them...When all the horror of prehistory, which has been overlaid with civilisation, is rehabilitated as rational interest by projection onto the Jews, there is no restriction.” *ibid.*, p. 185-186

¹⁹ “Because there can be no absolutely convincing argument against materially false judgements, the distorted perception in which they appear cannot be cured.” *ibid.*, p. 193

thesis will attempt in its own way to show that, although Nazi ideology was, in many important respects, a reaction against the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment, it was also, in less obvious ways, a descendant of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is known as a time of liberalism, reason, cosmopolitanism and belief in liberty. It is, then, quite an easy step to see an ideology such as Nazism, with its emphasis on elitism, racism, authoritarianism and nationalism, as being a complete rejection of the ideas of such a time. However, it will be argued here that Nazi ideology did have a relationship to Enlightenment thought which was not one of total repudiation. Although much of Enlightenment thought was rejected outright and, indeed, vilified, a large proportion was simply modified - or even merely criticised, or tempered with scepticism. Importantly, there were many aspects that were preserved intact. An exhaustive study of Enlightenment thought cannot here be made. What is intended is a selection of those elements of Enlightenment thought that can be seen to have some relationship to Nazi ideology.

As has been shown, rejection of the materialism and rationalism of the Enlightenment was a substantial part of Nazi ideology. Therefore, it is necessary to examine this aspect of Enlightenment thought. Also rejected by the Nazis was the cosmopolitanism, humanitarianism and striving for justice and

human liberty associated with the Enlightenment, so these will also be considered. Other aspects of Enlightenment thought which are linked with these elements, such as the Enlightenment attitude to religion, other cultures, science and empiricism, will likewise be examined. Additionally, the possibility of any parallels between Nazi ideology and Enlightenment thought will also be noted (although any such linkages will be explored in the subsequent chapter).

In looking at the thought of the Enlightenment it is necessary to stress that, although it could be said that there was a general *spirit* of the Enlightenment, there was no unitary doctrine. As Gay explains clearly, the Enlightenment was a cultural climate rather than a systematic body of ideas.²⁰ Hampson agrees that the Enlightenment was not at all a concrete event, but rather a loose temporal phenomenon of shared views and values.²¹ Within Enlightenment thought there was a great deal of disagreement and contradiction. Gay's analogy is that the *philosophes* can be characterised as rather like a family, having disagreements and conflicts yet retaining certain shared ideals.²² This too, has its importance, because many of these

²⁰ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1977) see the Preface, p. ix-xii.

²¹ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth, 1968) p. 9. Hampson argues that the Enlightenment "only existed to the extent that it appears meaningful to isolate certain beliefs and ways of thinking and behaving, and to regard these as especially characteristic of a particular period." p. 9

²² Gay, *op.cit.* See chapter headed, Overture, *The Enlightenment in Its World*, p. 3-8

disagreements led to the creation of ideological off-shoots, which then developed independently. There has also been, of course, some disagreement about the extent of the influence of Enlightenment thought. Vyverberg, for instance, in the conclusion to *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment*, discusses some of the difficulties facing the historian in analysing the period of the Enlightenment, and in relating such analysis to subsequent ideologies. He asks: "Even granting the philosophical validity of the principle of causation, how is he [the historian] to be assured of a causal connection between ideas? In most instances he must have recourse to a probability sanctioned by repetition, and to the analogy of his logical processes. Both methods may be deceptive."²³ Bearing this in mind, it is, nevertheless, the belief here that in order to gauge thoroughly the development of Nazi ideology it is essential to delve into the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

The *philosophes'* attitude to traditional religion will first be examined because it links in with much of their general philosophy. Although there were differences between individual *philosophes* as regarding, for example, belief in God, or the existence of the soul,

²³ Henry Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958) p. 230

they were united in their criticism and rejection of many components of traditional religion.

Voltaire was a major critic of the biblical explanation of the world and the *Philosophical Dictionary* contained many of his sharpest criticisms. In the entry, "Abraham", for example, Voltaire satirises the chronology of the Old Testament, which had previously been accepted as being above question. He, however, casts scorn on the biblical account of Sarah, Abraham's wife, becoming pregnant at the age of ninety; and he denounces the actions of Abraham in unscrupulously passing Sarah off as his sister in order, according to Voltaire, to gain material benefits. Voltaire makes his belief clear that the general acceptance of these biblical stories is a failing both of Christian scholarship and also of Jewish history.²⁴ Then, in the chapter headed "Genesis", he takes pains to dissect the biblical account of the Creation by highlighting the inconsistencies in it. For example, he finds the description of the creation of humanity as being in God's image contradictory because, elsewhere in the Bible, he explains, it is said that God had no corporeal substance. Another example he gives is of Adam being told he would die if he ate of the tree of knowledge, and this failing to happen. Voltaire doggedly

²⁴ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, edited and translated by Theodore Besterman (Harmondsworth, 1979) p. 18

applies reason to the Bible and finds it unconvincing.²⁵ The *Philosophical Dictionary* is an excellent example of his antipathy towards what he considered to be the unreasonable aspects of Christianity.²⁶

Gay emphasises that the *philosophes* had little good to say about Christianity. However, to him, this means that they underestimated much that was worthy.²⁷ Within Christianity, for example, the question of humanity's origins was not problematic, because it was accepted that God had created all species, including human beings. According to biblical record, as Banton explains, "God had in the beginning created a limited number of species which were unchanging. Each had its place in the divine scheme. The orthodox doctrine was that all men descended from Adam and the world was about six thousand years old."²⁸ So, the "anthropology of the bible", as Banton calls it,²⁹ held Adam to be the common ancestor of all human beings. Every human being could trace his ancestry back to Adam - the first created man - and Adam was thus the forebear of all peoples. Orthodox religion emphasised the common humanity of all people - each one being made in the likeness

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 215-228

²⁶ *ibid.* See "Christianity", p. 115-141

²⁷ See Gay, *op.cit.*, Book 2, Chap 4, *The Retreat from Reason*, p. 207-218

²⁸ Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London, 1977) p. 14-15

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15

of God, each one containing within them that divine spark that was the soul. Therefore, any theories about human beings - their nature or their physical characteristics - were related back to this orthodoxy. Knowledge of the human race was, to a large extent, derived from the Bible. In other words, man's creation was clear-cut and there was no mystery about it, or questions associated with it. There was a common ancestor and set time-scale, but, more importantly, there was a certitude about where people had come from and what their future held.

However, this certainty was pierced by the criticisms of the *philosophes*.³⁰ Where before man's lineage was free from obscurity and well understood, now there were doubts and ambiguities. Voltaire gleefully exploited these ambiguities by pointing out the contradictions in the biblical account and also by showing the similarities between this account and the creation myths of ancient antiquity. His general conclusion was that these myths of a paradise lost were created in answer to a feeling that all was not well in the world, and that there *must* have been a "golden age" in the past.³¹

³⁰ Additionally, by the mid-1700s, the disparity between scientific discovery and Old Testament tradition had become a gulf. For example, geological evidence had been gathered which, as Hampson says, though "imperfect and puzzling, was...sufficient to suggest a time-scale far greater than the Old Testament permitted, and also continuous and very extensive change." Hampson, *op.cit.*, p. 90-91

³¹ Voltaire, *op.cit.*, p. 215-228

Again, in "Angel", he compares aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition - in this case the idea of there being messengers of God (angels) - with similar elements in ancient civilisations. Clearly, as before, his intention is to show the false foundation of the Christian religion as interpreted via the Old Testament.³² In yet another entry, "Adam", he ridicules the Judeo-Christian claims of originality and truth, by highlighting the similarities between the Judeo-Christian interpretation of the genesis of humanity and the creation myths of other, more ancient civilisations.³³ However, if the biblical explanation of the origin of humanity, with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, seemed flawed and unreliable, then what proof was there that all persons originated from the same source? Doubts that Adam was a universal ancestor, founded, as Poliakov explains, "on rational and scientific grounds..."³⁴, were not slow in growing.

This criticism of the Old Testament also had an effect on the way in which Judaism was perceived, for the Old Testament came to be seen as the Judaic substructure on which Christianity was constructed, and therefore to be despised and condemned for that

³² *ibid.*, p. 36-38

³³ *ibid.*, p. 20-21. Gay stresses the way in which the *philosophes* looked to antiquity in their criticism of Christianity. They also compared other cultures favourably with Christianity. Gay, *op.cit.*, chapter 3, *The Climate of Criticism*, part 2, III, p. 168-171.

³⁴ Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth, A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (London, 1974) p. 95

reason. For some, Popkin maintains, "Judaism was the foul root upon which Christianity grew."³⁵ This, of course, is seen with particular clarity in some of Voltaire's writings. Much of the *Philosophical Dictionary* was dedicated to the ridiculing of Christianity via its links with Judaism. Those elements of religious dogma which he most criticised were those which he derived from the Old Testament. He makes great play of the fact that Jesus was himself a Jew, and spends a good deal of time tracing the development of Christianity out of these Jewish roots. For example, he traces the Christian rite of baptism to its origin in Judaic tradition,³⁶ and says, specifically, in the entry on "Solomon", that "our Christian religion is based on the Jewish one..."³⁷ Voltaire condemns religion as little more than superstition, which "born in paganism, adopted by Judaism, infected the Christian church from the earliest times."³⁸ In the light of these criticisms, the Jewish adherence to their religion meant that they were considered by many philosophers of reason to be propagators and condoners of superstition - out of place in the enlightened world. As far as many were concerned, asserts Popkin, the Jews were "superstitious, unreasonable, and unenlightened..."³⁹

³⁵ Richard H. Popkin, "Medicine, Racism, Anti-Semitism: A Dimension of Enlightenment Culture", in *The Languages of Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought* (Clark Library Lectures 1985-1986) edited by G.S. Rousseau (Oxford, 1990) p. 432. Popkin also says that "Old Testament morality was really immorality when seen from an enlightened perspective." p. 432

³⁶ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, *op.cit.*, p. 60

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 373

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 383

³⁹ Popkin, *op.cit.*, p. 425

On many levels, Judaism was seen and portrayed as being “antithetical to a life of reason.”⁴⁰ Although it might be supposed that the religious prejudices that existed against the Jews would have been largely irrelevant to the *philosophes* (because of their anti-religious, anti-Christian stance), this was not entirely the case.⁴¹ Voltaire, for example, although being a leading critic of Christianity, was also able to castigate the Jews for their “implacable hatred of Christians and the gospel.”⁴²

To Voltaire, social antagonism against the Jews derived solely from their own rituals and way of living. He accuses them of blood-sacrifice, and even hints at cannibalism, saying that there have been many examples of the sacrifice of boys and girls by the Jews and asking “why should the Jews not have been cannibals? It would have been the only thing the people of God lacked to be the most abominable on earth.”⁴³ This was extreme; but Jewish separateness was generally acknowledged. Rousseau⁴⁴ also commented on it. He describes the Jewish need to remain a people, and cites the actions of

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 435

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 431

⁴² Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, *op.cit.*, p. 307

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 39-40

⁴⁴ It is recognised that, in many ways, Rousseau was untypical of the general body of Enlightenment thought. However, although there was a gulf between himself and the *philosophes*, yet he was as much a man of his time as any other Enlightenment thinker. That he was an Enlightenment philosopher, though perhaps not a *philosophe*, cannot be denied. It is felt, here, that, as he is a pivotal figure between the thought of the Enlightenment and the Romanticism which would follow it, it is essential that his views be included.

their past leader, Moses, and his creation of a “body politic” out of a “swarm of wretched fugitives...”.⁴⁵ Rousseau admired the Jewish nation for maintaining itself in the face of all hostility against it, and believed that this was due to the many traditional devices laid down by Moses for the Jewish people to follow. Thus he describes how Moses, in order to

prevent his people from melting away among foreign peoples, gave them customs and usages incompatible with other nations; he over burdened them with peculiar rites and ceremonies; he inconvenienced them in a thousand ways in order to keep them constantly on the alert and to make them forever strangers among other men; and all the fraternal bonds with which he drew together the members of his republic were as many barriers keeping them separate from their neighbours and preventing them from mingling with them. That is how this peculiar nation, so often subjugated; so often dispersed and apparently destroyed, but always fanatical in devotion to its Law, has nevertheless maintained itself down to the present day, scattered among but never intermingled with the rest; and that is why its customs, laws and rites subsist, and will endure to the end of time, in spite of the hatred and persecution of the rest of the human race.⁴⁶

To Rousseau, the antagonism towards Jews, this self-imposed separatism apart, was an effect of religion itself, because any true believer of a given religion would always fail to accept those who had other beliefs. It was his view that “it is impossible to live at peace with people whom you consider damned; to love them would be to

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation*, in Frederick Watkins (editor) *Rousseau, Political Writings* (London, 1953) p. 163

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 163-164

hate the God who punishes them; you are bound either to save or to torment them.”⁴⁷ This torment was seldom slow to arise, as D’Holbach points out, and included the burning of the Jew by the Christian because he “clings to the faith of his fathers...”⁴⁸ However, such persecution would cease to occur if the Jew converted to Christianity. If he would but discard the principles of Judaism, and adopt the principles and beliefs of Christianity, he would become one with the Christian community. Therefore, solely in accordance with religious principles, the Jews were a people, who, if embracing Christianity, if being “saved”, became wholly assimilated into Christian society.⁴⁹

However, with the undermining of traditional religion a significant change took place. As long as Christianity had been the governing force in society, the position of the Jews had been perceived - and to some extent accepted - as being that of a people

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in Watkins, *op.cit.*, p. 153-154. Despite this, Rousseau came to believe that some form of religion was essential for the maintenance of the state. Here he again distanced himself from the *philosophes* because he accused them of being as dogmatic in their rejection of religion as clerics were in their praise of it. Thus he said of them that “their apparent scepticism is a hundred times more assertive and more dogmatic than the decided tone of their adversaries.” [*Emile*, p.312] Arthur M. Melzer, “The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity”, *American Political Science Review*, June 1996, volume 90, no. 2, p. 347

⁴⁸ Baron D’Holbach, *The System of Nature or, The Laws of the Moral and Physical World*, volume 1 (London, 1817) p. 310

⁴⁹ Although note Humboldt’s comment that “in Spain it is almost a title of nobility to descend neither from Jews or Moors.” Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (New York, 1972) p. 87

who had simply failed to become reconciled to the truth and redemption of the Christian religion.⁵⁰ The only important difference between Jews and non-Jews was the religious difference. This difference had, of course, led to terrible and wide-scale persecution of the Jews by Christians across much of European history. With the Enlightenment, however, came a condemnation of this sort of religious intolerance and persecution. To this extent, then, the Enlightenment was a period in which there was a movement to protect Jews from the excesses of Christianity. However, the general secularisation of society produced its own paradoxical, always potentially hazardous, consequences for the way in which Jews were perceived. The religious aspect of the Jews became no longer relevant. Jews ceased to be seen in a religious context and instead began to be perceived as a social anomaly.⁵¹ Worse, they came to be perceived as a race apart.⁵² This had very serious consequences because, as Rose explains, “the result was that there was no longer

⁵⁰ Which meant, however, as Hampson points out, that the persecution of the Jews “seemed to many Christians to carry a divine sanction...” *op.cit.*, p. 425

⁵¹ Adorno and Horkheimer comment that “the nationalist brand of anti-Semitism ignores religious considerations and asserts that the purity of the race and the nation is at stake...It is impossible to arouse the feelings of the masses today by suggesting that the Jews are obstinate unbelievers. But it is difficult to eliminate completely the religious hostility which encouraged Christians to persecute the Jews for two thousand years...The alliance between enlightenment and domination has cut off the link between the aspect of truth in religious and the consciousness, and has retained only the objectified forms of religion.” Adorno and Horkheimer, *op.cit.*, p. 176. See also Bauman who argues that “the first impact of modernity in the situation of European Jews was their selection as the *prime target of anti-modernist resistance.*” Bauman, *op.cit.*, p. 46. See also pages 38-39, 50, 57-59.

⁵² The idea of Jews as practitioners of a separate religion changed to the concept of Jews as a separate race. See Weindling who says that “since the 1840s there was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Germany that replaced religious discrimination with a secular concept of the Jews as a separate

permitted any autonomous space for Jews to live within.”⁵³ Thus, if Christianity was to be condemned and superseded, then so also was Judaism, because both were an affront and a threat to a society governed by the principles of reason and the methodologies of the natural sciences.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, a more general undermining of the traditional beliefs of religion gathered pace. The *philosophes* were not averse to portraying orthodox religions as mechanisms for keeping the population unempowered. According to Becker, the *philosophes* were “irritated...to think that mankind had been so long deluded by priests and medicine men...”⁵⁵ The unreasonable bonds of traditional beliefs and hierarchies were seen by the *philosophes* as being one cause of the existing social injustice. This view could give something of a political dimension to the casting-off of traditional religion in favour of more materialistic ideas. Rousseau and Porter describe how some *philosophes* “represented the very idea of the immortal soul as the fabrication of vested interests, above all the clergy, eager to indoctrinate the masses with beliefs that magnified their own

race.” P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 57

⁵³ This was in large part because “a new secular mythology of reason and revolution that claimed dominion over the *whole territory* of society...” had arisen. (*my italics*) *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁴ Popkin, *op.cit.*, p. 425

⁵⁵ Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, 1955) p. 42

authority, and, more broadly, systematically promoting a self-serving 'fiction' of the superiority of the spiritual over the physical, head over hand, priesthood over people."⁵⁶ Voltaire is a good example of one who was no friend of the clerical establishment. In the *Philosophical Letters*, he writes about George Fox, the first Quaker, who went about the country "shouting against war and the clergy...If he had only preached against the military", Voltaire dryly comments, "he would have had nothing to fear; but he attacked the church-men: he was promptly sent to prison."⁵⁷

D'Holbach, who as an avowed atheist had no time whatever for religion, wrote in similar vein, that "TYRANTS and FANATICAL PRIESTS, necessarily hate truth: despise reason, because they believe them prejudicial to their interests..."⁵⁸ He castigates these for deluding humanity. "To error", he declares, "must be attributed those religious terrors which in almost every climate have either petrified man with fear, or caused him to destroy himself for coarse or fanciful beings. To error must be attributed those inveterate hatreds, those barbarous persecutions, those numerous massacres, those

⁵⁶ G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, "Introduction: Toward a Natural History of Mind and Body", in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 37. They continue by saying that "for radical *philosophes*, the very notions of God, Satan, and all other non material powers were phantoms of priestcraft, fabricated to keep the people in their place." p. 37

⁵⁷ Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, translated and introduced by Ernest Dilworth (New York, 1961) p.

11

⁵⁸ Baron D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 366

dreadful tragedies, of which under pretext of serving the interests of heaven, the earth has been but too frequently made the theatre.”⁵⁹ D’Holbach stirringly tells the reader to pursue truth for, “its lustre can wound none but those enemies to the human race whose power is bottomed solely on the ignorance, on the darkness in which they have in almost every climate contrived to involve the mind of man.”⁶⁰ On a milder, but no less lucid, note, Hume⁶¹, for one, felt that Britain, at any rate, had already progressed beyond accepting these beliefs uncritically. “Now”, he said,

there has been a sudden and sensible change in the opinions of men within these last fifteen years, by the progress of learning and of liberty. Most people, in this island, have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority: the clergy have lost much of their credit; their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed, and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world. The mere name of king commands little respect; and to talk of a king as God’s vice-regent on earth, or to give him any of those magnificent titles which formerly dazzled mankind, would but excite laughter in every one.⁶²

When the *philosophes* started casting doubt on the credibility of traditional religion, questions then began to be asked concerning the

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5-6

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ As a Scot, Hume cannot perhaps be wholly included with the French *philosophes*. However, though perhaps not technically a *philosophe*, he was undeniably an Enlightenment man. Despite his conservatism, his apparent dearth of radicalism, and his overwhelming scepticism, his work was greatly admired on the Continent, and he was, indeed, feted by the *philosophes*.

⁶² David Hume, “*Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic?*”, in Frederick Watkins, *Hume, Theory of Politics* (Nelson, 1951) p. 166

relationship between human beings and their world. These were questions about the nature of the individual person, his role in society, his origins and his future. To the *philosophes*, it was clear that the individual was not a fixed entity - he experienced the world and was affected by it and, in turn, himself affected the world. As La Mettrie lyrically put it: "We are veritable moles in the field of nature; we achieve little more than the mole's journey and it is our pride which prescribes limits to the limitless."⁶³ The limitations inherent in the "Great Chain of Being"⁶⁴ were rejected by the *philosophes*. According to Voltaire, the "Great Chain of Being" was a "great phantasm."⁶⁵

To the *philosophes*, religious constraints pertained not only to spiritual matters, but also to social ones - acting as a tacit justification for the unchanging position of the social structure. The "Great Chain of Being" dogma enabled the aristocracy, for example, to be in positions of power because God had so ordained it. However, the *philosophes* evinced great antagonism towards this sort of

⁶³ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (La Salle, Illinois, 1912) p. 145

⁶⁴ The traditional religious view of human beings was that they were in a fixed position in the universe, they were part of a universal structure - a "Great Chain of Being". Briefly, this was the idea that all the entities in the universe were set in position and linked together as in a chain. God had created man to be the master of all the beasts of the earth. He had positioned him above the beasts, yet below the angels, in accordance with the natural hierarchy of existence. This was a widely accepted interpretation of the world. Correspondingly, man's position in the universe was for ever unchanging and no external circumstances could ever alter this. This view was not accepted by the majority of the *philosophes*.

