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**The Ideological Background of National Socialism in Regard to its Central Narrative**

**Convictions**


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by

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# Abstract

The origins of the National Socialist Party in Germany in the early 20$^{th}$ century are multifaceted and constitute four areas of influence – mythological/occult, Darwinian eugenics, prior *völkisch* political movements comprised of disenfranchised war veterans and youth activists, and a number of philosophical influences. The ideas assimilated from these sources constitute the construction of a narrative based on a series of questions that form what are called Central Narrative Convictions (or CNCs). The focus is to determine which of these were borrowed in regard to the Nazi platform as well as those unique to their own identity. These convictions also address other questions as well, such as whether the Nazis were left-leaning or right-leaning, whether they were a product of the Enlightenment or a reaction against it, and to what degree these earlier ideas influenced the early leadership in the party prior to Hitler's joining in 1919. While in many ways Hitler's ideas dovetailed other early Nazi figures (Drexler, Feder, Harrer, Eckart, and others), the focus for purposes here are ideological origins of National Socialism leading up to Hitler's joining the party, as well as the years leading up to the Third Reich itself when the National Socialists were one among many extremist parties on the German political landscape. Additionally, there are also contradictions to address, such as why the Nazis would persecute groups and individuals who originally contributed to their evolution.

# Contents

## Chapter 1

## Introduction

**Overview and Research Questions**

It is an empirical truth that with any movement, belief system, or any other type of

ideological classification ideas do not appear from an intellectual vacuum. There are antecedents

from which an ideology evolves, and in many cases, there may be more than one source for a

particular movement. In the case of the National Socialist Party – more familiarly called the Nazi

Party – this fact is no exception. There were a number of factors that predated the Nazis and

contributed to the formative ideology of the movement, and therefore to understand the Nazis or

any other movement, those factors need to be examined. The questions animating this study are

to ascertain what those ideological influences were, how they came together to form the ideology

that drove the National Socialist platform, and subsequently the policy of the Third Reich, and it

will also seek to analyze contradictions in Nazi policies regarding the antecedent figures and

movements that contributed to its own ideology. For this particular discussion, three questions

will be addressed that will establish the ideological background of the Nazis, and together the

objective is to demonstrate that the National Socialist Party was a product of several things that

preceded it.

A common misconception often held in popular perceptions of the National Socialist

Party is that it focuses on the person of Adolf Hitler, and indeed, Hitler did become its autocratic

leader and embodied much of the ideology that National Socialism entailed. However, the

evolution of what would become the Nazi Party presaged Hitler by at least one or two years, and

there are also other factors that birthed National Socialism independent of Hitler's influence.

Therefore, this particular discussion will not focus as much on the person of Adolf Hitler, except

where his personal ideology intersects with the National Socialist Party platform or where his own views do have relevance. Therefore, unlike many studies on this topic, reliance upon *Mein Kampf* as a primary source will be limited. Instead, the purpose of this project is to look at the ideological antecedents of the National Socialist movement. Given the party was established approximately one year before Hitler became part of it, there was already in place an established party platform. While many of Hitler's own ideas dovetailed with the original National Socialist platform, it did exist prior to his entry and thus was established as a fringe political movement.

The first research question which overarches the other secondary questions posed throughout the chapters is regarding what exactly constitutes the Nazi "story?" In this regard, the main impetus for this question is borrowed from the field of anthropology.[1] However, in looking at it from a more sociological approach as well as from the perspective that any movement, community, or group does have a collective "story" that drives their agenda, even groups generally accepted as being evil or viewed in a socially negative light such as National Socialism still follow the pattern. This approach was inspired in part by Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community*. Archer is a theologian who teaches Pentecostal Theology and Biblical Interpretation at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. In this particular volume, Archer talks about how the collective "story" of the Pentecostal tradition in particular shapes the narrative of the hermeneutical tradition that animates

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[1] The book utilized for this model is Brian Marsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984). This model was adapted in Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009) and Archer defined the concept Central Narrative Convictions along with the questions associated with it. This was a sociological/anthropological model adapted by Archer to the field of Biblical hermeneutics, but it is a valid approach to evaluating the ideological motivations of any type of group.

Pentecostal understandings of Biblical interpretation[2], and in doing so he defines what he calls *Central Narrative Convictions* (or CNCs for short) as being essentially the primary story used to explain why a community exists, who the participants in the community are, and how they fit into a larger scheme of history and what responsibilities they should bear as both individuals and as a community.[3] For this, he borrows a set of four fundamental questions suggested by J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview*, and these are the following:[4]

1. Who am I? (addressing nature, task, and purpose)
2. Where am I? (The nature of the world and universe one lives in)
3. What's wrong? (identifying basic obstacles that prevent the attainment of fulfillment)
4. What's the remedy? (the means of overcoming and conquering obstacles and hindrances)

There are variations on this model that are found in other sources as well, in particular those proposed by Appalachian religious scholar Loyal Jones, who in his book *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* lists *six* similar questions that address the same thing but with more of a religious application:[5]

1. How did we and all around us come to be?
2. Is there a God who created us and everything else?
3. What is the nature of said Creator?
4. Why are we created as we are, and what is the purpose of it?
5. Is there something beyond this life, and what is it like?

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[2] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009): 131.

[3] Archer, 156.

[4] Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984): 35.

[5] Loyal Jones, *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 51.

6. How does the creative force relate to us and all around us in this day and
   time?

Jones is framing his questions in the context of Appalachian