⁶⁵ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary, op.cit.*, p. 107

unyielding hierarchy. Sieyes, for example, directed that one should not ask “what is the appropriate place for a privileged class in the social order. It is like deciding on the appropriate place in the body of a sick man for a malignant tumour that torments him and drains his strength.”⁶⁶ Sieyes hoped that the progress of enlightenment would alter the social structure of society in such a way as to undermine the existing hierarchy, moderate the power of the aristocracy and ensure a decrease in the privileges of the nobility. “I hope”, he remarks, “that since enlightenment cannot long remain ineffective, the aristocracy will cease some day to resemble the Algerian pirates of France.”⁶⁷ He also elaborates on the gross damage that he sees a privileged class inflicting on the entire population. A privileged class”, he declares, “is a plague for the nation that suffers it. Thus, to reach an exact comparison, one is obliged to consider the privileged class in a nation as one would some horrible disease eating the living flesh on the body of some unfortunate man.”⁶⁸

In the Age of Reason, any idea about either the purpose of God or any revelation pertaining to this purpose, was no longer considered

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, *What is the Third Estate?* (London, 1963) p. 174. He also sought to point out that “the so-called usefulness of a privileged order to the public service is a fallacy...the higher posts...ought to be the natural prize and reward of recognised ability and service...” p. 56

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 76

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 164

to be important or cogent.⁶⁹ Vereker maintains that the Enlightenment's "exclusive concern with attainable happiness in the temporal order, individually and socially; and its rejection of all modes of divine revelation as valid, whether personal or corporate, other than that of nature herself" was fundamental.⁷⁰ La Mettrie was of the opinion that any argument which asserted that a belief in divine revelation, or any aspect of religion, was necessary was both "wretched and pitiable..."⁷¹ To the *philosophes*, says Becker, "renunciation of the traditional revelation was the very condition of being truly enlightened..."⁷² The *philosophes* looked toward a future where happiness would follow the governance of reason rather than being revealed and delimited by God. They "turned away from revelation", says Snyder, and, in conjunction with this turning away, "attempted deliberately to change existing institutions, traditions, and standards."⁷³ In other words, the growth of the doctrine of

⁶⁹ Saint-Simon, writing some time later, argued that "it is easy to establish the view that the human mind owes the great progress which it has made in the mathematical and physical sciences during recent years precisely to the weakening of belief in God...the idea of God being thus defective, all applications of this idea are equally defective. Man, having invented God, considers himself to be an important being: he believes that the Universe was created for his benefit, and that the planet he inhabits is the centre of the Universe, the stars revolving round it for the whole purpose of illuminating it. All these ideas are now known to be false." Henri Comte de Saint-Simon, *Introduction to the Scientific Studies of the Nineteenth Century*, in F. M. H. Markham, *Saint-Simon, Selected Writings* (Oxford, 1952) p. 20

⁷⁰ Charles Vereker, *Eighteenth-Century Optimism, A Study of the Inter-relations of Moral and Social Theory in English and French Thought between 1689 and 1789* (Liverpool, 1967) p. 108

⁷¹ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

⁷² Carl L. Becker, *op.cit.*, p. 50. Note, however, that D'Alembert, in the *Preliminary Discourse*, stated that the nature of man is "an impenetrable mystery for man himself when he is enlightened by reason alone...Thus, nothing is more necessary than a revealed Religion..." Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopaedia of Diderot* (New York, 1963) p. 26

⁷³ Louis Snyder, *The Age of Reason* (New York, 1955) p. 11

reason brought on doubts and uncertainties concerning religious traditions. These became so overwhelming that they eventually broke the religious mould and allowed other ideas and theories to be formulated.⁷⁴

Religious dogmas and disclosures were to be succeeded by enlightened discourse and methodological reasoning, and the natural sciences were to take the place of traditional religion in answering questions about the world. The Enlightenment replaced ideas of heavenly salvation with ideas of human and social progress. It was believed by the *philosophes* that he who was governed by reason, rather than by superstition or tradition, “would find consolation and hope in the prospects of general enlightenment rather than an individual fate.”⁷⁵ There was a deeply held impression that Enlightenment would eventually reach the whole world.⁷⁶ As Sieyes said: “Day by day, the influence of reason spreads further...”⁷⁷ This

⁷⁴ Note, however, that Laski argues that it is more relevant to place the rise of reason after, rather than before, the disintegration of religious dogmas. He believes that it was prevailing religious disputes that weakened religious belief and allowed reason to be applied. Thus he says that “the result of religious warfare was undoubtedly to weaken the hold of dogma upon men’s minds. And as soon as the dogma was weakened, the empire of reason extended its boundaries.” Harold J. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism, An Essay in Interpretation* (London, 1947) p. 66. Although there is assuredly much truth in this, it is likely that the religious disputes would not themselves have erupted with such force were it not for the doubts that had already been insinuated by the march of reason.

⁷⁵ Simon Schaffer, “States of Mind: Enlightenment and Natural Philosophy”, in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

⁷⁶ Gay, *op.cit.*, See Overture, section 2, I, p. 20-23

⁷⁷ Sieyes, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

general, reason-led enlightenment would transform the world and lead to a better future for all.⁷⁸ The *philosophes* firmly believed, says Becker, that “the Goddess (i.e. of Reason) had guided them safely out of the long night of superstition into the light of day, and for that they could not be too grateful.”⁷⁹ It was readily accepted by the Enlightenment philosophers that there was taking place a continuing generalised progress which was founded on reason and science, which was in opposition to tradition and superstition, and which would result in the ending of many of the problems that faced humanity. There was great optimism about the future. To the *philosophes*, explains Sampson, “the historical process was a progressive one...social progress was in large measure dependent upon the fruits of scientific method..[and]...all human problems are in principle soluble provided only reason is permitted to dispel the accretion of emotion and prejudice in the interests of objective investigation.”⁸⁰ In other words, the individual would progress from his present condition, and improve both himself as an individual and his world in its totality. Although not all the *philosophes* wholeheartedly shared the optimism about science and progress⁸¹,

⁷⁸ Schaffer is of the view that “visionary accounts of society’s advance were consequences of this revised account of the progress of reason.” “States of Mind: Enlightenment and Natural Philosophy”, in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 285

⁷⁹ Becker, *op.cit.*, p.75

⁸⁰ R. V. Sampson, *Progress in the Age of Reason, The Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London, 1956) p. 7

⁸¹ It must be remembered that Enlightenment beliefs were seldom unanimous. Rousseau, for example, though in many ways attuned to Enlightenment thought, expressed his doubts as to whether

enough did to ensure that it was a major characteristic of Enlightenment thought. Snyder insists that among the *philosophes*, with only a few exceptions, there was a “fervent belief” in this idea of progress, and it was belief which enabled them to see improvement as inevitable.⁸² Progress was usually considered to be, in historical terms, the advance of generalised enlightenment from the past darkness of superstition. “The panorama of history”, says Vereker, “was interpreted as a contest of darkness and light in which the forces of good were constantly, if slowly, gaining the upper hand and bound in the end to prevail.”⁸³

or not it was even possible to enlighten the people. “Once customs are established and prejudices have taken root”, he expostulates, “it is a dangerous and futile project to try to reform them; the people cannot stand having its ills touched even for the purpose of destroying them, like stupid and cowardly invalids who tremble at the sight of the physician.” *The Social Contract, op.cit.*, p. 46. However, it must be remembered that Rousseau parted company with the *philosophes* on many issues. For example, he had very strong views on the nation and he extolled the virtues of nationalism, arguing that devices of the past for inspiring national pride should be brought into the present. In his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, he wrote that ancient legislators, “all sought bonds that might attach citizens to the fatherland and to one another; and they found them in particular usages, in religious ceremonies which by their very nature were always national and exclusive; in games which kept citizens frequently assembled; in exercise which increased not only their vigour and strength but also their pride and self-esteem; in spectacles which, by reminding them of the history of their ancestors, their misfortunes, their virtues, their victories, touched their hearts, inflamed them with a lively spirit of emulation, and attached them strongly to that fatherland with which they were meant to be incessantly preoccupied.” (p. 165). In like manner, he believed that modern peoples must be educated to nationalism. “It is education”, says Rousseau, “that must give souls a national formation, and direct their opinions and tastes in such a way that they will be patriotic by inclination, by passion, by necessity. When first he opens his eyes, an infant ought to see the fatherland and up to the day of his death he ought never to see anything else. Every true republican has drunk in love of country, that is to say love of law and liberty, along with his mother’s milk. This love is his whole existence; he sees nothing but the fatherland, he lives for it alone; when he is solitary, he is nothing; when he has ceased to have a fatherland, he no longer exists; and if he is not dead, he is worse than dead.” (p. 176)

⁸² Snyder, *op.cit.*, p. 13

⁸³ Vereker, *op.cit.* p. 284

The belief in the power of reason became inextricably linked with the operation of science. It was very much believed that science and reason were two facets of the same phenomenon. Science was able to be operated by the use of reason; and reason exerted itself over the material universe by way of science. This inexorably led to a situation where the methods of science and the results of these methods came to be seen as always reasonable and - most importantly, and chillingly - always right. Poliakov puts it very succinctly when he tells us that the *philosophes* "subjected new-born science to Reason, which was henceforth considered infallible."⁸⁴ This belief in the infallibility of science and reason led to a narrowing of conceptions of reality to that which could be empirically proven; and also entrenched materialist explanations of the world, thus rigidifying and compartmentalising knowledge. There was also a tendency, in accordance with the movement towards making knowledge subject to empiricism, to relate the moral sphere to the scientific method. In other words, the dimensions of good and bad slowly came to be seen as being scientifically verifiable. This tendency was not, of course, accepted out of hand. Hume, for one, was far too clever a thinker to slide into such an error. "The distinction of vice and virtue", he declared famously, "is not founded

⁸⁴ Poliakov, *op.cit.*, p. 144

merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason."⁸⁵

However, despite such efforts, the faith in reason, empiricism and the scientific method became stronger and more pervasive. People did not question the fundamental efficacy and veracity of empiricism - only whether the facts and figures with which it worked were accurate and were calculated correctly. Condillac illustrates this tendency when he says that "our only view must be to consult experience, and to reason only from facts, which no one can call in question."⁸⁶

With this emphasis on science and reason, and in the wake of the offensive against traditional religion, the idea of the natural, as opposed to the supernatural, world began to achieve a special significance. Where religious dogmas were flawed and dishonest, nature was seen as being verifiably real and true. Not only this, but unlike religion and religious beliefs, nature could be subject to the laws of reason, and, indeed, was governed by laws - detectable by reason. In other words, as Laski explains, "nature...was that body of regular phenomena subdued by science to law; and reason was the weapon with which man had wrested new truths from the immense

⁸⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1983) p. 470

⁸⁶ Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *An Essay Concerning the Origin of Human Knowledge* (Gainesville, Florida, 1971) p. 92

errors of the past.”⁸⁷ D’Holbach shared this conviction, saying characteristically that “experience teaches that nature acts by simple, uniform, and invariable laws.”⁸⁸ La Mettrie, too, shared this pervasive belief in the existence of natural laws, and was also convinced that if human beings could put their faith in nature, all would go well with them. His stated belief was that “nature has created us all solely to be happy - yes, all of us from the crawling worm to the eagle lost in the clouds. For this cause she has given all animals some share of natural law...”⁸⁹ He is ardent in his praise of the merits of natural law: “whoever rigidly observes it”, he says, “is a good man and deserves the confidence of all the human race. Whoever fails to follow it scrupulously...is a scamp or a hypocrite whom I distrust...”⁹⁰ As Becker says: “In the eighteenth-century climate of opinion, whatever question you seek to answer, nature is the test, the standard...”⁹¹ An understanding of nature’s laws and a relationship with nature based on reason, was all that was necessary in order for human beings to attain happiness. La Mettrie, therefore, entreats people to “break the chain of your prejudices, arm

⁸⁷ Laski, *op.cit.*, p. 181

⁸⁸ D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 16

⁸⁹ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 121

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 127

⁹¹ Becker, *op.cit.*, p. 53

yourselves with the torch of experience, and you will render to nature the honour she deserves..."⁹²

Montesquieu was another who shared this belief in natural laws (although he held that these laws were set by God). He said that "since we see that the world, formed by the movement of matter, and lacking intelligence, continues to exist, its movements must be governed by invariable laws."⁹³ However, Montesquieu does not agree that the rules so clearly applicable to nature can be so easily applied to human beings, basically because of the flaws inherent in humans. Thus he says that "although the intelligent world also has its laws that by nature are invariable, it does not follow them without deviation as does the physical world its laws. The reason for this is that individual intelligent beings are limited by their nature, and hence are subject to error. On the other hand, because of their nature they act by themselves. Thus they do not always observe their original laws, and do not always obey even those they made for themselves."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Montesquieu retains his certainty that "as a physical being, man is, like all other bodies, governed by invariable laws."⁹⁵

⁹² La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 146

⁹³ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, in Melvin Richter, *The Political Theory of Montesquieu* (Cambridge, 1977) p. 172-173

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 173

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 174

The existence of these laws of nature meant that nature could be subject to the empirical method. Although nature was lauded as the fundamental truth in the world, it was not a great jump for many to proceed from the concept of understanding nature, to the concept of obtaining a degree of control over nature. Nature began to be perceived as being open to manipulation by human beings. There was a belief in man's ability - through reason - to better nature. The inroads made by science into knowledge about the natural world enhanced this belief. It began to be felt that nature would yield up her mysteries in the face of the scientific onslaught. This idea that nature could be fully comprehended and thereby controlled, had as a corollary a vanquishing of the idea that there were hidden recesses in the natural world, recesses in which lurked spirits of gods or other shades of the supernatural, not comprehensible to human beings. Any such insubstantial elements of nature were cleared away by the battalions of reason. They could not be explained by reason, examined by science, or proven by experiment. Therefore, they did not exist - only the material aspects of nature were real. Says Porter: "The world soul vanished, Nature was reduced to matter, or what natural philosophers commonly called body."⁹⁶ This discarding of the

⁹⁶ Roy Porter, "Barely Touching: A Social Perspective on Mind and Body", in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 79

incorporeal enhanced the already deepening tendency towards materialism,⁹⁷ and the reducing of nature to matter enhanced the possibility of human beings being able to improve on nature. There was also at this time, as Manuel indicates, a “vast increase in factual knowledge about the physical universe (which) gave men a tremendous sense of power, a feeling that with this newly acquired knowledge they could dominate nature.”⁹⁸ The mysteries of nature seemed only to wait to be discovered.

There was now a lot of new information that could be added to this study of nature for, as Schiebinger says, “the voyages of discovery and the colonies had flooded Europe with new and strange specimens of plants animals, and humans.”⁹⁹ One only has to look at Montesquieu’s footnotes in *The Spirit of the Laws* to get a good idea of the documentation that was becoming available concerning other nations and cultures.¹⁰⁰ There were many examples available of how people from other places looked, of how they conducted their lives, and many of these examples were very alien to the experience of the

⁹⁷ For enthusiastic exposition of materialism, see La Mettrie, *op.cit.*

⁹⁸ Frank E. Manuel, *The Age of Reason* (New York, 1967) p. 35. Porter agrees that there was at this time a “staggering expansion of human productive powers for the mastery of Nature and the management of matter.” in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 78. D’Holbach, however, described the belief that human beings could dominate nature as arrogance and folly. *op.cit.*, p. 150

⁹⁹ Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science.”, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, volume 23, no. 4, summer 1990, p. 389

¹⁰⁰ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, footnotes. For example, Addison’s *Travels to Italy*, Tournefort’s *Voyages*, Perry’s *The State of Russia under the Present Czar*, Father Ducereau’s *History*, Lange’s *Relation du Voyage du Laurent Lage à la Chine*, etc.

philosophes. This was important for the way in which conceptions of other peoples were being developed. For example, D'Holbach reports on being informed that "savages, in order to flatten the heads of their children, squeeze them between two boards, by that means preventing them from taking the shape designed for them by nature."¹⁰¹ He also discusses the practice, in India, of widows burning themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands; the Japanese proclivity towards suicide; and the customs of the native American.¹⁰² "With the expansion of Europe", explains Stocking, "a new empirical sphere of human otherness...gradually emerged..."¹⁰³ These cultural differences were guaranteed to fire the curiosity of the *philosophes*, and it was certain that they would try to bring their methods of reason to an understanding of them.

It is hardly surprising that there developed an impetus towards categorising this wealth of material. In this categorisation, there was seen to be no reason why the empirical method should not be used. Peoples were being met with, whose differences from the more familiar norm could, it was thought, be measured, be subject to empirical verification and be neatly categorised. Schiebinger

¹⁰¹ D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 259

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 510-511 and p. 556

¹⁰³ George W. Stocking, "Bones, Bodies, Behaviour", in George W. Stocking, *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour, Essays in Biological Anthropology* (Wisconsin, 1988) p. 4

describes this period as “the great age of classification”, and explains how “natural historians attempting to lay the grid of reason over the unwieldy stuff of nature sought new and simple principles that would hold universally.”¹⁰⁴ Principles which would allow all questions about relationships between peoples, and between individuals and the natural world, to be answered methodically.¹⁰⁵ The human variety that could now so easily be seen, tended to be explained in terms of differing environmental or social pressures.¹⁰⁶ La Mettrie, for instance, associated diet with character. Thus he describes the effect of red meat in the diet: “Raw meat”, he declares,

makes animals fierce, and it would have the same effect on man. This is so true that the English who eat meat red and bloody, and not as well done as ours, seem to share more or less in the savagery due to this kind of food, and to other causes which can be rendered ineffective by education only. This savagery creates in the soul, pride, hatred, scorn of other nations, indocility and other sentiments which degrade the character, just as heavy food makes a dull and heavy mind whose usual traits are laziness and indolence.¹⁰⁷

To D’Holbach, human variety was an integral part of nature, due mainly to the world’s differing climates. He says that, on the Earth,

¹⁰⁴ Schiebinger, *op.cit.*, p. 389

¹⁰⁵ Mosse comments that the uniting of nature and reason was a very materialistic synthesis which was concerned solely with “observable material explanations of how life on this planet evolved.” George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, An Introduction* (London, 1963) p. 200

¹⁰⁶ Vyverberg points out that the “climatic environment was widely assumed to have a certain influence upon the moral code of a nation or an age.” *op.cit.*, p. 136

¹⁰⁷ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 94

“all the productions may vary, by reason of its different climates: men, animals, vegetables, minerals, are not the same on every part of it: they vary sometimes in a very sensible manner, at very inconsiderable distances...Man, in different climates, varies in his colour, in his size, in his conformation, in his powers, in his industry, in his courage, in the faculties of his mind.”¹⁰⁸ Montesquieu agrees that climate and environment can have a powerful effect with regard to character development.¹⁰⁹ Climate, in his opinion, effects nations so fundamentally as to give them wholly different characters. He takes China as an example, saying that “because of the nature of its climate and terrain, the life of the people was precarious. Only by ingenuity and hard work could they continue to live.”¹¹⁰ From this he deduces a national character for the Chinese which includes a propensity to fraud.¹¹¹ He also asserts that people from colder climates are more courageous than people from warmer lands. Thus he says that “the inhabitants of warm countries are timid in the same way as are the aged; those of cold countries are courageous in the same way as young people.”¹¹² This he relates back to the material effect that variation in temperature has on the physical body. These

¹⁰⁸ D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 142-143

¹⁰⁹ With regard to those whom he terms “savages” he says that “nature and climate virtually dominate...” Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 270

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 280

¹¹¹ Much of Montesquieu’s information about the Chinese came from the travels of merchants and missionaries. *ibid.*, p. 235

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 258

climatic differences, he believes, also have the effect of influencing, if not determining the morality of peoples. Thus he says that “in the north will be found peoples who have few vices and not a few virtues; they have much frankness and sincerity. But if we move toward the south, we seem to be losing sight of morality itself.”¹¹³

At any rate, to the *philosophes*, “it was self-evident” says Becker, “that man was the product of his environment - of nature and the institutions under which he lived - and that by reshaping his environment in accord with the invariable and determinable laws of nature, his material and spiritual regeneration might be speedily accomplished.”¹¹⁴ A universal culture, based on that enjoyed by the *philosophes*, was seen as the ultimate goal. There was a general conviction that human differences could be radically lessened, or even entirely abolished, by the application of reason. Different cultures and ways of behaving in the world were seen as being malleable. “Although”, says Sampson, “human nature might remain intractable, universal, and unchanging, it did not follow that human behaviour was likewise beyond the power of man to control.”¹¹⁵ The positive control of human behaviour was seen as being essential for

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 259. Likewise, the Oriental, Indian and Turkish nations, he characterises as “lazy”, also the Spanish. *ibid.*, p. 260-261, 273

¹¹⁴ Becker, *op.cit.*, p. 137-138

¹¹⁵ Sampson, *op.cit.*, p. 40

the progress of humankind.¹¹⁶ The key element in promoting future benefits for humanity was in enhancing justice - whether between individuals or between nations - and this would be achieved via the use of reason. Voltaire, however, cuttingly points out that human beings, unlike the animals, possess both reason and slaves. "Man", he declares, "having received the ray of divinity called reason, what is the result? Slavery throughout almost the whole world."¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, it was generally maintained that by applying reason to the dogmas of vested interests, injustice would certainly be diminished - among individuals and also world-wide.

This view is clearly visible in Humboldt's account of the races of Spanish America, which he concludes with a plea that the Indians (the "copper-coloured race") be liberated from the unequal situation into which they had been thrust by their white conquerors. He pleads that the powers governing Spanish America should understand "this important truth, that the prosperity of the whites is intimately connected with that of the copper-coloured race, and that there can be no durable prosperity for the two Americas till this unfortunate race, humiliated but not degraded by long oppression,

¹¹⁶ Sampson points out in this connection that the "theory of progress, implicit in all their thinking was a teleological one. The end was given; it remained constant, and the criterion of progress was the evidence of upward movement towards this given, fixed goal, which represented the satisfaction of all existing human wants. Hence the popularity of utopias..." *ibid.*, p. 65

¹¹⁷ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, *op.cit.*, p. 181

shall participate in all the advantages resulting for the progress of civilisation and the improvement of social order!"¹¹⁸ That all should participate in the advantages of civilisation was seen, not only as a goal, but also, very largely, as an inevitable consequence of the progress of reason. As Vereker puts it, the *philosophes* came to the conclusion that, through the process of enlightenment, there would be a "lessening of inequality between nations; the same process within the social structure of a single people; a general progress in knowledge, moral and physical, by mankind at large."¹¹⁹ To accomplish this, it was essential that reason should be given full rein. This would ensure that the unreasonable and, therefore, unsustainable structures of injustice would be razed. It was D'Holbach's conviction that "reason, with its faithful guide experience, must attack in their entrenchments those prejudices to which the human race has but too long been the victim."¹²⁰ He emphasises that "without experience there can be no reason; without reason man is only a blind creature, who conducts himself by chance."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Humboldt, *op.cit.*, p. 240. For a good overview of Enlightenment perceptions of American natives, see R. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge, 1976)

¹¹⁹ Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 285. Sampson is in agreement with this, saying that, to the *philosophes*, "the direction of future progress lay primarily in the destruction of inequality among nations and between classes." *op.cit.*, p. 134

¹²⁰ D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 4

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 304

This reliance on reason, as opposed to tradition and superstition, led increasingly to a rejection by the *philosophes* of any form of belief which was not scientifically or empirically “provable”. As Manuel says, the *philosophes* became impelled “to discredit anything which was not in conformity with everyday experience and which could not be examined for truth or falsehood by experience.”¹²² The gathering of facts and the empirical method became unalterable prerequisites to any study of humanity. For the *philosophes*, such study had to be “grounded upon firsthand facts, derived from observation and experiment, subject to the searing sunlight of criticism.”¹²³ In writing *Man a Machine*, for instance, La Mettrie points out that he had not allowed himself “even the most vigorous and immediately deduced reasoning, except as a result of a multitude of observations which no scholar will contest...”¹²⁴ D’Alembert agrees, saying that “in a well-constructed philosophy, any deduction which is based on facts or recognised truths is preferable to one which is supported only by hypotheses however ingenious.”¹²⁵ He adds later that it is essential “to collect as many facts as we can, to arrange them in the most natural order, and to relate them to a certain number of principal facts of which the others are only the

¹²² Manuel, *op.cit.*, p. 29

¹²³ Rousseau and Porter, *op.cit.*, p. 25-26

¹²⁴ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 149

¹²⁵ D’Alembert, *op.cit.*, p. 7

consequences.”¹²⁶ He continues that “the single true method of philosophising as physical scientists consists either in the application of mathematical analysis to experiments, or in observation alone, enlightened by the spirit of method, aided sometimes by conjectures when they can furnish some insights, but rigidly dissociated from any arbitrary hypotheses.”¹²⁷

To Vereker, this “dependence on empirical knowledge...” was one of the fundamental traits of the Enlightenment era.¹²⁸ In other words, empirical knowledge took precedence over all other forms.¹²⁹ There was a powerful tendency, as Cassirer puts it, to “subdue the sheer profusion of reality by attacking it without reservations as to whether it can be described in clear and distinct concepts or reduced to measurement and number.”¹³⁰ By this method, it was hoped and believed that questions of humanity and society would be solvable in time, as more facts were gathered and more knowledge gained. This belief was reflected in the contemporary scientific method, with the aggregation of facts being seen as crucial to the practice and development of science. It was a point of view which heralded an

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 23

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 25

¹²⁸ Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 108

¹²⁹ There was, says Vereker, “a preference for empirical observation over metaphysical or *a priori* systems of thinking...” *op.cit.*, p. 147

¹³⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by Fritz C.A. Koelby and James P. Pettegrove (Boston, 1961) p. 75

“emphasis on the facts of experience as the source of scientific law...” and which led, in turn, to a conviction that the scientific method had at least the capability of answering all questions.¹³¹ The *philosophes* were, then, “united in the hope engendered by the progress of empirical observation in the natural sciences and in the conviction that if available evidence were inadequate, time would provide more complete information and increasingly trustworthy conclusions.”¹³² Future scientific and social developments were looked on with favour.¹³³

Great emphasis was placed on the tool of analysis in opening up new areas of information. The analytic method was seen as being, in the final instance, an infallible way of discerning reality. Condillac, for example, confidently argued that the route to human understanding was through careful analytic empiricism. “The study of the human understanding”, he says, “cannot be carried on with success but by the way of observation; and our only aim should be to discover a fundamental experiment which no one can question, and will be sufficient to explain all the rest...My purpose therefore is to reduce to a single principle whatever relates to the human

¹³¹ Manuel, *op. cit.*, p. 29

¹³² Vereker, *op. cit.*, p. 143

¹³³ Vereker says that a main characteristic of progressive eighteenth-century thought with regard to empiricism was, therefore, “a belief in future attainments...” *ibid.*, p. 148

understanding, and this principle shall...be...a constant experience, all the consequences of which shall be confirmed by new observations.”¹³⁴ D’Alembert was in agreement with this view. He gives a succinct summary of his method in the *Introduction to the Encyclopaedia of Diderot*. “It is not at all by vague and arbitrary hypotheses”, he declares,

that we can hope to know nature; it is by thoughtful study of phenomena, by the comparisons we make among them, by the art of reducing, as much as that may be possible, a large number of phenomena to a single one that can be regarded as their principle. Indeed, the more one reduces the number of principles of a science, the more one gives them scope, and since the object of a science is necessarily fixed, the principles applied to that object will be so much the more fertile as they are fewer in number. This reduction which, moreover, makes them easier to understand, constitutes the true “systematic spirit”.¹³⁵

He defines the “science of reasoning” as knowing “how to arrange ideas in the most natural order, how to link them together in the most direct sequence, how to break up those which include too large a number of simple ideas, how to view ideas in all their facets, and finally how to present them in a form that makes them easy to grasp.” This he claims as being the “key to all our knowledge.”¹³⁶ There was, at this time, says Cassirer, a generally accepted assumption that “a

¹³⁴ Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 5-7

¹³⁵ D’Alembert, *op.cit.*, p. 22

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 30

new field of knowledge of the highest importance becomes accessible to reason as soon as reason learns to subject this field to its special method of analytic dissection and synthetic reconstruction."¹³⁷

The doctrine of reason went into an easy partnership with the empirical and scientific method. Even in those early days of the growth of modern science, however, there were those who mistrusted empiricism and who doubted that the scientific method would give the answer to all questions. It was possible to contrast scientific methods with philosophical insights and caution against ignoring such insights. In the words of Buffon: "The arts which one calls scientific have taken philosophy's place; the methods of mathematics, of botany and natural history, in a word formulas and dictionaries, occupy nearly everybody. Men imagine that they know more because they have multiplied the number of symbols and of learned phrases, and they do not remember that all of these arts are simply the scaffolding for reaching knowledge and that they are not knowledge itself..."¹³⁸ There was, then, at least an element within Enlightenment thought which, though accepting the value of gathering facts and figures, was concerned that this value should not

¹³⁷ Cassirer, *op.cit.*, p. 16. The *philosophes* relied on reason, and the facts established by reason became themselves the bases for further reasoning. As Cassirer explains: "Every apparent goal attained by reason is but a fresh starting point." *ibid.*, p. 22

¹³⁸ Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, quoted in Vyverberg, *op. cit.*, p. 78

be overestimated. In the search for universal truth, sometimes too much emphasis was placed on measurements and categorisations and the conceptual dimension was overlooked. Nevertheless, the thinkers of the Enlightenment were profoundly influenced by the scientific and rational view of the workings of the world. This influence was so extensive that they came to view the world almost solely in these terms. They “allowed as truth”, says Manuel, “only those facts and theories which could be arrived at by the employment of a strict rationalist or scientific method.”¹³⁹

The mathematical approach was seen by many as being the natural tool of analysis, and many of the participants in the Age of Reason put their trust in a mathematically based science to explain the workings of the world. In looking to fully understand the natural laws, they saw mathematics as being the “magic key” to such comprehension.¹⁴⁰ La Mettrie, for instance, is struck by the mathematical regularity found everywhere in nature - despite nature’s great variety. As an example, he enjoins us to consider nature’s variety in the shape of ears. “In ears”, he says, “we find everywhere a striking variety, and yet the difference of structure in men, animals, birds, and fishes, does not produce different uses. All

¹³⁹ Manuel, *op.cit.*, p. 27

¹⁴⁰ Snyder, *op.cit.* p. 11

ears are so mathematically made, that they tend equally to one and the same end, namely, hearing.”¹⁴¹ Precise mathematical calculations were seen as being infallible (and therefore, invaluable) when it came to defining the natural universe. Voltaire, was another who also used mathematical language. “Mathematical certitude”, he says, “is immutable and eternal...The physical certainty of my existence and of my feelings, and mathematical certainty have the same value, although they are of a different kind.”¹⁴² Condorcet believed that, by way of mathematical analysis - what he called “social mathematics” - it was possible to predict future social outcomes.¹⁴³ He was convinced that the “mathematical calculation of future probabilities could usefully be applied to social and political questions...”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, it was desirable at least, if not positively necessary, to use mathematical analysis to the benefit of society. Other of the *philosophes* were equally convinced of the usefulness of the mathematical method. Condillac, for example, says that it seemed to him that “we might reason in metaphysics and in morals with as great exactness as in geometry; that we might frame as accurate ideas as the geometers...”¹⁴⁵ Rousseau also uses the language of

¹⁴¹ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 123

¹⁴² Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, p. 106

¹⁴³ Condorcet, quoted in Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 207. Sampson comments that Condorcet fervently believed “in the power of scientific methods to transform man’s knowledge of and control over himself and his society...” *op.cit.*, p. 119

¹⁴⁴ Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 207

¹⁴⁵ Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 2

mathematics when he speaks of forms of government. He argues that the size of a state is mathematically related to the amount of liberty possible in that state. Thus he says that “the ratio of subject to citizen increases in direct proportion to the number of citizens. From which it follows that liberty diminishes the larger the state becomes.”¹⁴⁶

There was, then, within Enlightenment thought, a certain belief in the mathematical regulation of nature, and a belief that science could give unbiased answers to social questions. The advantage of using this mathematical approach seemed to be, as Vereker puts it, that “the truth could be discovered by the intellect, free from the seduction of words, the distortion of the passions, and the errors of ignorance.”¹⁴⁷ However, D’Alembert points out that some areas of life are not as susceptible to analysis as others, for example, where men’s emotions are concerned. It is easier to analyse perceptions, he says, when “the soul is in a state of tranquillity than when it is in the throes of passions or of the lively sentiments which affect us. In truth, how could it possible be easy to analyse such feelings as these

¹⁴⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract, op.cit.*, p. 62. However, he later explains further that his geometrical language is to be thought of more in terms of an aid to clear understanding than to be taken literally. “If I borrow geometrical terms for a moment to express myself in fewer words,” he says, “I am nevertheless not unaware of the fact that geometrical precision is not to be found in moral quantities.” *ibid.*, p. 63

¹⁴⁷ Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 207

with precision? We must indeed surrender ourselves to them in order to know them, even though the moment on which the soul is affected by them is the very time when it is least capable of study.”¹⁴⁸

Montesquieu also points out that any study of nature must take into consideration the limitations inherent in the nature of human beings, they being differentiated in their intelligence and governed, to a greater or lesser extent, by their passions. Although Montesquieu concedes that on a physical plain, laws of nature can be applied to human beings, these laws cannot define the entire situation because man is “a limited being. He is subject to ignorance and error, like all finite intelligences; even the little he knows slips from him. As a creature dominated by sensation, he is subject to a thousand passions.”¹⁴⁹

Vyverberg accents the fundamental role of the human senses in the practice of empiricism.¹⁵⁰ As D’Holbach says: “It is by his senses, man is bound to this universal nature; it is by his senses he must penetrate her secrets; it is from his senses he must draw experience

¹⁴⁸ D’Alembert, *op.cit.*, p. 96

¹⁴⁹ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 174. Voltaire agrees that human beings are creatures of passion, but believes that reason need not be incompatible with this. The creative process, he says, “is a race horse carried away headlong, but its course has been properly laid out.” *Philosophical Dictionary*, *op.cit.*, p. 188

¹⁵⁰ Vyverberg, *op.cit.*, p. 100. Manuel adds that, for the *philosophes*, “the only kind of reality was objective and scientific, the only phenomena allowable those which could be apprehended by the senses.” *op.cit.*, p. 29. Rousseau and Porter also make the point that, in Enlightenment philosophy, “experience was all, and experience was derived from the senses...” *op.cit.*, p. 44

of her laws.”¹⁵¹ And D’Alembert explicitly states that “all our direct knowledge can be reduced to what we receive through our senses; whence it follows that we owe all our ideas to our sensations.”¹⁵² Condillac acknowledges this. “The senses”, he insists, “are the source of human knowledge.”¹⁵³ La Mettrie also extols the value of the senses, saying that if, in the search for knowledge, he had to rely on reason alone he “should have disdained a guide which I think to be so untrustworthy, had not my senses, bearing a torch, so to speak, induced me to follow reason by lighting the way themselves. Experience has thus spoken to me on behalf of reason; and in this way I have combined the two.”¹⁵⁴

Hume also felt that reason could not always be relied on to show the whole truth, it being “so uncertain a guide that it will always be exposed to doubt and controversy...”¹⁵⁵ Not least because, as he put it, “private interest” and “appetite” could be “disguised under the appearance of reason...”¹⁵⁶ Also, there was the influence of

¹⁵¹ D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 16

¹⁵² D’Alembert, *op.cit.*, p. 6. Note, though, that he makes this statement in the context of a refutation of, as he puts it, “the system of innate ideas...” *ibid.* On the other hand, he believes that even the “most limited mind” can be instructed in the arts and sciences, because “all our knowledge is ultimately reduced to sensations that are approximately the same in all men.” *ibid.*, p. 31

¹⁵³ Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 338

¹⁵⁴ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 148-149

¹⁵⁵ David Hume, “Of the Coalition of Parties”, Essay *xiv* of *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, in *Hume, Theory of Politics*, edited by Frederick Watkins (Edinburgh, 1951) p. 221. Most of the *philosophes* agreed that there were some mysteries in the world impenetrable to reason. Gay, *op.cit.*, Book 1 Chap. 3 1 III, p. 141-145

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 222

human nature in gathering and examining evidence to be taken into consideration. “Tis evident”, he says,

that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognisance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. ‘Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in the sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and cou’d explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings.¹⁵⁷

Despite these ambiguities, the drift to materialism continued.¹⁵⁸

D’Holbach argued strongly in favour of its advantages over a reliance on spirituality. “Morals and politics”, he declared, “would be equally enabled to draw from MATERIALISM advantages which the dogma of spirituality can never supply, of which it even precludes the idea.”¹⁵⁹

He continues by saying that “if the intellectual faculties of man, or his moral qualities, be examined, according to the principles here laid down, the conviction must be complete, that they are to be attributed to material causes...”¹⁶⁰ He dismisses the idea of a spiritual component to human beings, being convinced that he had

¹⁵⁷ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *op.cit.*, p. xv. Hampson makes the point that “men’s accessibility to new theories was influenced, if not actually determined, by their philosophical presuppositions.” *op.cit.*, p. 224

¹⁵⁸ Rousseau and Porter claim that the Enlightenment “did actually generate...a thorough going materialist strand...” *op.cit.*, p. 31

¹⁵⁹ D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 211

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 215

proved that what was called the soul was “purely material”.¹⁶¹ La Mettrie, too, favoured a wholly material explanation of human beings, which rejected all idea of a non-quantifiable spirit distinguishing them from the animals. As far as he was concerned the soul was “but an empty word, of which no one has any idea, and which an enlightened man should use only to signify the part in us that thinks.”¹⁶² In La Mettrie’s case, however, this rejection of spirituality had the unfortunate effect of leading him to a definition of humanity which approached being no more than “one who thinks”. He seems to have had an interpretation of humanity which was based very largely on the possession of intelligence and the power of speech. He argues that human infants are inferior to animals because of their lesser instinct, and that it is education which allows them to rise above the levels of animals. However, there are categories of humans who cannot be included in this elevation. He wonders, for instance, whether the concept of humanity can be applied to “the deaf and to the blind, to imbeciles, to madmen, or savages, or to those who have been brought up in the woods with animals; to those who have lost their imagination through melancholia, or in short to all those animals in human form who give evidence of only the rudest instinct?” And he answers: “No - all these, men of body but not of

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 267

¹⁶² La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

mind, do not deserve to be classed by themselves.”¹⁶³ “The imbecile and the fool”, he later says, “are animals with human faces, as the intelligent ape is a little man in another shape.”¹⁶⁴

The reliance on materialism resulted in a tendency to use human physical structure to define non-physical human characteristics. People’s characters began to be seen as being revealed by their physical appearance.¹⁶⁵ Such things as, for example, the shape of skull or length of jaw-bone was believed by physiognomists to significantly determine people’s inner qualities.¹⁶⁶ La Mettrie is convinced of the relationship between character and appearance. He declares that it is as unnecessary to be a great physiognomist

in order to guess the quality of the mind from the countenance or the shape of the features, provided these are sufficiently marked, than it is necessary to be a great doctor to recognise a disease accompanied by all its marked symptoms. Look at the portraits of Locke, of Steele, of Boerhaave, of Maupertius, and the rest and you will not be surprised to find strong faces and eagle eyes. Look over a multitude of others, and you can

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 114

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 146

¹⁶⁵ As Porter puts it: “Enlightenment materialism had become incorporated in...radical materialist sciences such as phrenology.” Roy Porter, “Barely Touching: A Social Perspective on Mind and Body”, in G.S. Rousseau, *op.cit.*, p. 74

¹⁶⁶ However, Porter maintains that “traditional physiognomy has been somatic through and through, postulating that character embossed itself directly upon the face or body. This came to seem hideously crude to 18th-century savants aware of hypocrisy and the mask, and subscribing to the New Philosophy’s view that Nature’s essence lay not in surface qualities but underneath.” *op.cit.*, p. 77 Nevertheless, it appears that there was a significant acceptance of its findings.

always distinguish the man of talent from the man of genius, and often even an honest man from a scoundrel.¹⁶⁷

D'Holbach describes physiognomists as being people who could “very promptly judge, of the concealed dispositions of their fellows, simply by inspecting the lineaments of their face.”¹⁶⁸ Ever the materialist, he is convinced that “those persons who are most accustomed to use their intellectual faculties, have their brain more extended than others: the same has been remarked, of watermen or rowers, that they have arms much larger than other men. His account that “in the dead body of an idiot...the brain was found smaller than ordinary...” confirms his belief.¹⁶⁹ Condillac was another who was interested in physiognomy. He explains its applicability by reference to there being an association of ideas and physical characteristics. He says that some ideas have such strong physical associations that they are virtually inseparable one from the other. Thus, certain ideas about character are associated with certain physical features. “Physiognomy”, he says, “is only an assemblage of features with which we have connected such ideas...We must not therefore be surprised if we are inclined to judge of other people from their physiognomy, and if sometimes even at first sight we conceive a

¹⁶⁷ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 96

¹⁶⁸ D'Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 292

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 180-181

dislike to them or are prejudiced in their favour.”¹⁷⁰ It is clear, then, that judging character from appearance was widely accepted as having scientific validity, and this assumption became incorporated into explanations of human difference.

This type of explanation of human difference was a symptom of the materialism of the Enlightenment, a materialism which, however, did not continue to go unchallenged. There were those who described human beings, neither as rational actors, nor as beings who were subject solely to the cold laws of science, but as beings guided by inner forces. It was said that an over emphasis on science and empiricism had obscured man’s true nature - a nature which had failed to be defined by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In other words, science, empiricism, and reason itself were seen not only as failing to define the whole picture, but also as actively propagating a false version of reality. The version of reality encompassed by the Enlightenment denied the existence of the inner spirit of human beings. This inner spirit was to be reclaimed. Enlightenment thought came to be seen as excessively materialist, and was condemned for it.¹⁷¹ There then arose a denial of what Mosse terms

¹⁷⁰ Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 82

¹⁷¹ Cassirer, however, claims that Enlightenment materialism, though made much of, was an insignificant element in Enlightenment thought. He says that “in truth this materialism, as it appears in D’Holbach’s *System of Nature* and La Mettrie’s *Man A Machine* is an isolated phenomenon of no characteristic significance.” *op.cit.*, p. 55. To really understand the relationship

“the materialist universe”¹⁷² which led, he says, “toward a recapturing of the irrational...”¹⁷³

The repudiation of materialism had an effect which - in hindsight - seems all too predictable. There arose an insinuation of the merits of unreason, feeling and emotion into explanations of the world. Even La Mettrie, that arch-materialist, though upholding the truth of describing the world through reason, found a place for the imagination in understanding human beings and the world. “By the imagination, but its flattering brush,” he says, “the cold skeleton of reason takes on living and ruddy flesh, by the imagination the sciences flourish, the arts are adorned, the wood speaks, the echoes sigh, the rocks weep, marble breathes, and all inanimate objects gain life...It reasons, judges, analyses, compares, and investigates.”¹⁷⁴ He also acknowledges that a man’s powers of reasoning are not absolute, they can, in certain circumstances, be overwhelmed. In illustration of this point, he poses the question that “if reason is the slave of a

of the Encyclopaedists to science, he continues, it is more valid to look at the works of D’Alembert because “the scientific sentiments of the Encyclopaedists are not represented by D’Holbach and La Mettrie, but by D’Alembert. And in the latter we find the vehement renunciation of mechanism and materialism as the ultimate principle for the explanation of things, as the ostensible solution of the riddles of the universe.” *ibid.*, p. 55-56. However, although it is true that other of the *philosophes* were not as thoroughly materialist as were D’Holbach and La Mettrie, yet their belief in science and empiricism relentlessly pushed them (albeit some more than others) in that direction.

¹⁷² Mosse, *op.cit.*, p. 209

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 214. It can be noted here that Rousseau was, of course, the protagonist of the denial of rationalism. As Melzer puts it, his “famous counter-Enlightenment attack on rationalism” is well known. Melzer, *op.cit.*, p. 350

¹⁷⁴ La Mettrie, *op.cit.*, p. 108

depraved or mad desire, how can it control that desire?"¹⁷⁵ He concedes that it could not. Others, of course, saw even less validity in the following of reason. D'Holbach blamed society for distancing human beings from nature. He complains that the "institutions of man...commonly conspire to counteract nature; - to constrain - to divert - to extinguish the impulse nature has given him, to substitute others which are the source of all his misfortunes."¹⁷⁶

Although the Enlightenment was a period of optimism, there was also a pessimistic strand which warned that society might be in the process of decay. Montesquieu, for instance, indicates that a deteriorating morality, in the shape of greed, indifference, and love of luxury, could bring about the ruin of societies. He cites as an example, the ancient republics which, he says, were corrupted by "the greediness of certain individuals, and the prodigality of others..." This greed and prodigality caused an imbalance in the ownership of

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 119

¹⁷⁶ D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 259-260. Diderot, for example, believed that civilisation had caused humanity to fall from a state of nature into a state of decadence. Sampson argues that, to Diderot, "the actual history of man is one of degeneration. It is the story of the decline from the age of innocence and bliss of unspoilt nature to the present artificiality of civilisation." *op.cit.*, p. 81. Herder, however, points out that, although society may act to distance man from nature, it also, by so doing, distances him from savagery, because, "without society man is apt to relapse into a savage state and languish away in inactivity, when having placed himself in circumstances in which his most necessary wants will be supplied he will be like a flower uprooted and torn from its stem, wilting on the ground. But let him be a member of society having many wants; let him be responsible for himself and others...Duties invigorate him; vexations arouse him; restlessness keeps his mind in motion; he will accomplish more, the more astonishing it is that he should do so. J.G. Herder, *Essay on the Origin of Language*, in F.M. Barnard, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1969) p. 172-173

land, turning some people into masters, others into slaves or workers for the masters. The masters became corrupted by the very ease of their position while the others “were cowardly, already corrupted by the luxury of the cities, or by the nature of their occupations.”¹⁷⁷ For Montesquieu, says Vyverberg, it was “the ruin of public and private morality which signalled the definitive decadence of civilisations.”¹⁷⁸ Like Montesquieu, Rousseau also perceives the danger of society being corrupted by luxury. “Luxury”, he says, “corrupts the rich and poor alike, the first by possession and the second by covetousness; it sells out the country to effeminacy and vanity...”¹⁷⁹ He believed that, prior to the civil state, human beings enjoyed natural liberty and lived by relying on his instinct and his strength. However, with the arrival of the civil state, this natural liberty was lost to humanity. Instead, man began to use his reason. With this use came benefits such as justice, morality, duty, law, civil liberty, and “the ownership of all he possesses.” These benefits - which were not available to him in his natural state - changed him, says Rousseau, from “a stupid and limited animal into an intelligent being and a man.” This could have been all to the good were it not for the fact that “abuses of this new condition” entered into the civil state, acting on the individual so as

¹⁷⁷ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 146

¹⁷⁸ Vyverberg, *op.cit.*, p. 162. According to Diderot, part of the decline of nations is characterised by despotism towards the population which, in turn, contributes towards the overall social decline because “with a people in slavery, everything becomes corrupt.” (p. 199) Others linked the anti-

to “degrade him beneath his former state.”¹⁸⁰ This degradation led Rousseau to “see all the states of Europe rushing to their ruin. Monarchies, republics, all these nations for all their magnificent institutions, all these fine governments for all their prudent checks and balances, have grown decrepit and threaten soon to die...”¹⁸¹

Rousseau was one who blamed this decadence on the philosophy of reason’s disregard for man’s inner nature. For him, and other critics, as Manuel explains, “all the ills of existing society and the wretchedness of man are to be understood as the inevitable result of deviation from the prescribed laws of man’s instinctive being.”¹⁸² The view that society was over-cultivated and growing detached from natural values, led to an idealisation of a so-called “natural” time - a time before human beings had fallen prey to the sophistications of society. It was widely proclaimed in some areas, says Manuel, that “before man was misled from the path of nature, he had absolute liberty and life was blissful.”¹⁸³ Rousseau was convinced that “all artificial things have disadvantages, civil society

religion of the Enlightenment with a decline in morality, emphasising, as Hampson says, “the connection between dissolute morals, irreligion and the new ideas.” *op.cit.*, p. 133

¹⁷⁹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, *op.cit.*, p72

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 20

¹⁸¹ Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, *op.cit.*, p. 160. He likened the civil state to the human body and said that, like all human bodies, it must one day cease to exist. It contained within itself the seeds of its destruction.” *The Social Contract*, *op.cit.*, p. 96. Note the similarity between this pessimistic view and the views of Gobineau.

¹⁸² Manuel, *op.cit.*, p. 39

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 38

most of all.”¹⁸⁴ He recalled a time before civil society came into being, a time which he considered to be more natural. He did not see this pre-civilisation era as a barbaric time of savagery, but rather as a time of simplicity and natural goodness. He saw it, Vyverberg explains, “as the earliest and simplest social state, where brutishness has been superseded by reason and innocent happiness...with nature he associates such diverse qualities as liberty, simplicity and growth.”¹⁸⁵ For Rousseau, it was necessary to cut through and reject the cloying and corrupting layers of civilisation which had been placed atop man’s “natural” state, in order to reverse the process of decay which was attacking society. In his eyes, as Vyverberg says, “man, and hence society, may yet be regenerated, for one need only uncover the original nature of man, so long overcast with the artificialities of a corrupt civilisation...”¹⁸⁶ However, Voltaire points out that the development of civilisation is at all times a progress from a savage past.¹⁸⁷ “Civilised nations have not always been civilised”, he says, all were for long savage...”¹⁸⁸ D’Holbach also remarks on this. “The civilised nations of the present day”, he says, “were in their origin savages composed of erratic tribes...” As time passed by they

¹⁸⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, *op.cit.*, p. 105

¹⁸⁵ Vyverberg, *op.cit.*, p. 58

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 60

¹⁸⁷ Melzer description of Voltaire is as “Rousseau’s implacable foe and persecutor.” Melzer, *op.cit.*, p. 345

¹⁸⁸ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, *op.cit.*, p. 39

became less savage and more civilised. This process D'Holbach describes as "the natural course, the necessary progression..."¹⁸⁹

Fundamentally, the Enlightenment thinkers saw progress, and thence the solutions to the ills of society, as being achievable by one way only, and that way was by the method of reason and experimentation. As Condillac says, "it is be reason alone that we are enabled to conduct ourselves prudently in life, and to make any progress in the search after truth."¹⁹⁰ There was a conviction that if human beings could allow reason to be their governance then the answers to all social - and moral - problems would become clear. Diderot, for example, put it very succinctly when he declared it to be the belief of the *philosophes* "that the greatest service to be done to men is to teach them to use their reason, only to hold for truth what they have verified and proved."¹⁹¹ Or, as Sieyes put it: "Reason has no room for blind trust."¹⁹² Only through reason and the scientific

¹⁸⁹ D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 558

¹⁹⁰ Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *An Essay Concerning the Origin of Human Knowledge* (Gainesville, Florida, 1971) p. 92

¹⁹¹ Denis Diderot, "Conversation with the Abbé Barthelemy", in *Diderot, Interpreter of Nature: Selected Writings* (London, 1937) p. 28. Mosse emphasised that, to the *philosophes*, "the method of reason was superior to authority, traditions, or human intuition..." George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, An Introduction* (London, 1963) p. 7 And Snyder reminds the reader that the goal of the encyclopaedia of the *philosophes* was "to combat the older systems of thought based on tradition and authority, and substitute for them an edifice of knowledge based on science and reason." *op.cit.*, p. 59

¹⁹² Sieyes, *op.cit.*, p. 168

method could the workings of the world be explained.¹⁹³ There was an over-riding acceptance of, in Cassirer's words, "the modern scientific view of the world."¹⁹⁴ The use of reason was seen as going hand in hand with the progress of science - leading to a better world for all.¹⁹⁵ By the use of reason the world could reach its pinnacle. There was a belief, as Bredvold tells us, in a "New Age"¹⁹⁶ which would arise as the result of the "scientific regulation of human affairs..."¹⁹⁷ This "New Age" would encompass all the values of the Enlightenment, and would therefore be a time of freedom and equality for all.¹⁹⁸ The *philosophes* believed that humanity was, as Becker puts it, "emerging from the dark wilderness of the past into the bright ordered world of the eighteenth century."¹⁹⁹ Science would vanquish the values of the past. "With the stimulus of the new science", says Bredvold, "men began to turn their eyes more to the promise of the future, and the idea of progress was a philosophy of future history, of a future which would be almost the exact opposite of the miserable past, because man was henceforth to control his own destiny by means of science."²⁰⁰ Manuel explains that the

¹⁹³ There would be, says Cassirer, "a new triumph in the scientific explanation of the corporeal world..." Cassirer, *op.cit.*, p. 18

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 20

¹⁹⁵ Sampson describes this belief as "contemporary day-dreams of a golden future time." *op.cit.*, p. 125

¹⁹⁶ Louis I Bredvold, *The Brave New World of the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor, 1961) p. 101

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 103

¹⁹⁸ Vereker, *op.cit.*, p. 11

¹⁹⁹ Becker, *op.cit.*, p. 118

²⁰⁰ Bredvold, *op.cit.*, p. 104

philosophes were convinced that the application of reason “would emancipate Europe from the artificialities, restrictions, injustices, and superstitions which had been inherited from the “Dark Ages” and which served only to impeded progress. Reason would create a society of law and order, a smooth running mechanism whose consistency and harmony would mirror the workings of the natural universe.”²⁰¹ Superstition - that deformer of reason, that, in D’Holbach’s words, “hideous chimera” - would be vanquished.²⁰² To a large extent, the Enlightenment can rightly be described, with Schaffer, as the period when “reason destroyed the world of spirits and liberated humanity from superstition.”²⁰³

Clearly the Enlightenment was a complex and often non-consensual body of thought with many different strands and viewpoints. Nevertheless, its influence was widespread. In the growth and increasing socialisation of science throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a very great deal that was derived directly from the Enlightenment. The *philosophes* established the milieu that allowed the questioning of religious beliefs; they sought to categorise all aspects of nature - including human beings; they related non-material characteristics to material

²⁰¹ Manuel, *op.cit.*, p. 2

²⁰² D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 219

²⁰³ Schaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 241

features; and they promoted the value of science and empiricism. In particular, the Enlightenment attack on traditional religion allowed a severe undermining of absolute faith. This made much possible that had never been before been conceivable. Importantly (considering what was to come later) the idea of a common humanity was questioned. Once doubted, the way was then clear for the Nazis (and others) to contend that some peoples were inferior *by creation*. This had the result of freeing the Nazis to justify their barbaric treatment of other peoples by appeal to reason, arguing that their inferiority was an empirically verifiable fact. In addition, the release from traditional religious constraints gave individuals the previously non-available option of pursuing their ends without fear of heavenly damnation. A purely human judgement of good or bad was now permitted, and this was said to be determinable by reason. The Nazis believed that their ideological judgement was a reliable measure of morality. This belief ultimately allowed a person such as Hitler to affirm that his will was the decisive arbiter of morality. The Enlightenment fusion of science and reason, with its concomitant presumption that science was both “unbiased” and infallible, left a legacy which was inherited by the Nazis.

This chapter has examined elements of Enlightenment thought with a view to preparing the way for an consideration of the

paradoxical nature of the relationship between the thought of the Enlightenment and Nazi ideology. In so doing, it sought to show that Nazi ideology was part of the intellectual history of Europe, and not something wholly divorced from it. In the next chapter, the influence of the Enlightenment on Nazism, and the contradictory relationship between the two will be further considered.

Chapter Seven

The Enlightenment and Nazi Ideology

The Enlightenment and Nazi Ideology

In this chapter, the paradoxical relationship between the thought of the Enlightenment and Nazi ideology will be further examined. It will be contended that Nazi ideology was not a simple, direct reaction against the thought of the Enlightenment, but rather, that this relationship was a more complex and often contradictory one. It will further be argued that Nazism was underlain by an ideology which was based on, and which incorporated, many aspects of Enlightenment thought. In addition, it will be maintained that Nazism would not have been able to develop its particular characteristics were it not for the prior effect which the Enlightenment had had upon the world. Although Nazism overtly rejected the Enlightenment, in fact there were many contradictions

inherent in this rejection. In addition, there were many points of contact between Enlightenment thought and Nazi ideology. In examining these factors, the views on, or relationship of, the Enlightenment and Nazism to elements such as reason, science, progress, Christianity, Judaism, classical antiquity, civilisation, materialism and intellectualism will be considered. In this way, it is intended to show that Nazism can be placed in the context of European intellectual history and can be usefully studied in that context.

To this end, then, the Enlightenment and Nazism will be considered in conjunction. It will be found that there are parts of Enlightenment thought that do not appear to be completely alien to aspects of Nazi ideology - even though the relationship may be highly ambiguous. There is, of course, no direct line: it is not being suggested here that the Enlightenment was in any way a direct cause of the development of Nazi ideology. That is not the case and it would be absurd to suggest otherwise. However, it is true that Nazi ideology had a history and part of its history was the Enlightenment. In a fundamental way Nazi ideology could not avoid being influenced by the Enlightenment, because the Enlightenment went some way towards creating the world into which Nazism came. Despite Nazi scorn of the rationalism, materialism and empiricism of the

Enlightenment, it was nevertheless impossible for them to move away from the influence of the Enlightenment in this regard. Try as they might to cast off reason in favour of instinct, the fact remained that the Enlightenment had transformed the world from a place where magic, emotions, instincts and supernatural events were accepted - if not commonplace - to a place where these things could never again be easily accepted.¹ Reason and the scientific method now occupied the place in the world that had been previously occupied by these non-material elements, and they had been largely superseded. In any examination of any question from the Enlightenment onwards, the answer according to reason would first have to be rejected before any other answer could be considered.

The Nazis rightly associated the reliance on reason with the Enlightenment, but they endeavoured to reject this period because of its liberalism and its humanitarianism. As this was the case, they made some attempts in their ideology to substitute other attributes for reason and empiricism. However, these attempts were failures and this failure was ever present in their experiments, their classifications, their bureaucratisation and their systemisation. Hitler said himself that “a battle of the mind cannot be fought with

¹ However, note that Rousseau was one of the first to demand that there should indeed be a place for at least some of these things in the world. As Melzer puts it, Rousseau’s intention was the re-enchanting the world. Arthur M. Melzer, “The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity”, *American Political Science Review*, June 1996, Volume 90, no. 2, p. 344.

faith alone; reason must play its part. In addressing the masses we must appeal to their emotions, their faith; in our councils, however, hopeful speculation founded on faith has no place. Everything is weighed up realistically...We proceed by mathematically accurate planning and with Prussian precision.”²

The Enlightenment was a period of revolutionary thought, of the casting-out of the old and the welcoming in of the new. It was a seed bed for ideas and ideological conditions that had never before existed. Many previously held beliefs were overturned. To some extent, the Enlightenment created a new world of thought.³

Ideological constructs - once devised - become part of the social stream of consciousness. Ideas, of course, are not absolutes - they can be open to interpretation, or even appropriation into a different form. In addition, there is the question of context: that which may be acceptable in one context may turn out to be unacceptably excessive in another. Even small prejudices can set the scene for larger hatreds. What is always the case, however, is that ideas can

² Edouard Calic, *Unmasked, Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931*, translated by Richard Barry (London, 1971) p. 48. Hitler also declared that the one ambition of National Socialism “must be scientifically to construct a doctrine that is nothing more than a homage to reason.” *Hitler’s Table Talk, His Private Conversations, 1941-44*, translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, introduction by H.R. Trevor-Roper (London, 1973) (hereafter, *TT*), 23.9.41, p. 39. He added that “reason alone must have the last word.” *ibid*, 24.6.43, p. 712

³ See Gay, who says that “characteristic Enlightenment ideas...achieved their revolutionary force only in the eighteenth century. Hobbes, and even Bayle, lived and wrote in a world markedly different from the world of Holbach or Hume.” There was now “a coherent modern view of the world.” Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganis*, (London, 1977) p. 17

have consequences and sometimes may represent the thin end of an ideological wedge. This was tragically proven to be the case with the consequences of Nazi ideology. Jeffrey Herf, for example, describes Hitler aptly when he says that he was “an actor committed to pursuing the implications of ideas to their logical or illogical conclusions - war and mass murder.”⁴ It is hard to describe mass murder as being in any way a logical conclusion, but given the premises of Hitler’s ideas, such a conclusion was foregone.

At first sight it may appear that there are no points of contact between the Enlightenment and the ideology of National Socialism. Indeed, it has been argued that Nazi ideology originated in a revolution against the thought of the Enlightenment. It is true that disavowal of the Enlightenment was ubiquitous in many of Nazism’s ideological formulations. Nevertheless, there are indications that the rise of Nazi ideology was not a direct revolution against the thought of the Enlightenment. With the Enlightenment came ideas that would never again depart. These were ideas such as belief in freedom, in progress through science and reason, and in, at least certain types, of equality. The *philosophes* believed that the gathering of facts, the gaining of knowledge, the empirical method, the use of science, would inevitably lead to an enlightened world. Science was seen almost as

⁴ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism, Technology, culture and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 47

synonymous with progress. Religious faith receded as the acceptance of the power of science expanded. As Laski put it in the *Rise of European Liberalism*: “Slowly, but, nevertheless, irresistibly, science replaced religion as the controlling factor in giving shape to the thoughts of men.”⁵ Once the idea had arisen that human beings could progress through science, it could be either accepted or rejected, but it could not disappear. Colm Kiernan declares that the *philosophes*’ belief in progress was “a logical consequence of their dismissal of the Christian doctrine of original sin.”⁶ In other words, if there was no original sin, then there was no real limitation on man’s betterment. The rejection of conventional religion and all that went with it by the Enlightenment *philosophes*, changed for ever the world which the Nazis inherited. It changed the world’s intellectual conditions.

The Enlightenment is a period which is generally respected. It is a time in which its luminaries sought answers to the problems they

⁵ H.J. Laski, *Rise of European Liberalism, An Essay in Interpretation* (London, 1947) p. 12. Manuel also discusses the lessening of faith in traditional religion. He cites Isaac Newton (1642-1727) as being one of the main influences in the drift from religious mysticism towards scientific empiricism, saying that “the reading public of Europe lost interest in the theological disputations about religious dogma as they became absorbed in contemplation of Newton’s world-machine, whose rules of motion both of celestial bodies in the heavens and of objects on earth were translated into mathematical formulae. It was amazing - to realise that these laws could be expressed in mathematical symbols which no one could deny or about which there could be no substantial difference of opinion.” Frank E. Manuel, *The Age of Reason* (New York, 1967) p. 24. He concludes from this that science “was steadfastly undermining the Christian view of the world...”, *ibid.*, p. 25

⁶ Colm Kiernan, “The Enlightenment and Science in Eighteenth-Century France”, in *Studies on Voltaire and the 18th Century*, edited by Theodore Besterman (Oxford, 1976) p. 106

saw in society - solutions to inequality, injustice, tyranny. In addition, as Isaiah Berlin explains in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, it is a time when people believed that, through the power of reason, the answer to each of these questions could be found. This was an era whose thinkers largely assumed a universality of values, and largely believed in a rational, scientific method of addressing the world. Berlin is of the belief that the sort of reliance on rationality that was present during the Enlightenment (when the efficacy of rationalism becomes not only the accepted wisdom, but also accepted as the only method of examining the world) inevitably causes a backlash against itself. "In due course", he says, "this great wave of rationalism led to the inevitable reaction. It seems to me a historical fact that whenever rationalism goes far enough there often tends to occur some kind of emotional resistance, a 'backlash', which springs from that which is irrational in man."⁷ However, to suggest that there was an inevitability in this process, leads one surely to conclude that individuals have no control in the devising of their philosophies, but are wholly led by fate. This view also may tend to absolve from responsibility, or deny the culpability of, those who formulated the illiberal anti-Enlightenment ideologies. It has been argued that the ideology of the Nazis was part of this anti-rational backlash. In saying that Nazi ideology was a revolution against the ideas and

⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity, Chapters in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1990) p. 34-35

outlook of the Enlightenment, there can arise a tendency to infer that Nazism had some level of, if not quite justification, then at least plausible motivation. In other words, portraying the Enlightenment as excessively rationalistic, can suggest that its very rationalism demanded an "antidote". This casts a shadow over the Enlightenment - a shadow that stretches from the present and through the Nazi era to darken the Enlightenment. The Nazis did indeed castigate the Enlightenment and the values associated with it. However, this attack masked certain underlying connections.

Nazi ideologues were, of course, rarely averse to proclaiming antipathy against the Enlightenment. There was an obvious "denial" aspect to Nazism which consisted of a self-conscious opposition to the values of the Enlightenment. The central tenets of the Enlightenment were condemned and indeed despised. Outwardly at least, the Enlightenment represented to the Nazis everything that was hateful. They bitterly condemned the materialism and liberalism which they saw as being intrinsic to it.⁸ However, there were between them areas of similarity. For example, Nazi attacks on Christianity and the clerical establishment were in some ways not so dissimilar from the Enlightenment onslaught (albeit the crude manner in which they were carried out undoubtedly was). Hitler, for example, blames

⁸ As Gregor Strasser put it in 1926 in "Thoughts about the Tasks of the Future": "The spirit which is to be overcome is the SPIRIT OF MATERIALISM!", *Nazi Ideology before 1933, A Documentation*, introduced and translated by Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Manchester, 1978) p. 89

Christianity for causing the collapse of the ancient world, saying that “as soon as the idea was introduced that all men were equal before God, that world was bound to collapse.”⁹

It could also be said that the fatal attack on a by-and-large unquestioning religious faith by the Enlightenment was an essential pre-requisite to Nazism. Take, for example, the question of whether or not human beings contained within themselves a God-given spirit or soul. This question was, of course, considered by the *philosophes*, and the consensus tended to be that its existence or otherwise could not be proven. Some of the *philosophes*, of course, were convinced that there was no such thing - that the idea of a spirit separate from the body was simply one more religion-inspired lie. To these *philosophes*, it was not just a matter of being unable to probe the existence of the soul, but more a matter of there being no reason to even consider that one existed, such ideas being merely superstitions. The problem with this conclusion was that, once the idea of a common human soul was abandoned, the belief in an equal joining together of all human beings by that divine implant was also undermined. In addition, if a person had no soul, then that divine spark that was supposed to differentiate people from the animals

⁹ *TT*, 26.2.42, p. 336. Hitler is described by Ward as “a Führer who from the beginning has hoped to root out Christianity...”, W.R. Ward, “Guilt and Innocence: The German Churches in the Twentieth Century”, *The Journal of Modern History* (The University of Chicago Press) volume 68, no. 2, June 1996, p. 407

would be another fallacy. Human beings and animals were alike in their biological processes. People could not claim superiority over the animals due to their possession of a soul.¹⁰ It does not seem unlikely that the weakening of Christianity and the attendant weakening of the concept of a spiritual brotherhood of man, contributed to conditions that allowed certain of the more brutal of the Nazi doctrines to emerge. Without God, the individual was not above the animals - he could be reduced to the "blond beast" so beloved of Nazism. This is not to say he would be so reduced. Those Enlightenment *philosophes* who dispensed with belief in God, as well as belief in the validity of the religious establishment, put in its place a belief in the intrinsic value of human beings. The Nazis could not accept this, of course, because it presumed a certain equality, in terms of basic humanity at least. A condemnation of the idea of human equality was a regular feature of Nazism.

During the Enlightenment period, nevertheless, many attacks were made on religion by the *philosophes*. Typically the specific target varied between individual *philosophes*. Some, for example, retained a faith in God - merely despising the specific clerical structure that had been developed around Christianity. A major

¹⁰ Condillac was one, however, who was convinced of the existence of the human soul. He also believed that both human beings and animals possessed souls. In the *Essay Concerning the Origin of Human Knowledge*, he says that "the resemblance between brutes and us, proves they have a soul; and the difference between us, evinces that it is inferior to ours." Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 57. However, he was somewhat unusual in holding to this view.

criticism here was of the “social control” aspect of established, traditional religion. There was a great deal of criticism directed against the hierarchy of priests and clerics who guarded their own positions. These, it was frequently claimed, sought to manipulate the population by exalting tradition, ordering faith and reinforcing superstition, in order to maintain the existing hierarchical social structure and to safeguard their private benefits. In this case, the attack would often be against the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the established Church, and there would be a striving to return to the “real” values of Christianity. Other *philosophes*, though undoubtedly believing in God, found the biblical accounts - both in the Old and in the New Testament - fantastic, irrational, contradictory, superstitious and unbelievable. Additionally, they found anyone who believed, or professed to believe in these accounts, or who sought to propagate such accounts, to be fools, or liars, or both. Then there were other of the *philosophes* who found the whole idea of God or religion to be unreasonable and wholly insupportable. It seemed to them that it was an affront to reason to suppose that human beings were the most important part of the entire universe. Holbach thought it was incredible that a human being who occupies “an infinitely small portion of the globe, which is itself but an imperceptible point in the

immensity of space, vainly believes it is for himself this universe is made..."¹¹

This reason-based view of reality also had implications for other religions - notably Judaism. The Enlightenment had rejected superstition and rejected Christianity as being governed by superstition. Not surprisingly then, Judaism was also rejected as superstition.¹² Voltaire, as has been seen, exhibited an antipathy towards Judaism. However, it is hard to be sure whether this was simply because he considered it superstitious nonsense and despised it for that reason alone; whether he hated it because he saw it as fundamental to the superstitious aspects of Christianity; or whether a prejudice against Jews as a people amplified his dislike of Judaism as a religious system. Whatever the case, Voltaire's attitude was symptomatic of a general feeling. As Christianity was reviled as superstition, then Judaism, with its close links to Christianity, was even more reviled. Nevertheless, although the *philosophes* were desirous of a society unpolluted by the superstition often associated with religion, they were opposed to legal proscriptions on faith. Montesquieu, for example, was adamant that "laws should not be

¹¹ Baron D'Holbach, *The System of Nature or, the laws of the moral and physical world*, volume 1 (London, 1817) p. 149

¹² Gay says that "the Biblical Jews, whom the *philosophes* were in no position to appreciate and took every opportunity to defame, enlarged the boundaries of myth..." Gay, *op.cit.*, p. 93

used to punish religious belief.”¹³ Voltaire, too, though a fervent critic of orthodox religion, praised the wisdom of William Penn (that committed Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania) in enacting a law “to mistreat no one for his religion, and to regard all those who believed in God as brothers.”¹⁴ Although the *philosophes* did not approve of what they considered to be the more superstitious of these religious beliefs, and although they were inclined to view them as both social and human evils, they would have seen no one persecuted for them - even the Jews.

The Nazi period, of course, differed fundamentally in this respect from the Enlightenment. Even before the Nazis came to power, a generalised anti-Jewish feeling had been transformed into a racist, anti-Semitism. Although this was an eventuality that would have been quite outwith the sphere of Enlightenment thought, it is, nevertheless, true that this racist anti-Semitism incorporated within itself many of the aspects of anti-Judaism that had been current during the Enlightenment. For example, the widely-believed reports of Jewish blood sacrifice, became intrinsic to Nazi anti-Semitism, but were expanded. Enlightenment claims that Judaism was

¹³ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, in *The Political Theory of Montesquieu*, edited by Melvin Richter (Cambridge, 1977) p. 302. He also said: “For it seems to us that we are left with nothing when deprived of our religion, and lack nothing when allowed to practise it.” *ibid.* He additionally maintained that it was “better to subvert a religion by the promise of personal favour and material comforts, by the hope of better fortune...” *ibid.*

¹⁴ Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, translation and introduction by Ernest Dilworth (New York, 1961) p. 18-19

superstitious nonsense were enlarged. Now Judaism was portrayed as cabalistic, as a destructive evil and corrupting force of black magic and wicked intent against non-Jews. The non-European origin of Jews was also cited as a reason for anti-Semitism. It was said that people of such origin were intrinsically incapable of viewing the world in the same way that "pure bred" Europeans could. This led to an insidious process being set in motion. It began with the assertion that the Jewish religion had become anomalous in a world of reason; and was continued by the Nazis, illogically but relentlessly, with the assertion that the Jewish race was anomalous in nature. Their very presence on earth began to be described as an affront to nature. "Two worlds face one another", declared Hitler, "the men of God and the men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god. He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over against each other; and if I call one of them a human being I must call the other something else. The two are as widely separated as man and beast. Not that I would call the Jew a beast. He is much further from the beasts than we Aryans. He is a creature outside nature and alien to nature."¹⁵

¹⁵ quoted in Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks, A Series of Political Conversations with Adolf Hitler on his Real Aims* (London, 1939) p. 238. Hitler's conclusion was that "a people that is rid of its Jews returns spontaneously to the natural order." *TT*, 17.2.42, p. 314. If this seems rather abstract, a more concrete example can be seen in a comment he made when discussing Rumania. Here, he said that "to bring decency into civil life, the first condition is to have an integral state: an incorruptible army, a police and administration reduced to minimum. But the first thing, above all, is to get rid of the Jew. Without that, it will be useless to clean the Augean stables." *ibid.*, 17.10.41, p. 67-68

As well as anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity was a significant feature in Nazi ideology. Again, this was not straightforward. Hitler had a great deal of grudging respect for the power of the Church in Germany and did not wish to act precipitously against it. Because of this, he made a great show of Nazi esteem for the Church. For example, in 1933, he declared jubilantly that “it is Christians and not international atheists who now stand at the head of Germany.”¹⁶ This had the dual effect of censuring the opposition, whilst simultaneously appealing to traditional values. In Munich, later that month, he said that the Nazi movement had “sought to bring together into a new unity, Germans of all classes and professions, whatever their descent, whatever their religion, provided only that it were Christian...”¹⁷ However, although this acted as an obtuse attack on non-Christians, in all other respects it merely gave lip-service to religion. This was because Hitler’s ulterior wish was to break the power of the Church - seeing it as a dangerous rival to himself and his followers. He shared the *philosophes*’ view of the Church as being a powerful manipulator of the population. This was the aspect of it that he feared most because he knew that the church could influence people against Nazism if it so chose. This was why he sought to remain in collusion

¹⁶ *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler* (hereafter, *Speeches*), 15.2.33, p. 240

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 24.2.33, p. 252

with the Church. However, he was only biding his time until he was in a position to move against it.

Part of what may be described as a “pincer-movement” against the established Church was the setting up of the so-called “German Church”.¹⁸ Although purporting to be a specifically German arm of the established church, it was in actuality an attempt to gain respectability by using the reputation of the Church. The “German Church” was also a useful platform for condemning “enemies of the state” and subversive behaviour, etc. and for opening up and making acceptable debate on favourite topics of Nazi ideology such as Aryan superiority and Jewish iniquity. It was also a further agency for propagating the essentially atheistic Nazi ideology. Although Hitler publicly declared his support for Christianity, there is nothing in either Nazi ideology or in Hitler’s actions or private musings to prove a belief in God in any generally accepted sense. Certainly he had no faith in conventional religion.

Rauschning reports a tirade against the Church made by Hitler. In it, Hitler makes clear the Nazi position when he declares that “we must prevent the churches from doing anything but what

¹⁸ “At first Hitler proposed to get control of the Protestant churches from within by pushing the German Christian movement. This movement, distinguished from the more rabid Protestant right-wing fronts only by the last of its objects, ‘the maintenance of the purity of the race and the protection of the nation from degeneration’, obtained a third of the seats in the parishes and synods of Prussia even before Hitler was firmly established in power.” Ward, *op.cit.*, p. 407

they are doing now, that is, losing ground day by day. Do you really believe the masses will ever be Christian again? Nonsense! Never again. That tale is finished. No one will listen to it again. But we can hasten matters. The parsons will be made to dig their own graves. They will betray their God to us. They will betray anything for the sake of their miserable little jobs and incomes.”¹⁹ Thus, the religious hierarchy was said to be a vehicle for the self-serving behaviour of its members. Priests and clerics were accused of aiming to inculcate the population with superstitious fears, in order to maintain the mystery of religion and thus to secure their own elevated positions. Nevertheless, Hitler felt that the Nazis could “learn by the example of the Catholic Church. Though its doctrinal edifice...comes into collision with exact science and research, it is none the less unwilling to sacrifice as much as one little syllable of its dogmas.”²⁰ This last assertion is not so far from the position of the Enlightenment. The *philosophes* had sought to explode the dogmas of religion by the methods of science, experiment, and unfettered enquiry. Hitler himself perceived this similarity. He wondered aloud about the “clairvoyance [with which] the authors of the

¹⁹ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 58 Elsewhere he declared that religions had “passed the climacteric; they’re now decadent.” *TT*, 11.11.41, p. 125

²⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (hereafter, *MK*), introduction by D.C. Watt, translated by Ralph Mannheim, (London, 1989), p. 417. He elsewhere castigated religion as being “in perpetual conflict with the spirit of free research.” *TT*, 24.10.41, p. 83

eighteenth...century criticised Christianity and passed judgement on the evolution of the Churches!"²¹

A cynical appropriation of religious symbolism could be very useful to the Nazis. Hitler gives an explicit example of this, saying that Nazism would imitate

just what the Catholic Church did when it forced its beliefs on the heathen: preserve what can be preserved, and change its meaning. We shall take the road back: Easter is no longer resurrection, but the eternal renewal of our people. Christmas is the birth of *our* saviour: the spirit of heroism and the freedom of our people. Do you think these liberal priests who have no longer a belief, only an office, will refuse to preach *our* God in their churches? I can guarantee that, just as they have made Haeckel and Darwin, Goethe and Stefan George the prophets of their Christianity, so they will replace the cross with our swastika. Instead of worshipping the blood of their quondam saviour, they will worship the pure blood of our people. They will receive the fruits of the German soil as a divine gift, and will eat it as a symbol of the eternal communion of the people, as they have hitherto eaten of the body of their God. And when we have reached that point...the churches will be crowded again. If *we* wish it, then it will be so - when it is *our* religion that is preached there.²²

It is, then, unsurprising that in public Hitler often referred to God and His purpose which, predictably, usually coincided with Nazi plans. However, in private, the bulk of Hitler's references are grossly disparaging. For example, Hitler at one point declares that (like Judaism) "Christianity is a rebellion against natural law, a protest

²¹ *TT*, 25.10.41, p. 88

²² Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 58

against nature.”²³ He also declared that he would not be prevented from “tearing up Christianity root and branch, and annihilating it in Germany.”²⁴ Hitler was not hiding his feelings when he routinely linked Christianity to both Jewishness and Communism and roundly condemned all three. “Christianity”, he declared, “is a prototype of Bolshevism: the mobilisation of the Jew and the masses of slaves with the object of undermining society.”²⁵

But, as usual, there were convolutions. Although Hitler despised Christianity, he was not wholly devoid of admiration for Christ. Although he claimed on at least one occasion that it was “nonsense” to try to “make an Aryan of Jesus”²⁶, there were other occasions when he appeared to be doing just that. For example, he repeated suggestions that Jesus was not a Jew but an Aryan, either by dint of being the child of Aryan immigrants into Nazareth, or by dint of being the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier. This Jesus, Hitler could admire, portraying him as a fighter against Judaism. “Originally, Christianity was merely an incarnation of Bolshevism the destroyer”, declared Hitler. “Nevertheless”, he continued,

the Galilean, who later was called the Christ, intended something quite different. He must be regarded as the popular

²³ *TT*, 10.10.41, p. 51

²⁴ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 57. He also decried it as “a religion that rebels against all the joys of the senses.” *TT*, 1-2.12.41, p. 142

²⁵ *TT*, 19.10.41, p. 75

²⁶ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 58

leader who took up His position against Jewry. Galilee was a colony, where the Romans had probably installed Gallic legionaries; and it's certain that Jesus was not a Jew. For the Galilean's object was to liberate His country from Jewish oppression. He set himself against Jewish capitalism, and that's why the Jews liquidated Him.²⁷

Despite this interpretation of the role of Jesus, the problem came, for Hitler, with any of the other aspects of Christianity. Even if Jesus were not a Jew (and, of course, he could not be stomached by Nazis if he were a Jew), even if he rebelled against Judaism, it still remained the case that the doctrines of Christianity were in complete opposition to anything the Nazis favoured. This incongruity in Hitler's view of Jesus could be partially surmounted by blaming those who came after Jesus for warping his teachings. Thus Hitler says that "Christ was an Aryan, and St. Paul used his doctrine to mobilise the criminal underworld and thus organise a proto-Bolshevism."²⁸ However, in spite of Hitler's occasional attempts to show Christianity as having been an anti-Jewish movement whose message had been misappropriated and distorted, in his more characteristic descriptions of it, it was condemned as Jewish religion. It was a Jewish invention and worthy of revulsion because of this. Rauschnig relates that, to Hitler, "the whole hated doctrine of Christianity, with its faith in redemption, its moral code, its conscience, its conception of original sin, (was) the outcome of

²⁷*TT*, 21.10.41, p. 76. The following month he declared that "Jesus fought against the materialism of his age and, therefore, against the Jews." *ibid.*, 29-30.11.44, p. 721

²⁸ *TT*, 13.12.41, p. 143

Judaism.”²⁹ The Old Testament was the story of the Jewish people, Jesus was a Jew, and the whole of Christianity contained within itself the tenets of the Old Testament - Jewish tenets. A Jewish religion had no place in Nazi Germany.

Even without the Jewish dimension, however, Christianity was still anathema to ideological Nazism. Christian values of mercy, compassion, human worth, humility, were condemned as cowardice, weakness, corrupting effeminacy and decadence. There is an obvious link between the Nazi attitude to liberalism and this attitude to Christian values. Nazis lauded action, strength, battle - not turning the other cheek.³⁰ Hitler disparaged what he termed the “Jewish Christ-creed with its effeminate pity-ethics.”³¹ Christianity was not for Nazis. They were against the established religion in Germany, both because they feared the power of the Church and also because Christian and Nazi values were incompatible.

The spiralling away from Christianity and from the universalism intrinsic to it, was correlated to a growing emphasis on

²⁹ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 232. As Hitler put it: “Christianity is the worst of the regressions that mankind can ever have undergone, and its the Jew who, thanks to this diabolic invention, has thrown him back fifteen centuries.” *TT*, 21-21.2.42, p. 322

³⁰ Note that Rousseau said of Christians that, in war, they knew “better how to die than to conquer.” *The Social Contract*, Volume III, in Maurice Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers, Political Theorists of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1986) p. 95

³¹ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 57. He also said, “Let’s be the only people who are immunised against the disease [i.e. Christianity].” *TT*, 13.12.41, p. 145

all things specifically German, thus strengthening nationalism, further undermining universalism and evoking a greater interest in the pagan aspects of German culture. For example, in the youth movements, great emphasis was laid on old Germanic gods and heroes. In fact, many of the rituals of Nazism looked very like pagan religion.³² However, although there were many elements of faith in National Socialism, there were also other elements that could not be described in religious terms. It can be argued that the paganism, for example, was simply a consequence of the emphasis on nationalism, which stressed the particular national mythology, culture and history of the German people. Thus old legends, myths and heroes gained special importance. And this, in turn, was partly due to the historical importance the Nazis attributed to themselves as members of the ancient Aryan tribe; partly due to their identification with the Roman Empire; and partly due to their distancing themselves from Christianity.

Although the Nazis and the *philosophes* opposed Christianity from different backgrounds, the opposition itself cannot be doubted.

³² See Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London, 1986), whose work is concerned, as he explains, with "National Socialism and that religion of nature to which, in the eyes of those most important to the movement, it was supposed to approximate. It was a religion born of cultural, social, and psychological circumstances that have to be described as 'German'. Yet, its vision - the appeal that it had for at least the fully initiated - went so far beyond the concerns and demands that were largely responsible for the support it received from the German public, that the vital core of the National Socialist religion had always to remain secret." p. vii. Also see Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism", in *The New York Review*, 22 July 1995. He affirms that "Nazism was decidedly anti-Christian and neo-pagan..." p. 12

Voltaire, typically, would much have preferred the moral systems of the classical era to the teachings of Christianity. "Stoicism", he said, "is undoubtedly better than Christian moral teaching. It breeds better character."³³ Gay argues that this anti-religious ethos of the Enlightenment can rightly be described as paganism, a paganism that he traces to its roots in the classical era. The *philosophes* were thoroughly familiar with the works of classical antiquity - and valued them and their authors very highly. Rousseau, characteristic in this respect if not in others, describes in admiration the "heroic souls of the ancients" as seeming

like the exaggerations of historians. How can we, who feel that we are so small, believe that there were ever men of such greatness? Such men did exist, however, and they were human beings like ourselves. What prevents us from being like them? Our prejudices, our base philosophy, and those passions of petty self-interest which, through inept institutions never dictated by genius, have been concentrated and combined with egoism in all our hearts.³⁴

The *philosophes*' intellectual immersion in the classics, linked with the radicalisation of the intellectual climate during the Enlightenment led, Gay contends convincingly, to the growth of a pagan outlook among them. There was a tendency to admire the classical period and see its demise as the start of an era of darkness and superstition.

³³ Voltaire, in Cranston, *op.cit.*, p. 56

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation*, in *Rousseau, Political Writings*, translated and edited by Frederick Watkins (Edinburgh, 1953) p. 163. Compare with Hitler on genius, self-interest and institutions.

Cranston gives Condorcet as an example of one who “depicted the achievements of Classical Antiquity being succeeded by a thousand years of darkness and retrogression.”³⁵ Thus Condorcet “dwells at length on one long period of ‘decadence’ - the thousand years of European experience which followed the eclipse of Roman glory...”³⁶ In many ways, the *philosophes* saw the classical era as an example of civilisation that they would wish to emulate.

Hitler, too, often praised the achievements of classical antiquity, remarking that the ancestors of the Germans “were still throwing stone hatchets and crouching round open fires when Greece and Rome had already reached the highest stage of culture.”³⁷ He likewise commended the emphasis laid by the ancient Greeks on the improvement of the human body through exercise and wanted this to be also characteristic of German society. “Strong and handsome must my young men be,” he declared, “I will have them fully trained in all physical exercises. I intend to have an athletic youth - that is the first and the chief thing. In this way I will eradicate the thousands of years of human domestication. Then I shall have in front of me the pure and noble natural material. With that I can create the new order.”³⁸ He was confident that this aim was being

³⁵ Cranston, *op.cit.*, p. 6

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 153. Brought on, according to Hitler, by the inception of Christianity.

³⁷ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich, Memoirs*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (London, 1970) p. 95

³⁸ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 247

achieved. "What splendid bodies we can see today," he asserted. "It is only in our century that young people have once again approached Hellenistic ideals through sports. How the body was neglected in earlier centuries. In this respect our times differ from all previous cultural epochs since antiquity."³⁹ Their religions were, of course, pagan and, perhaps more to the point in Nazi eyes, they were Christianity-free. Hitler whole-heartedly declares that "the reason why the ancient world was so pure, light and serene was that it knew nothing of the two great scourges: the pox and Christianity."⁴⁰ This sort of comment is yet another example of the fundamental antagonism between Nazism and Christianity.

Although the Enlightenment philosophers largely rejected Christianity, they tended not to reject the universalism that went with it. On the whole, they believed that human beings, though being unequal in intellect, abilities, or looks, and perhaps - through various reasons - achieving unequal levels of civilisation, nevertheless shared a common, and equal, humanity that could not be gainsaid. Among the *philosophes*, a political ideology of equality comparable with, for example, Marxism, did not, of course, exist. However, there was an acceptance that, though human differences were natural and explicable, these differences did not need to interfere with civil rights.

³⁹ Speer, *op.cit.*, p. 96-97

⁴⁰ *TT*, 19.10.41, p. 75

Rousseau⁴¹, in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, illustrated his ideas on equality by reference to education. “All, being equal under the constitution of the state”, he said, “ought to be educated together and in the same fashion; and if it is impossible to set up an absolutely free system of public education, the cost must at least be set at a level the poor can afford to pay.”⁴² And Sieyes, whilst understanding that inequalities did exist, was emphatic that these could not be allowed to affect basic civil rights. “Inequalities of wealth or ability are like inequalities of age, sex, colour, etc. In no way do they alter the nature of the equality of citizenship; the rights inherent in citizenship cannot attach to differences.”⁴³

Holbach, too, was interested in the differences and inequalities that existed among individuals, and put these down to the natural diversity which was to be found within humanity. “The diversity found among the individuals of the human species”, he said, “causes

⁴¹ Again, it must be pointed out that Rousseau, unlike the bulk of Enlightenment thinkers, was more inclined towards the “fatherland” than towards universalism.

⁴² Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, *op.cit.*, p. 177

⁴³ J. Sieyes, *What is the Third Estate?*, p. 161-162. However, it must be noted that Sieyes is sometimes held in some degree responsible for that notorious distinction between “active” and “passive” citizenship which was used to exclude some from the franchise after 1789. Sieyes believed that everyone should have equal rights of citizenship. However, he believed that “all do not have a right to take an active part in the formation of public powers: not all are *active* citizens.” quoted in Murray Forsyth, *Reason and Revolution, The Political Thought of the Abbé Sieyes*, Leicester, 1987), p. 118. Nevertheless, as Forsyth points out: “Seen as a whole Sieyes’ views are not those of a man determined at all costs to exclude the lower strata of society from the suffrage, and to reserve it for those with substantial property. On the contrary, they are the views of one who believed that the exercise of the most elementary political right called for certain moral and intellectual qualities, that not everyone in the society of his own day possessed these qualities, but that they ought to be encouraged to acquire them.” *ibid.*, p163

inequalities between man and man..."⁴⁴ "According to this diversity of faculties", he continued, "the individuals of the human species are divided into different classes...all these varieties in man, flow from the individual properties of his soul, or from the particular modification of his brain. It is thus, that wit, imagination, sensibility, talents, etc., diversify to infinity the differences that are to be found in man."⁴⁵ D'Alembert went so far as to say that these natural inequalities meant that some people were naturally superior to others, as he explained with reference to the ability of some to influence others by the power of their eloquence. "As Logic and Grammar speak to the mind", he said, "Eloquence was created to speak to sentiment, and can impose silence even upon reason. The prodigious effect that it has worked upon an entire nation, often through a single individual, is perhaps the most striking evidence of the superiority of one man over another...."⁴⁶

Although the *philosophes* were distanced from the general population, they were strongly disposed to hold to the belief in the equality of human rights, and wished for a state that would uphold these rights.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, for the majority of the *philosophes*, it

⁴⁴ D'Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 205

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 207

⁴⁶ D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopaedia of Diderot*, translated by R.N. Schwab (1963) p34. He added that "nature alone can create an eloquent man", p. 34, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Montesquieu, for example, said that "if a state is to enjoy and preserve liberty, everyone must be able to say what he thinks." *op.cit.*, p. 285

was part of the existing social structure that some would rule and others would be ruled, and it was generally held to be true that the ordinary member of the population - due to his lack of education, knowledge and technique - would not be involved (at least in the near future) in the making of laws and the ruling of the country. In other words, there was an acceptance that there were those who were natural leaders and those who would never be. This being the case, such leadership qualities had to be honed and nurtured.⁴⁸

Within Nazism, of course, it was fundamental that some were natural leaders and some were not. This is the very basis of the *Führerprinzip* - that principle of ideological élitism, encompassing active opposition to both democracy and liberalism.⁴⁹ It was a main plank in Nazi ideology that the leader would take whichever action he deemed necessary regardless of statements of the law. With regard to the law, there were two forms in Hitler's view. One form was bureaucratic, devised by officialdom; the other was a natural law, one that empowered great leaders such as himself. Hitler's comments on the law characterise his intrinsic indifference to it. For example, he remarks that "it is just like cowardly, inconsistent

⁴⁸ Rousseau passionately believed this. "It is important, however, and even more important than we imagine", he said, "that those who are one day to command others should from their youth show themselves to be superior in all respects or at least that they should try to do so." Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in Watkins, *op.cit.*, p. 173. He also believed that the "general will" of the population would be made manifest by this type of leadership.

⁴⁹ MK, p. 74

bourgeoisie to pacify their consciences with legal proceedings. There is only *one* legal right, the nation's right to live."⁵⁰ And on another occasion he wrote that "if the species itself is in danger of being oppressed or utterly eliminated, the question of legality is reduced to a subordinate role. Human law cancels out state law."⁵¹ Although, in Hitler's eyes, these two forms of law were far apart, and it was obvious which one he thought important, the lack of regard that Hitler had for any form of law can be seen in a wondering comment he made about the *Palais de Justice* of Brussels. "Typical of the epoch of Liberalism", he said, "is the *Palais de Justice* in Brussels. It is a cyclops which dominates the whole town; and fancy having the Law Courts, of all things, as the dominating feature of a place."⁵²

The whole crux of the Nazi attitude towards the law was that it should be operated in the interests of Nazism. The Nazis would be party to any existing laws only so far as they suited their purposes. Where these purposes were hindered or thwarted, they sought to ride roughshod over the laws and usually succeeded - although this success could sometimes be slow in coming. Their disdain of the law

⁵⁰ Calic, *op.cit.*, p. 87. And he also remarked that "for us the supreme law of the constitution is: whatever serves the vital interests of the nation is legal." (*ibid.*, p. 86). And he additionally declared that "the greatest revolutionary changes on this earth would not have been thinkable if their motive force, instead of fanatical, yes, hysterical passion, had been merely the bourgeois virtues of law and order." *MK*, p. 388

⁵¹ *MK*, p. 88. Hitler was categorical that "the notions of law as invented by jurists have little to do with natural laws." *TT*, 27.2.42, p. 341. Elsewhere, he said that the function of the law "is to maintain public order without which there can be neither civilisation nor progress. All means used to this end are justifiable." *ibid.*, 20.8.42, p. 641

⁵² *TT*, 13.6.43, p. 705

was not only a convenient device resorted to when deemed necessary, it was also intrinsic to Nazi ideology. Within Nazi ideology, the law was not perceived to be a social construct based on moral principles to safeguard human rights, but rather it was a mechanism through which to wield power and ensure obedience. To this extent it could be described as an instrument of despotism. Hitler had an overriding contempt for both the structure and the practice of the law as it stood, declaiming that it was rigid and stultifying. He habitually railed against laws that did not fit in with his world-view. This can be seen in his opinions on the passing of the death-penalty. For example, when discussing the trial of a man accused of fire-raising, he said that he would “be interested to know whether they’ll pass the death sentence on that madman who set fire to the *Bremen* - deliberately, it’s said, from a liking for setting things alight. I’ve given instructions for the event of the man’s not being condemned to death. He’s to be shot immediately.”⁵³ This is an illustration of the real scorn Hitler had for the law. In a fundamental way he believed that the law should reside within his own will.

So to this extent, the Enlightenment and Nazi ideology were poles apart. Montesquieu, for example, showed his contempt for the principles of absolutism when he said that “absolute obedience

⁵³*TT*, 19-20.8.41, p. 30

presupposed ignorance in the person who obeys; ignorance as well is presupposed in the person who commands. For he need not deliberate, doubt, or reason; he has only to will.”⁵⁴ He continued: “In despotic states the nature of government demands unconditional obedience. Once the will of the ruler is known, it ought to produce its effect as infallibly as that produced when one ball strikes another.”⁵⁵ Thus, “under despotism,” he concluded, “the law is nothing more than the will of the ruler.”⁵⁶ These comments could well describe Hitler’s own methods of command. The Enlightenment philosophers, on the other hand, wished for all people to be treated as being equal under the law and, although they felt many laws to be unjust and in need of changing, they held to the general principle of the rule of law. As Montesquieu said: “Law in general is human reason, to the extent that it governs all the peoples of the earth.”⁵⁷ It was essential for them that laws should be in concordance with the rules of reason. Many of their efforts were towards achieving just laws. They sought to do this by disseminating knowledge and putting forward logical arguments. Discontent regarding the law existed during the Enlightenment and during the Nazi era. The reasons for this

⁵⁴ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 194

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 195

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 221. Despite this, many of the *philosophes* were not averse to justifying some forms of “benevolent dictatorship” when it was in their interests to do so. As Gay explains, “the *philosophes* cultivated their connections with power, and their cosy fraternising with the enemy cost them heavily. It distorted their tactics, long circumscribed their freedom of action, sometimes seduced them into intellectual dishonesty, and blurred their radicalism, not only for others but for themselves as well.” Gay, *op.cit.*, p. 24

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 177

discontent, however, could not be more different - being a regard for justice and equality and human dignity on the part of the *philosophes*, and a regard for their own power and domination on the part of the Nazis.

This thirst for power was also reflected on Hitler's views on the parliamentary system. Indeed, particular venom was reserved for it. Hitler never tired of blaming this system for a great part of the ills of the nation. In *Mein Kampf* he said that "by rejecting the authority of the individual and replacing it with the numbers of some momentary mob, the parliamentary principle of majority rule sins against the basic aristocratic principle of Nature, though it must be said that this view is not necessarily embodied in the present-day decadence of our upper ten thousand."⁵⁸ Within Nazi ideology, there was a link made between the parliamentary system and the decadence of society. Again in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler begs his readers not to forget that "the parliamentary principle of democratic rule has by no means always dominated mankind, but on the contrary is to found only in brief periods of history, which are always epochs of the decay of peoples and states."⁵⁹ To the Nazis, the parliamentary democratic system was a system that worked against the interests of the nation. The Nazis proclaimed themselves to be men of instinct, who took action when

⁵⁸ *MK*, p. 74. The *völkisch* philosophy, on the other hand, "serves the basic aristocratic idea of Nature and believes in the validity of this law down to the last individual." *ibid.*, p. 348

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 410

the nation required it, rather than only talking about action as the current party politicians did. Hitler said that if these politicians “only possessed a healthy instinct, it would be considerably better and more profitable for the nation.”⁶⁰ The very structure of the parliamentary party system facilitated the growth of loyalty to the various political parties as opposed to loyalty to the nation. This last was the most important of the reasons because, despite all talk of loyalty to the nation, the Nazis were primarily concerned with the removal of all opposition to themselves. And this meant the removal of all dissidence and all factions.

As far as factionalism was concerned, the *philosophes* were aware that there could be risks. Hume, for example, warned that “when men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to neglect all the ties of honour and morality, in order to serve their party...”⁶¹ Factions, he went so far as to say, “subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other.”⁶² Rousseau, too, sought to illuminate the danger to the nation of factionalism. He again referred to the classical era, seeing ancient society as being able to serve as a

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 383

⁶¹ Hume, *Theory of Politics*, in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, edited by Frederick Watkins, p. 149

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 169

template for an ideal way of running contemporary society. In classical times, he explains, citizens served a multiplicity of functions, which thus militated against factionalism, and this was an example worth following.⁶³ “That is the real secret of making everything proceed toward the common goal”, he explains, “and of preventing the spirit of faction from taking root at the expense of patriotism, so that the hydra of chicanery will not devour a nation.”⁶⁴

However, it is safe to say that this idea of political factionalism was far more specific than the Nazi one, which condemned all opposition or political vicissitude as divisive and ruinous. This view was influenced, of course, by the Nazi ideal of the unity and homogeneity of the nation, within which contrary views or opposing movements were rejected and prohibited.⁶⁵ As has been seen before, Hitler was very adept at welding different concepts together in order to appeal to different sections of society. Winkler describes this as a “dual strategy” and argues that it was a useful tactic in establishing the base for the growth of a mass movement. “On the one hand”, he says,

⁶³ It is worth mentioning that Hitler frequently made reference to the example of antiquity.

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, in Watkins, *op.cit.*, p. 220

⁶⁵ Montesquieu’s comments on despotic states may seem prophetic here: “Despotic states. Since in them all men are equal, no one may be preferred to any other. Since all men are slaves no distinction, may be made among them.” *op.cit.*, p. 194. He also says: “In monarchies and despotic states, no one aspires to equality. Not even the idea occurs; everyone aspires to superiority. People of the very lowest rank only wish to rise in order to become masters of others.” *op.cit.*, p. 204

individual social groups were wooed with promises which could only have been kept at the expense of all the other groups. On the other hand, conflicts of interest were universally denounced and apparently removed by a movement which claimed to stand above classes. The contradiction between the two levels of National Socialist agitation was striking but did not prove to be disturbing. The party leaders obviously felt that the individual groups were interested primarily in what had been promised them, rather than what the National Socialists promised others.⁶⁶

It was by means such as these that, despite their élitist and authoritarian beliefs, the Nazis still contrived to claim that socialism was contained within their ideology. Unlikely as this may at first appear, it is not the case that the socialist aspect of Nazism was entirely a sham, although, of course, it bore little relation to the socialism of the communists.⁶⁷ Hitler sought to describe National Socialism as involving a nation-based racial equality. However, even within the terms of his own ideological formulation of National Socialism, it was not socialism but mass-ism that he described, with a lumpenproletarian population being led by an élite of “natural” born leaders. Even at that, according to Mosse, the “socialism” element within National Socialism was quickly superseded. “National Socialist ideology”, he says,

⁶⁶ Winkler, “German Society, Hitler and the Illusion of Restoration 1930-33”, *Journal of Contemporary History, Special Issue, Theories of Fascism*, volume 11, no. 4, October 1976, p. 1

⁶⁷ Eatwell points out that it is “important to remember that whilst fascism was a hierarchical ideology in some senses, in others it was quite egalitarian...The Nazi celebration of manual work was not just rhetoric; there was a genuinely egalitarian side to it, both in terms of consideration and reward.” Roger Eatwell, “The Nature of the Right, 1: is there an ‘essentialist’ philosophical core?”, in *The Nature of the Right, European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789*, edited by Roger Eatwell and Noel O’Sullivan (London, 1989) p. 55

was not static. In its rise to power the party displayed a great deal of cynicism. Most of its leaders knew that the "socialism" of the party title was a ruse to get votes. One faction of the party, however, had believed in the "socialist" part of the title. They wanted to combine the ideology with a socialist programme, for this would establish a genuine equality among all Aryans and thus solve the social problem. The dispute between this faction and the rest of the party nearly wrecked the movement, but it was the Socialists who had to leave.⁶⁸

As became clear, the Nazis were not socialists, but there must be some doubt that the socialism aspect of Nazism was complete pretence. Even in 1927, Hitler was able to give a definition of socialism that seemed to make it completely compatible with nationalism. In his "Secret Pamphlet for Industrialists", he says that

from the hitherto misconstrued and consequently divisive concepts, "nationalism" and "socialism", the movement has formulated a new compounded concept by pointing out that nationalism in its highest form is identical with supreme concern for the welfare of the folk and that socialism in its highest form is identical with extreme love for folk and fatherland, so that both represent the responsible fulfilment of one and the same folkish duty.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, An Introduction* (London, 1963) p. 366.

⁶⁹ Hitler, "Hitler's Secret Pamphlet for Industrialists", 1927, reprinted in *Journal of Modern History*, volume 40, 1968, with an introduction by Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., p. 373. This is a rather more sophisticated version than that of Gregor Strasser who, in 1926, had said: "We are Socialists, we are enemies, mortal enemies of the present capitalist economic system with its exploitation of the economically weak, with its injustice in wages, with its immoral evaluation of individuals according to wealth and money instead of responsibility and achievement, and we are determined under all circumstances to abolish this system!" Miller Lane and Rupp, *op.cit.*, p. 89

In this way he sought to remove all conflict between nationalists and socialists.

Now, according to Mosse, "National Socialism wanted to distinguish the Aryan from the masses, but in the end it pressed all its subjects into a common mould."⁷⁰ However, even within the Aryan race, some were more worthy than others. Hitler clearly delineates this in *Mein Kampf*. He says there that

it would be lunacy to try to estimate the value of man according to his race, thus declaring war on the Marxist idea that men are equal, unless we are determined to draw the ultimate consequences. And the ultimate consequence of recognising the importance of blood - that is, of the racial foundation in general - is the transference of this estimation to the individual person. In general, I must evaluate peoples differently on the basis of the race they belong to, and the same applies to the individual men within a national community. The realisation that peoples are not equal transfers itself to the individual man within a national community, in the sense that men's minds cannot be equal, since here, too, the blood components, though equal in their broad outlines, are, in particular cases, subject to thousands of the finest differentiations.⁷¹

And in *Hitler's Secret Book* it is baldly stated: "One people is not equal to another."⁷² Of course, when this idea was extended to cover other races and nations, the inequality and comparative worthiness

⁷⁰ Mosse, *op.cit.*, p. 371

⁷¹ *MK*, p. 402

⁷² *Hitler's Secret Book* (hereafter, *HSB*), p. 27. He also said: "Our people therefore is only harming itself if it accepts half-castes into the *Wehrmacht*, and thus admits them to a position of equality with pure-blooded Germans. We cannot risk...burdening our blood-stream with the addition of further foreign elements." *TT*, 1.7.42, p. 545,

or unworthiness was even more deeply emphasised. Hitler said that the philosophy of Nazism “by no means believes in an equality of the races, but along with their difference it recognises their higher or lesser value and feels itself obligated, through this knowledge, to promote the victory of the better and stronger, and demand the subordination of the inferior and weaker in accordance with the eternal will that dominates this universe.”⁷³ It was a matter of fact to the Nazis that some people were more worthy of life than others. They were sure that there were fundamental divisions in the world between those whom they considered to be human beings and others whom they dismissed as sub-human creatures.

Mosse argues that, concerning race, there was no idea of progress or evolution within Nazi ideology. Within Nazi ideology, he says, “history was not progress as such; neither was it a Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest. The race was fully formed at its very beginning. It was not a question of evolution but of smashing those obstacles that stood in the way of the race’s final triumph.”⁷⁴ It does, however, remain the case that “survival of the fittest” rhetoric was widely used, showing that the Aryan race was seen as having a crucial part to play in the competition between races. In other words, in terms of humanity, the Aryans were seen as the “fittest” - those

⁷³ *MK*, p. 348

⁷⁴ Mosse, *op.cit.*, p. 362.

who survive and triumph over all the others.⁷⁵ Unlike the Enlightenment *philosophes*, the Nazis were very far from being concerned with universal progress. Their conception of progress was one that was for, and indeed was only possible for, the Nordic super-race. Far from being encouraged to progress, other races or nations were, at best, to remain at the same stage of development as when they came under Nazi sway. At worst, their development was to be reversed.

However, although the Nazi movement could never be described as progressive, that is not to deny that there were elements within Nazi ideology that were genuinely concerned with progress. Indeed, the idea of progress was a significant one within Nazi ideology. The concept of the Third Reich itself, was one that assumed a progress to a final goal - that of the creation of an ideal Nazi state. In addition to this, Hitler was enthusiastic in his use of the rhetoric of progress. For example, at a New Year reception of the diplomatic corps, he spoke of his concerns that the "progress of humanity be safeguarded."⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the sincerity of these sentiments cannot be assumed. Hitler made little secret of the fact that some of his utterances were purely for public consumption, and were not statements of his true aims. On another occasion he said that "the

⁷⁵ The SS "marriage laws", for example, and the culling of people with mental and physical disabilities, were based on the assumption that a better breed of Aryan could be produced.

⁷⁶ *Speeches*, 1.1.35, p. 1194

German people is filled with the ardent desire to live in peace with the other peoples of the earth and to co-operate with them in all spheres of life in mutual understanding for the welfare and progress of humanity, and wishes with all its heart to see also in all other peoples the same effort towards trustful co-operation and mutual respect.”⁷⁷ It must be noted that the, for Hitler, uncommonly diplomatic language in this example, may disguise the real meaning behind his particular use of the phrase, “progress of humanity”.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, although this speech could be construed as a diplomatically phrased threat, that does not negate the fact that the idea of progress was implicit in Nazi thought, even though it was a peculiarly Nazi concept of progress and only applicable, it seems, to the Aryan people. In one of Hitler’s comments on art, for example, he disparages admirers of so-called primitive art, saying that “they forget that it is not the function of art to retreat backwards from the stage of development which a people has already reached: its sole function must be to symbolise that development.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, A reply to the address of the papal Nuncio, Monsignor Orsenigo, at the 1936 New Year reception, 10.1.36, p. 1258

⁷⁸ Also see other references to progress. For example: “The German people will, with all its heart, choose a truly constructive labour for peace in the service of general progress rather than that warfare which destroys peoples.” At New Year reception of Diplomatic Corps, *ibid.*, p. 1373

⁷⁹ *Speeches*, 18.7.37, opening House of German Art in Munich, p. 590. However, he later makes comment on the “unchanging character of the people”, which shows the fundamental difference between Hitler’s idea of progress and the idea of progress as encompassed by Enlightenment thought. Opening of 2nd Exhibition of German Art in Munich, 10.7.38, p. 605

Progressiveness was, of course, a quality closely associated with the *philosophes*. They can be described both as progressive, and also as truly revolutionary, in that they strove to transform society. Yet in many cases they took classical antiquity as a model, and harked back to those times with, if not longing, then at least with strong admiration. Likewise, there was an obvious revolutionary aspect to the Nazi era, which was the creation of a new order, a new man, and ultimately a new world. But in the Nazi case, this aspect was subsumed under the weight of reaction. The Nazis looked to the past in a way that would have been alien to the Enlightenment *philosophes*. Nevertheless, despite these incongruities, the elements of progress and reaction were to be found both in the Enlightenment and also within Nazi ideology. O'Sullivan points out the disadvantages inherent in trying to make an analysis of society that is couched purely in progressive or non-progressive terms. He says that making an "assumption that the modern age can be analysed in terms of a conflict between tendencies regarded as 'progressive', on the one hand, and countervailing tendencies regarded as 'reactionary' or 'regressive', on the other" would lead to a situation wherein "the complexities of history should be abandoned in favour of a retrospective search for nice and nasty ideas, thinkers and tendencies, in a world which is polarised into saints and sinners, 'left'

and 'right', good and evil, or light and darkness."⁸⁰ So, although the way in which progress was interpreted by the Nazis and by the Enlightenment *philosophes* was very different, nevertheless there were shared elements.

These were not, however, enough to disguise the significant differences. Unlike the Nazis, it was a virtually unanimous view among the *philosophes* that all peoples had the capacity to progress and attain civilisation. They would progressively become more reasoned and would therefore inevitably advance culturally. Condillac, for example, said that "the Romans inform us that the Gauls and Germans had their musicians and poets: and the same thing has been remarked in our times, in regard to the Negroes, the Cannibals, and the Iroquois. Thus it is that even among Barbarians we find the seeds of those arts which are matured to perfection in civilised countries..."⁸¹ The *philosophes* troubled themselves little as to why some peoples in the world were, in their view, far more civilised than others, but tended to put this down to a number of environmental or climatic reasons. This was not a unanimous view. Humboldt, for example, says that "we everywhere perceive that the colour of the American depends very little on the local position in which we see him; notwithstanding the variety of climates and

⁸⁰ Noel O'Sullivan, *Fascism (Modern Ideologies series)* (London, 1983), p. 2

⁸¹ Condillac, *op.cit.*, p. 230

elevations inhabited, nature never deviates from the model of which she made selection thousands of years ago.”⁸² Holbach, on the other hand, was certain that “an European transplanted into Hindostan, will by degrees become quite a different man in his humours - in his ideas - in his temperament - in his character.”⁸³ Despite this variance, the fact that progress was possible to everyone in the world and everyone in the world would finally enjoy the benefits of progress, was crucial. Humboldt points out how advantageous the progress of civilisation could be. He gives as an example evidence of the potential of the recently encountered American Indian. “When an Indian attains a certain degree of civilisation,” he says, “he displays a great facility of apprehension, a judicious mind, a natural logic, and particular disposition to subtilise or seize the finest differences in the comparison of objects.”⁸⁴ There is no doubt that, for Humboldt, the benefits of progress were possible to every race.

The idea of progress was, of course, profoundly important within Enlightenment thought. The *philosophes* believed that, by way of reason and the scientific method, the world could be bettered. The people would progress, become more enlightened and, as Montesquieu said, “whether the people is enlightened is no small

⁸² Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, edited by Mary Maples Dunn, translated by John Black (New York, 1972) p. 50

⁸³ D’Holbach, *op.cit.*, p. 213

⁸⁴ Humboldt, *op.cit.*, p. 57

matter.”⁸⁵ It was vital and inevitable that the people would become more civilised and would create a better world in which to live. The *philosophes* were notable, as Cranston points out, for “their belief in the future being better than the past.”⁸⁶ Therefore, in this better world, life would be much improved. There was a strongly held belief in the perfectibility of humanity - the idea that humankind, although imperfect, did have the possibility of reaching a pinnacle of perfection. In practical terms, this perfectibility meant a process whereby a human being could become everything he could aspire to, if unhampered by custom, law, religion, ignorance or superstition. This would be because the people would be more knowledgeable about those elements in society which would endanger their liberty - for example, superstition and religious dogma. Although these aspects of society remained un-progressive, they would certainly be defeated. This would happen initially in Western Europe, but would eventually spread over the whole world.⁸⁷

Despite the avowed universalism of the *philosophes*, however, they were not immune from the generally-accepted view within

⁸⁵ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 171

⁸⁶ Cranston, *op.cit.*, p. 6

⁸⁷ Gay explains how other cultures could be used to suggest how improvements could be made at home. “Montesquieu making cultivated Persians criticise French institutions, Diderot speaking through an idealised Tahitian who radically disapproves of Western sexual repressions, Voltaire assailing French bigotry by comparing it unfavourably to Chinese toleration, are all setting up cross-cultural dialogues in which primitive, or at least non-European, cultures pointed the way to a more rational civilisation at home.” Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1977) p. 168

society that the civilisation of Western European was the one to which the whole of humanity should aspire. The *philosophes* measured civilisation on their own terms: how far advanced were people in science, how far from magic and superstition; how amenable to reason were they? Among the *philosophes* there were those who unself-consciously considered those peoples who had progressed to a lesser extent to be less civilised and probably more inferior. This opinion was determined matter-of-factly. In other words, in spite of the *philosophes*' declared empirical methods, the question of civilisation tended to be asked within an atmosphere where much was generally accepted with little or no critical scrutiny. So, for example, if people did not live in an advanced, Western European, city-dominated state, they were considered to be primitive.⁸⁸ However, there were strands within the Enlightenment which involved the questioning of this assumption. Rousseau, with his so-called "noble savage", is the obvious example. He was convinced that the "noble savage" was "morally superior to the sophisticated denizens of European cities."⁸⁹ According to Bredvold,

⁸⁸ However, although other cultures may have been considered primitive, they were not generally thought to be racially inferior. As Nicholas Hudson points out, "European explorers certainly imagined themselves as superior to all the peoples they encountered. But this sense of superiority was founded not on a race hierarchy, but on the belief that Europeans had achieved a level of civilisation unknown in other nations." Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, volume 29, no. 3, Spring 1996, p.250

⁸⁹ Cranston, *op.cit.*, p. 5 Again, it must be noted that Rousseau's eulogy to the "noble savage" was part of his rejection of many aspects of Enlightenment thought. As Melzer puts it: "The premise, which stands at the core of Rousseau's whole political thought, is that the large commercial republic based on enlightened self-interest, which was favoured by the Enlightenment, is not workable. It inevitably leads to class conflict, moral decay, political despotism, and military defeat." Arthur M.

it was believed that progress could be achieved if it were only possible to “abolish the artificial man who is formed by customs, institutions and prejudices, re-educate a generation or two, and the human race will enjoy the universal happiness for which it was intended by Nature.”⁹⁰

The Enlightenment *philosophes* were liberals who preached toleration and who were generally accepting of human variety. However, it cannot be far from the truth to say that there was a certain “world view” to which they adhered. They prided themselves on their cosmopolitanism, but failed to see the limits they imposed upon it. This is no surprise because other cultures and ways of life were only then beginning to be widely explored. And it must be said that it was intrinsic to Enlightenment philosophy that enlightenment would emanate throughout the world as a result of the critical methods of the *philosophes* themselves. It cannot be overstressed that, although the *philosophes* may have seen other cultures as being deficient in comparison with their own, they made all but no distinction between those people and themselves in terms of a common humanity. Although the question of the inner spirit was a thorny one (given their disillusion with Christianity and its ideas of a

Meltzer, “The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity”, *American Political Science Review*, June 1996, Volume 90, No. 2, p347.

⁹⁰ L. Bredvold, *The Brave New World of the Enlightenment*, p. 83

common divine spirit within human beings), they at least were certain that if people lacked souls, that lack effected all people equally.

To the Nazis, however, some races were so much inferior as to be more bestial than human. Slavs and Jews, for example, might aspire to humanity, but they were sub-humans, nearer to the animals than to the Aryans.⁹¹ Likewise, the Russians, in the words of Hitler, “exist only *en masse*, and that explains their brutality.”⁹² According to the Nazis, the truth of this racial inferiority could be seen by the mere *look* of Jews, Slavs, Africans and others. Hitler, for example, describing the Jews of Linz said that “in the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanised and had taken on a human look.”⁹³ The look - but not the actuality. The idea that human beings could be perfected was present in Nazi ideology, but in a very different form from anything the Enlightenment *philosophes* could have conceived. In the Nazi case it was only Aryans, and only in racial terms. In their ideology, the Aryan was already a superior being compared with other races. Thus the Nazis emphasised the differences between races and between nations. These differences occurred because some were simply inferior to others. The German nation and the Aryan race that

⁹¹ Although Nazis were known to refer to Aryans as “blond beasts”, this in no way suggested, of course, that they were inferior status.

⁹² *TT*, 22.2.42, p. 327

⁹³ *MK*, p. 48

composed it, constituted the élite of humanity. This was because the Aryan race contained within itself the germ of perfectibility, being the race which had brought civilisation to Europe. Thus in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declares that “human culture and civilisation on this continent are inseparably bound up with the presence of the Aryan. If he dies out or declines, the darkness of an age without culture will again descend on this globe.”⁹⁴

It is interesting that Hitler uses the symbolism of enlightenment to describe the importance of the Aryan race and hence, of course, the Nazi ideology. He always maintained that he was enlightening the people with his Nazi message. To Hitler, this message was vital to the endurance of the Aryan race and the German nation, because it contained the instructions to fight a battle of survival with those forces of darkness - such as the “international racial-maggots”⁹⁵ who inculcated a “racial tuberculosis of the nation.”⁹⁶ It was essential that such descriptions, and elucidation of this struggle, should be constantly presented to the people. The struggle for survival had the added effect of causing the race to progress and perfect itself. This was because the eternal struggle

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 348

⁹⁵ *HSB*, p. 23. It was Hitler’s abiding view that the Jew “lives upon the decay of peoples.” *TT*, 1-2.2.41, p. 141

⁹⁶ *Hitler’s letters and notes*, edited by Werner Maser, translated by Arnold Pomerans (London, 1974) p. 215

inevitably led to the survival of the fittest and best.⁹⁷ Inferior races had no capacity for true progress and were only fit to be pressed into the service of a more worthy one.

The Nazis had no scruples about this. As far as they were concerned abstract morality was not an issue when it came to conquest. Those who were stronger were entitled to rule, and those who were defeated were quite rightly at the mercy of their victors - as Hitler makes clear with regard to the Slavic peoples:

After all these centuries of whining about the protection of the poor and lowly, it is about time we decided to protect the strong against the inferior. It will be one of the chief tasks of German statesmanship for all time to prevent, by every means in our power, the further increase of the Slav races. Natural instincts bid all living things not merely to conquer their enemies, but also destroy them. In former days, it was the victor's prerogative to destroy entire tribes, entire peoples. By doing this gradually and without bloodshed, we demonstrate our humanity. We should remember, too, that we are merely doing unto others as they would have done to us.⁹⁸

“The Slavs”, he added, “are a mass of born slaves, who feel the need of a master.”⁹⁹ Hitler's concept of peace was wholly determined by domination and subordination. In his view, peace was a condition “supported not by the palm branches of tearful pacifist female

⁹⁷ “All human thought and invention, in their ultimate effects, primarily serve man's struggle for existence on this planet...” *MK*, p. 405

⁹⁸ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 140-141. By “without bloodshed”, Hitler intended, in accordance with his enthusiasm for selective breeding programmes, to limit the increase of the Slavic races by restricting their procreation.

⁹⁹ *TT*, p. 33

mourners, but based on the victorious sword of a master people, putting the world into the service of a higher culture.”¹⁰⁰ Physical superiority was a justification of any kind of behaviour. Not only this, but also, according to Hitler, it was a law of nature that “this earth...is awarded by Providence to people who in their hearts have the courage to take possession of it, the strength to preserve it...”¹⁰¹ This, of course, is the classic formulation of “might is right” - a triumph of materialism. Hitler was convinced that as long as these natural laws were borne in mind, the German people would, by dint of force of arms, be able to engineer their own progress in the field of international conquest. As an Aryan people, they would find that by casting off the depleting values of liberalism, by ridding themselves of the influence of Jews, by combating communism, and above all by seeking to ensure racial purity (in other words, by embracing Nazi ideology) they would be able to march onwards to the New Order of Aryan supermen who would rule the world.

This sort of reasoning would, of course, have been wholly repugnant to the *philosophes*. To them, physical strength, though ever a significant factor in the world, could never be a justification of domination. D’Alembert, for example, scathingly referred to “that barbarian right of inequality called the law of the strongest, which we

¹⁰⁰ *MK*, p. 360

¹⁰¹ *HSB*, p. 15

find so difficult not to abuse, though the practice of it likens us to animals.”¹⁰² However, despite disapproving of the way in which the stronger justified his subjugation of the weaker, the *philosophes* were under no illusions that this was an uncommon practice.¹⁰³ They did, however, hope that human beings would eventually rise above this. In the *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, Humboldt says that “the general interest displayed in Europe for the remains of the primitive population of the new continent has its origin in a moral cause which does honour to humanity. The history of the conquest of America presents the picture of unequal struggle between nations far advanced in arts and others in the very lowest degree of civilisation.”¹⁰⁴

The Nazi idea of civilisation was one that was specific to their ideology. The kind of civilisation that they admired, was one that was untouched by the racial and social “corruption” which they deplored. The seeds of this admirable kind of civilisation were those which had been sown by the Aryan tribes. The tribal origins of the Aryan race

¹⁰² D’Alembert, *op.cit.*, p. 12

¹⁰³ Rousseau, in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, shows again his growing patriotism when expounding his views on the way in which a state should go about protecting itself from outside enmity. Far from approving of a martial body separate from the general populace, he instead believed that every citizen should have both the right to bear arms against interlopers, and also the ability to efficiently do so. “Each citizen,” he said, “should be a soldier by duty, none by profession.” *Considerations on the Government of Poland, Rousseau Political Writings*, Frederick Watkins (p. 237). This would have the effect of ensuring that the nation was as safe as possible from conquest by outside forces. However, most importantly, to Rousseau, it was the “love of country and of liberty” that would prevent such conquest. “Work, therefore”, he exhorted the Poles, “without pause of relaxation, to bring patriotism to the highest pitch in every Polish heart.” *ibid*, p. 244

¹⁰⁴ Humboldt, *op.cit.*, p. 48

were harked back to and extolled, Hitler, for example, exulting: "Yes, we are barbarians! We want to be barbarians! It is an honourable title. We shall rejuvenate the world! This world is near its end."¹⁰⁵ The Aryan tribal period was seen as a healthy and vigorous period which could be the basis of a new civilisation.¹⁰⁶ A new civilisation that would encompass the heroic ideal in all aspects of life, from art and architecture to education and leisure, a new civilisation that would be led by men who relied on action and instinct to determine their lives rather than intellect and learning. "The greatness of a nation," declared Hitler, "will be judged not by the counterfeit cultural standards of present-day civilisation but by its overall achievements, the eternal values and the eternal force which have brought forth great men. I intend to throw our innate qualities into the world scales."¹⁰⁷

The Nazis also believed that through racial breeding programmes (eugenics) physical features desirable for this new civilisation could be emphasised and maintained, and the undesirable eliminated. The SS, for example, was lauded as containing the cream of the Aryan race. It was intended by the Nazi leadership that members of the SS should adhere to selective

¹⁰⁵ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 87

¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, although the Nazis found it easy to celebrate their own tribal origins regarding the onset of civilisation, this regard for tribalism did not stretch very far. They had very clear ideas about tribal peoples and their worth, which was, predictably, exceedingly low.

¹⁰⁷ Calic, *op.cit.*, p. 67

breeding programmes, which were designed to strengthen the race and eradicate any impurities. A major Nazi preoccupation was, of course, the pursuit of racial purity. It was vitally important that this should be achieved, because, it was asserted, it was the blood that was the container of the essential Aryan *Geist*. The Nazis were in the habit of claiming that a large part of their motivation was due to this non-material essence.¹⁰⁸ Certainly they were at pains to declare that this *Geist* was particular to the Nordic/Aryan race and was not shared with other races. The Aryans were distinguished from, and made superior to, other races by this *Geist*.

Descriptions of the drive to racial purity were often couched in spiritual or religious terms. For example, in one case, where Hitler is speaking of the programme of so-called blood-purification, he refers to its "holiness". Thus he says that there is "only one holiest human right, and this right is at the same time the holiest obligation, to wit: to see to it that the blood is preserved pure and, by preserving the best humanity, to create the possibility of a nobler development of these beings."¹⁰⁹ This programme of blood purity preservation would

¹⁰⁸ But, although they spoke of spirit, they did not generally see this as being a God-given attribute, but rather as being a product of nature, in conjunction with shared history and breeding.

¹⁰⁹ *MK*, p. 365. However, on one occasion, he seemed to be of the belief that through the workings of time and nature the Aryan blood in its entirety could be purified. He said that "from the seventh generation onwards, it seems the purity of the Aryan blood is restored. In the long run nature eliminates the noxious elements." *TT*, 1-2.12.41, p. 141. He was not consistent in this opinion, though, and often held to the contrary view that blood once "polluted" - as he would have it - could never again become pure.

gradually be implemented by the whole German population leading to a perfect, superior Aryan race - a race of supermen. "Creation is not yet at an end", said Hitler.

At all events, not so far as the creature Man is concerned. Biologically regarded, man has clearly arrived at a turning-point. A new variety of man is beginning to separate out. A mutation, precisely in the scientific sense. The existing type of man is passing, in consequence, inescapably into the biological stage of atrophy. The old type of man will have but a stunted existence. All creative energy will be concentrated in the new one. The two types will rapidly diverge from one another. One will sink to a sub-human race and the other rise far above the man of to-day. I might call the two varieties the god-man and the mass-animal.¹¹⁰

Unlike the *philosophes'* vision of the perfectibility of the human being, the Aryan ideal cast all other peoples in the role of at best inferiors, at worst sub-humans.¹¹¹ The SS was destined to become the racial élite of the new German Reich. Hitler had great confidence in this eventuality. He said: "I do not doubt for a moment...that within a hundred or so years from now all the German élite will be a product of the SS - for only the SS practises racial selection."¹¹² Within a

¹¹⁰ Rauschning, *op.cit.*, p. 241

¹¹¹ The similarity between Hitler's ideas on "nobility of blood" and a description of the French nobility by G. Lefebvre is quite telling. "What really characterised the nobility", he said, "was birth; it was impossible to become a noble, but in the eyes of everyone the true nobleman was born. It was from blood that the noble derived his superiority over the 'ignoble' commoners. Hence, it followed that noble status was inalienable and that an unsuitable marriage was an ineffaceable blot...the nobles...were a distinct race, heroic and military, made for command..." G. Lefebvre *The Coming of the French Revolution*, in Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, *What is the Third Estate*, edited by S.E. Finer, translated by M. Blondel (London, 1963) note 1, p. 200.

¹¹² *TT*, 1-2.11.41, p. 106. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that the *völkisch* state "must see to it that only the healthy beget children...And conversely it must be considered reprehensible: to withhold healthy children from the nation. Here the state must act as the guardian of a millennial future in the

racist ideology, it is possible to speak of human betterment as being possible through genetic manipulation and racial breeding systems.

This tendency towards a systemisation of human procreation illustrates the influence of science on Nazi ideology. Despite Nazi exhortations to trust in one's emotions and follow one's instincts, in practice this aspect of Nazism was insignificant. Of overwhelmingly greater significance was their trust in science.¹¹³ Again this shows up something of a paradox within Nazism. The Nazis stressed their reliance on instinct and emotion and inner spirit and yet clearly subordinated these to the methodology of science. For all their talk of the inner soul and the power of unreason, these elements were, in practice, totally ignored. For example, the racial-breeding rules, the treatment of people as disposable objects, the logically reasoned arguments for genocide and occupation, all are in opposition to spirituality and instinctiveness. That which might be termed race-science became a governing force in the obliteration of racial "inferiors". Benno Müller-Hill's work, *Murderous Science*, is an essential reference point in these matters.¹¹⁴ He describes the way in

face of which the wishes and the selfishness of the individual must appear as nothing and submit." *MK*, p. 367

¹¹³ Weindling gives a good description of the way in which science became accepted as an arbiter of truth. "Science", he explains, "became considered as being neutrally correct and its values as being beyond question." P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 6

¹¹⁴ See his section headed "A German Chronicle of the identification, proscription, and extermination of those who were different", especially pages 8-17. Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science, Elimination by scientific selection of Jews, Gypsies, and others, Germany 1933-1945*, translated by George R. Fraser (Oxford, 1988)

which science and ideology came together so as to allow the most dreadful blood-letting. This was very obviously seen in the race laws where people were categorised as Jew or Aryan depending both on their heritage and also on certain measurable physical characteristics.

In connection with this, the classical profiles of old were also admired by the Nazis. They often made a point of comparing the faces of great Romans, or noble men of Germanic history with the faces of Jews, Slavs or others whom they considered to be *Untermenschen*. There the noble face, the big brain-capacity skull, etc. would be favourably compared with the physical dimensions of those considered ignoble and nearer to the beast. The belief that human beings could be scientifically categorised was closely linked with the equally important Nazi belief in the merits of unity and racial homogeneity. Counter-arguments about the individuality of human beings were rejected as liberal inventions.¹¹⁵ This meant that there was no real bar to such biological classifications. People could be grouped together entirely in physical terms. The scientific method could be brought to bear, empirical experiments could be carried out, predictions could be made.

¹¹⁵ However, it must be remembered that the idea of being *able* to classify human beings in the same way as plants or animals, only became popular during the period of the Enlightenment.

The Nazis accepted the findings of race scientists that conclusions could validly be drawn from the measurement, collation and scientific analysis of these human physical differences. Despite their talk of *Geist* and instinct, the Nazis operated in purely material terms when demonstrating their scientific categorisations of human beings.¹¹⁶ According to Hammond, with the 1930s came the “degeneration of German anthropology into racial obsessions...”¹¹⁷ Proctor, too, points out that “anthropology was ‘politicised’ under the Nazis...”¹¹⁸ As far as physical bodily structure was concerned, as Proctor points out, Germany’s leading anthropologist in the 1930’s, Eugen Fischer, was very influential in associating non-material with material factors. “One effect of the triumph of Fischer’s brand of anthropology”, says Proctor, “was to broaden anthropological discussion to include questions of mental dispositions, social behaviour, and ‘racial character’...Racial science promised to explore the human constitution not just the human physique.”¹¹⁹ However, science was not used for anthropological classification alone. It was a

¹¹⁶ Some *philosophes* also seemed to take for granted that a fine countenance equalled a fine character, whether in intellect or honesty. Diderot, for example, wrote to Sophie Volland that “if nature has marked a face with the outward signs of vice or virtue, this face becomes pleasing or displeasing to us.” *Diderot’s Letters to Sophie Volland*, translated by Peter France, 2 September 1752, letter 20, p. 114. This assumption was not at all universally accepted. Humboldt, for example, questioned the suppositions of the day. He said that “the Negroes of Congo and the Caribs, two eminently robust races and frequently of a colossal stature, prove that to look upon a beardless chin as a sure sign of the degeneration and physical weakness of the human species is a mere physiological dream.” Humboldt, *op.cit.*, p. 51

¹¹⁷ Michael Hammond, “The Shadow Man paradigm in Paleoanthropology, 1911 -1945”, in *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour, Essays on Biological Anthropology*, edited by George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison, Wisconsin, 1988) p. 127

¹¹⁸ Robert Proctor, “From *Anthropologie* to *Rassenkunde* in the German Anthropological Tradition”, in Stocking, *ibid.*, p. 140

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 156

major and governing force in Nazism. An important paradox within Nazi ideology is exemplified by this. On the one hand, Nazism castigated the materialism of the age and had no doubt that this materialism could be traced back to the Enlightenment, which it took pains to condemn. Yet, on the other hand, its ways of measuring human worth by physical characteristics could not be more materialistic. Although Nazis condemned materialism, their own ideology was almost totally materialistic, whether in equating good bodies with good minds or characters, or in assuming that their much-vaunted *Geist* had a physical, blood-linked basis.

The Enlightenment, on the other hand, is known for its materialism and indeed was roundly condemned by the Nazis for this. However, as with so much in the Enlightenment, this again is not completely straightforward.¹²⁰ Although the Nazis spoke of the coldness of reason, and criticised the period of the Enlightenment for its lack of attention to the emotions, this perception was not entirely valid - witness Diderot's comments on what he terms "the passions". He says that "people declaim without end against the passions; all the ills of mankind are attributed to them, and it is forgotten that they are also the source of all pleasures."¹²¹ And Montesquieu said

¹²⁰ See Vereker: "Did nature speak through instinct and the passions as well as reason?", Charles Vereker, *18th-Century Optimism, A Study of the Interrelations of Moral and Social Theory in English and French Thought between 1689 and 1789* (Liverpool, 1967) p. 143

¹²¹ Diderot, *Philosophical Thoughts*, quoted in Philip N. Furbank, *Diderot: A Critical Biography* (London, 1992) p. 31

that “as a creature dominated by sensation [man] is subject to a thousand passions.”¹²² So, the non-material aspects of peoples' lives were not universally ignored - far less universally condemned.

However, Diderot also said that the passions should only be appealed to “when you have persuaded the reason...”¹²³ Therefore, although the Nazis were correct in thinking that the Enlightenment thinkers put less emphasis on the emotions as compared with their overwhelming emphasis on reason, still the *philosophes* were far from being ignorant of the power or the worth of the emotions.

Since the tail-end of the period of the Enlightenment there had been a great intellectual movement away from over-reliance on reason alone and towards taking note of the emotions, the inner feelings and instincts of people.¹²⁴ This attention to matters of the spirit, was claimed by the Nazis, but was in practice brushed to one side by them. Given that this was the case, it is tempting to think that Nazi rhetoric over instinct and emotion was little more than oration designed to stir up the masses and propel them in the required direction. This was probably at least partly true. Hitler was manifestly convinced that he knew how to manipulate the masses and that was certainly by way of their emotions. In his view, all mass

¹²² Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 174

¹²³ Denis Diderot, *Diderot's Letters to Sophie Volland: A Selection*, letter 28, 1 Aug. 1765, translated by Peter France (London, 1972) p. 141

¹²⁴ This had also been in existence during the period of the Enlightenment, but not to quite the same extent.

movements could be characterised as “volcanic eruptions of human passions and emotional sentiments”.¹²⁵ Yet, from Hitler’s own words, this was clearly far from being merely a cynical manoeuvre. He obviously set great store on the power of intuition. For example, in *Mein Kampf*, he laments the fact that due to race-mixing and a resulting lack of blood-unity, the German people are lacking in an instinct that could save them from national destruction. “The German people”, he laments, “lack that sure herd instinct which is based on unity of the blood and, especially in moments of threatening danger, preserves nations from destruction in so far as all petty differences vanish at once on such occasions and the solid front of a unified herd confronts the common enemy.”¹²⁶ Hitler undoubtedly believed in that part of the ideology which stressed instinct, emotion, etc., but he was also well aware that by playing on the emotions of the populace he could achieve his aims quicker than by the use of the methods of reason alone.

He was very conscious of the power of his rhetoric and would not have doubted the truth of D’Alembert’s words that “eloquence...can impose silence even upon reason...”¹²⁷ This point was also taken up by Montesquieu when describing the pitfalls that

¹²⁵ *MK*, p. 98. Also, he advised that propaganda must on the whole “be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect.” *ibid*, p. 164

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p. 360

¹²⁷ D’Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 33-34. See full quotation, note 52

could lie ahead of a free state. "A nation such as this", he said, "is always impassioned. Thus it is more easily moved by its passions than by reason, which never produces great effects on the minds of men. It is easy for those who govern this nation to lead it into enterprises contrary to its true interests."¹²⁸ Rousseau was another who was aware of the power of the passions with regard to the masses. He said that "whoever concerns himself with the problem of creating institutions for a people ought to know how to direct opinion, and thus to govern the passions of men."¹²⁹ Therefore, there was a clear understanding on the part of the *philosophes* that human beings could be directed by factors other than reason. It is faulty to assume, then, that they valued and were aware only of the power of reason and intellect. On the contrary, the passions and emotions were no strangers to them. Nevertheless, this awareness of the power of non-reasonable, human motivations did not lead them to disparage reason, but rather to admire its unique qualities.

The Nazis lauded instinct over reason and reviled intellectualism. It was extremely useful for Hitler to condemn his enemies as bureaucrats or intellectuals - men of paper - and compare them unfavourably with himself as a man in tune with emotion, a man knowing how to take action. "A nation consisting solely of

¹²⁸ Montesquieu, *op.cit.*, p. 285

¹²⁹ Rousseau, "Considerations on the Government of Poland", *op.cit.*, p. 275 Note how close these sentiments are to Hitler's own views on the emotions of the masses and the manipulation of them.

professors, officials, scholars, and so forth,” he declared, “cannot maintain itself, precisely because in that case more and more its natural strength of decision, its force of will and of heart, tends gradually to be extinguished. Only if wisdom is united with the primitive force of self-preservation can a people in the long run successfully survive in its struggle for life.”¹³⁰ He was adept at accusing these intellectuals of pulling the nation into a pool of lethargy, declaring for example that the “intellectual classes, especially in Germany, are so segregated and so ossified that they lack a living connection with the people below them.”¹³¹ The immediate pre-Nazi era was characterised by the Nazis as a time of decadence and corruption. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler typically describes this period as “inwardly sick and rotten.”¹³² The Nazis were not slow to link this corruption with the influence of the Enlightenment. They portrayed the Enlightenment as being the period which gave birth to this corrupting over-intellectualising which had now spread into their own time and their own political procedures. Hitler condemned intellectuals as “always indulging in sophistry, always probing and

¹³⁰ Hitler, Buckenberg annual harvest celebration, 30.9.34, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939*, volume 1 (hereafter, *Speeches*), edited by Norman Baynes (London, 1942) p. 903-904

¹³¹ *MK*, p. 392. He also declared that intellectuals “love neither strength nor health, and they regard weakness and sickness as supreme values.” *TT*, 17.2.42, p. 35. Moreover, “the political preparations, as well as the technical armament for the World War, were not inadequate because insufficiently educated minds ruled our people, but because the rulers were overeducated men, crammed full of knowledge and intellect, but bereft of any healthy instinct and devoid of all clear energy and boldness.” *MK*, p. 392

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 396

searching, but always wavering and uncertain, mobile, but never sure.”¹³³

This attributed uncertainty was, of course, unfavourably compared with the instinctual grip on reality of the Nazi aim and outlook. It would be the Nazis who could stop the rot and restore the nation to health, although this restoration would not come easily. The German people would have to fight for it, but they could be assured that this fight would be worthwhile in the end. Then they would be able to feel, as Hitler put it, “the pride born of the knowledge that each and every one has shed his blood and played his part in the greatest struggle for freedom in the history of the German race.”¹³⁴ The German people would go forward into a New Order. A New Order which, though based on élitism, violence and authoritarianism, encompassed the creation of a new world founded on, what the Nazis declared to be, a more realistic concept of humanity than had gone before. Within the Nazi ideology, authoritarian militarism and the process of stamping on human rights could be equated with vigour and prosperity.

¹³³ *Speeches*, 10.5.33, p. 567. It is known to be a favourite ploy of Hitler’s to compound all symbols of enmity into one. Thus any intellectual (as the following example shows) could easily be transmuted into the Jewish, Communist, intellectual. “The Dictatorship of the proletariat”, declared Hitler, “is nothing else but the Dictatorship of Jewish intellectualism.” Closing speech at Nuremberg *Parteitag*, 1937 *Speeches* p. 700.

¹³⁴ *TT*, 20.5.42, p. 492

Yet, the Nazis' own discussions were very far from being free of intellectualism, and their practices were gripped by materialism - their celebrations of instinct always falling before their own claims to reason. For a movement that professed to despise intellectualism, it had a surprising number of people who could be described as intellectuals within it,¹³⁵ and frequently hailed the intellectual "genius" of its leadership. Although Hitler was quick to condemn intellectualism when he judged it appropriate to do so, there were other occasions when he deliberately moved away from this position to extol the value of the intellectual. This typically Hitlerian contradiction could, as always, be easily smoothed over by recourse to that useful object of blame - the Jew, as can be illustrated by this criticism of the party system by Hitler: "The proletarian parties had, as far as possible, excluded from their ranks the brain-workers and intellectual workers of Germany," he said reprovingly. "Naturally", he continued, "without any intellectual leadership at all one could not exist, but this intellectual leadership had been claimed for decades past by the Jews."¹³⁶ This is a classic example of Hitler's disregard for consistency. He had no scruples about, on the one hand, excoriating intellectualism, while, on the other hand, admitting the need for it.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Benno Müller-Hill's *Murderous Science*, for an idea of the participation within the scientific community. Müller-Hill, *op.cit.*

¹³⁶ *Speeches*, Closing speech, Nuremberg *Parteitag*, 1937, p. 713

This inconsistent approach led to his unreserved condemnation of the Enlightenment's "over-intellectualising", as can be seen from a speech made by him at a Gymnastics display at Stuttgart in 1933. "The so-called Age of Reason", he declared, "stamped with its characteristic liberal outlook, with its half-knowledge and half-culture, was in a fair way to breed a thoroughly unfit generation. The over-valuation of knowledge led not merely to a disregard of the bodily form and of bodily strength, but in the end to a lack of respect for bodily work."¹³⁷ And yet, despite these complaints, founded on his obvious antagonism towards the Enlightenment, and despite his repudiations of reason in favour of instinct and *Geist*, he constantly sought to make reasoned arguments for every corner of his ideology, from the *Führerprinzip* to racist anti-Semitism. Indeed, he claimed to believe that "in our State Reason must be ruler and that the German people has sufficient insight and discipline to understand the necessities which this reason imposes."¹³⁸ Now, although this paean to reason undoubtedly contained a subtext concerning population obedience to Nazi rule, it still remains the case that Hitler had no qualms about using it.

Indeed, the very fact of there being an ideology at all, and one that the Nazis sought to make logical and cohesive was in itself proof

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 30.7.33, p. 539

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 4.10.36, at Harvest Thanksgiving held at Buckenberg, p. 679

of their reliance on reason. Nazis were assured of the coherence of their despite the intrusion of contradictions. It is difficult to deny, of course, that Hitler was less than honest; but liar though he was when it suited him, it is clear from his actions, his own works, and his reported sayings, that his thinking was largely governed by his avowed ideology. There were ideological parameters that greatly structured (though did not determine) his decision-making. Although certain peripheral aspects of his ideology and thinking seem to have been influenced by works recently read or conversations conducted, these influences would be retained or discarded according to how well they fitted in to his overall *Weltanschauung*. Some view this as illustrating the pragmatic nature of Nazism (rather than the ideological). It would be better seen, however, as exemplifying an opportunism inspired by moral vacuity; and illustrating an ideology which, though believed in and followed, was innately untenable. The Nazi ideology was part of a world view which, though proclaiming itself to be governed by instinct and action, was nevertheless clearly bounded by reason - flawed reason perhaps, but certainly reason nonetheless. It has to be assumed that the Nazis would have sought reasoned arguments even without the influence of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, without the clearing away of unquestioned (and hitherto unquestionable) religious faith by the Enlightenment, and the consequent movement towards science and empiricism, they

would not have had to use reasoned or science-based arguments to justify their case in the same way.

The Enlightenment cannot be ignored in any consideration of Nazi ideology. This is both because of the extent of its influence in shaping the intellectual climate from which the Nazis emerged, and also because of the negative importance attached to it by the Nazis. Although the Enlightenment was overtly rejected by the Nazis, many of its central tenets were unquestionably adopted by them, and so Nazi ideology cannot be said to have been in complete opposition to Enlightenment thought. Similarly, there can be no certainty that Nazi anti-rationalism was an inevitable backlash against the supposed over-rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Nazis did reject the materialism and intellectualism they associated with the Enlightenment, and linked it with the corruption and decadence they saw in their own society (a corruption that they claimed could be vanquished if the Nazi route to a New Order was followed). Nazism, however, was no stranger either to materialism or intellectualism.¹³⁹ Hitler sought to condemn the Enlightenment's reliance on reason, while at the same time praising the role of reason in Nazi Germany. Although the Nazis made great play of celebrating instinct and emotion over reason (Hitler, of course, genuinely believed in the

¹³⁹ Though Hitler, of course, tried to make a distinction between necessary Aryan intellectualism, and intellectualism more accurately (he said) characterised as Jewish-Communist.

power of intuition and emotion), their own ideology was fundamentally reason-bound. In practice, the Nazis were materialists who relied heavily on science, using its methods to classify human beings in ways conducive to their ideology. Racial science (including racial breeding programmes) became a major political tool for the Nazis and they had no scruples about linking physical appearance with spiritual attributes - clearly a triumph of materialism. That the importance of ideas can never be overestimated can be seen from the way in which Nazi ideology inexorably led to death and destruction.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to locate Nazi ideology within the context of European intellectual history. It has aimed to show that the ideology of Nazism can be related to the ideas of the past, even to ideas which were specifically rejected by it, such as those of the Enlightenment. In this way it has endeavoured to explain that Nazi ideology was not a spontaneous and inexplicable eruption of incoherent abstruseness, but rather drew on the stock of ideas and assumptions bequeathed by the history of ideas in Europe of which the Enlightenment was part. It has striven to show that, although Nazism specifically rejected the Enlightenment and, indeed, based much of its ideology on premises inimical to Enlightenment thought, yet its relationship to the Enlightenment was far more

paradoxical and contradictory than this rejection suggests and cannot, therefore, be seen as simply a reaction against it.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Any examination of Nazi ideology reveals that Hitler was paramount. Not only had he the ability to synthesise many of the ideological currents that were present in society, but he also added his personal obsessions to that synthesis. This produced an ideology which, despite its contradictions, had a degree of coherence, that had a general appeal, and that joined traditional prejudices and beliefs to modern scientific methods and theories. Hitler was able both to integrate the ideology and also to successfully convey it to his supporters and to the general public. Besides this, as Leader, he had a vital role within the ideology, in that he was the human symbol of the leadership which the ideology extolled. However, as important as Hitler was within Nazi ideology, it is essential to stress that the importance of anti-Semitism was in no way less. Hitler's function as

a committed and highly successful propagandist of anti-Semitism was crucial.

Antipathy towards the Jews was, unquestionably, at the very core of Nazi ideology. Almost every aspect of the ideology can be found to have some relationship to anti-Semitism. Despite the importance of the other facets of the ideology, anti-Semitism was the most influential. Among other things, this was because it provided the ideology with a focus. The Jew was at the centre of the ideology and, therefore, all other aspects of the ideology could be referred to him. In like manner, anti-Semitism was vital in linking the ideology together. Anti-Semitism could be described as the glue that enabled the disparate strands of the ideology to bind. Also, anti-Semitism was an aid to enabling the ideology to take on a practical dimension. In other words, a large part of the ideology could be put into practice by the implementation of plans leading to the total separation of the Jews from the rest of the population. This began with such things as: the dissemination of propaganda emphasising the racial differences between Jews and Aryans, the blame for social problems being placed on Jews, laws being passed to eradicate racial mixing, and steps being taken against associations identified with Jews. The end result of this isolating of Jews is well known.

The drive towards unity had, as a consequence, the exacerbation of racist anti-Semitism. At the same time, this obsession with unity was an *effect* of anti-Semitism and the race doctrine. This was because hatred of racial diversity inevitably had to lead to a pressure towards a uniformity of race. Within Nazi ideology, anti-Semitism was legitimised and compounded by racial science. The way in which the Nazis made use of science in the formulation of their racist ideology cannot be overestimated. They used science to justify their racial fixations, by claiming that racial prejudices were natural and that this was scientifically verifiable. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest was held to be a corroboration of both racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular. The Nazis harnessed Darwinian theories of evolution to their racist anti-Semitism and proclaimed that science validated their ideological stance. In the justification of race-hatred, the specific importance of defining human beings solely in terms of their biology, was overwhelming. The science of eugenics gave intellectual backing both to racism and also to ideas of the validity of racial conflict. These ideas were not, of course, invented by the Nazis. However, under their influence, these ideas achieved an appalling prominence.

Nazi ideology would not have been able to maintain coherence without its symbolism, on which it was heavily dependent. This

dependence was due in part to the ideology's inherent defects. Its foundations, though purportedly scientific and "in tune with nature", were shot through with such unstable elements as prejudice, sentimentality, mythology, rapacity and arrogance. Nevertheless, upon these foundations the ideology was built up into a complex whole, covering a wide area of human experience. Within it, each of its symbols substituted for many differing realities. Under a minute analysis of all these varying realities, the ideology would have fragmented into all its separate components. There would have been too many inconsistencies and incongruities for it to have been able to hold together. However, because symbols can simultaneously comprise of several aspects of reality, and because of their ability to share elements, they were able to be combined in such a way as to make the ideology sustainable. For this reason alone, the symbolism was wholly essential both to the ideology and also to the mobilisation of the population.

Hitler had an excellent grasp of the ways in which to use symbolism to this effect and, indeed, even though the *content* of Nazi propaganda may be offensively crude, its techniques were new and sophisticated. In addition, the symbolism used by the Nazis was able to be as successful as it was because much of it was already quite familiar. As has been seen, Hitler was far from reluctant to make use

of symbolism that was used by other groups and movements. He learned from the propaganda techniques of the Communists, for example, and admitted to utilising the example of the Church. This made Nazi propaganda easier to accept. Also, anti-Semitism was very much a force in society before the Nazis began their march to power. The Jew was genuinely considered to be a malign influence by the Nazis, however, the way in which they made use of the Jew in their propaganda reached unprecedented heights of cynicism. Without the Jew, Nazism would have been far less successful in Germany. The symbolic use of the Jew was a most powerful mobilising device. By the very fact of the Jewish people being so well integrated within German society, it was easy for the Nazis to implicate them in the cause of a wide range of social ills.

Hitler was able to construct a whole *Weltanschauung* around the negative concept of the Jew and Judaism. However, even this would not have been enough to get the Nazis into power and to maintain their hold on society had it not been for the wide-spread disillusion with liberal-democracy. This disillusion meant that people were predisposed to be amenable to any alternative to liberalism, even if this alternative contained elements that were against humanity. Many people were particularly enthused by Nazism's anti-Semitic component, many by its talk of community. Many who

attended the rallies and mass meetings were dazzled by the spectacle and caught up in the emotional euphoria of it all. This all contributed to a retreat from liberalism which had the eventual effect of licensing Hitler's cynical use of violence in pursuit of his aims.

Nazism was not an unexplainable aberration - many of the ideas contained within it had been around for many years and were quite accepted in many areas of society. Sternhell's work on the historical background to the radical and revolutionary movements that preceded fascism illustrates this. It shows that fascism did not spring from a void, but rather had a distinct intellectual past. Although Sternhell specifically omits the growth of Nazism from his thesis, the ideas of the thinkers that he examines can be related to Nazi ideology. The crisis of liberalism and Marxism, to which Sternhell traces the development of fascism, allowed specific trends and ideas to achieve a political ascendancy. So, within certain circles, political authoritarianism, the synthesis of revolutionary socialism and radical nationalism, and the politicising of anti-Semitism, all became ideologically acceptable and politically powerful. As has been seen, this can similarly pertain to Nazi ideology. The rejection of materialism, reason and liberalism, the growth of biological theories of human behaviour, the embracing of

nationalism, all led to the development of fascism and equally, all were part of the route to Nazism.

It is clear from examining the work of Gobineau, Chamberlain, Treitschke and Moeller van den Bruck that Nazi ideology grew out of the same intellectual climate that produced these writers. They were part of an intellectual mood that prefigured Nazism. They exemplified and also helped to create, the intellectual milieu into which Nazism entered. Although of varying backgrounds, within their thought there were shared ideas and attitudes. Much of what is said by these writers is directly reiterated by Hitler and is contained within Nazi ideology. There are many corresponding themes, for example, the idea of the superiority of the German race, the need for strong authoritarian leadership, the exasperation with liberal democracy, the idea of young and old cultures.

The intellectual history that was most rejected by Nazism and its precursors was, of course, that which was specific to the thought of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, the influence of the Enlightenment cannot be exaggerated. In many ways, Gobineau and Chamberlain are heirs to that era. The racial categorisations on which their work depended were, after all, ultimately traceable to the empirical methods of the Enlightenment. Treitschke and Moeller,

with their nationalism and militaristic values, are more distanced from the values of the Enlightenment than are Gobineau and Chamberlain. Nevertheless, despite their differences, the ideas of Gobineau and Chamberlain, and the ideas of Treitschke and Moeller came together in Nazi ideology. Gobineau's emphasis on race and condemnation of race-mixing, Chamberlain's Social Darwinist approval of the struggle for survival between races and his admiration of Aryan superiority, Treitschke's ardent nationalism and belief in militarism, and Moeller's anti-liberalism and faith in the necessity of revolution to overcome the bourgeois system, are all examples of thought which were brought together within Nazi ideology.

Enlightenment thinkers were products of their time. This meant that they had a particular world view, which greatly influenced their ideas and conclusions. They assumed that their rational, enlightened society should serve as a model for all other societies and cultures. Indeed, they were fully convinced that all others would eventually attain the level of civilisation enjoyed by themselves. This, of course, meant that these others were perceived as being presently at a lesser level of civilisation. In other words, assumptions of relative degrees of cultural value were already established. Not only this, but the undermining of traditional religion had the unintended additional effect of casting doubt on the common origin of the human

race. This meant that not only could some peoples be thought of as culturally inferior, but there was even the question of whether they arose from the same origin as the “more civilised” peoples of Western Europe. In other words, the belief in a commonality of human beings became subject to doubt where, before, no doubt had been. This added a new dimension to the study of human beings.

The empirical and materialist emphasis of the Enlightenment affected the way in which individuals and races were perceived, because human differences became seen as being physically measurable. Moreover, these measurements could be compared, and this comparison was often founded on an ideal type of beauty, or perfection, or civilisation, and was, therefore, indicative of racial rank. The Enlightenment belief in the infallibility of reason gave a prominence to science and empiricism. The emphasis on empiricism allowed the categorisation of human beings. This categorisation, when allied with the idea of cultural superiority, permitted a hierarchy of human beings (judged on appearance) to begin to be defined.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment inadvertently set the scene for the development of racist ideologies based on material classifications of human beings as soulless creatures. Certain

classifiers of humanity came to believe that some peoples were more valuable or worthy than others. This perceived racial superiority was believed to be original in nature and was, therefore, immutable. Not only that, but such inequality was said to be both natural and verifiable by science. If race as a category was scientifically verifiable, then race struggle seemed a positively scientific factor also. The trust in science evinced by Enlightenment thinkers penetrated society and was certainly continued down through the centuries.

Nazis rejected the Enlightenment, while failing to acknowledge the influence that it had upon them. Hitler spoke against reason and intellectualism, while at the same time bowing to both. He condemned materialism, while supporting a biological view of humanity that was wholly materialist. He lauded instinct, while with his approval, a battalion of Nazi scientists took minute physical measurements and carried out experiment after experiment in pursuit of racial perfection and purity. It was part of the dreadful nature of this ideology, that such fundamental contradictions could not be perceived.

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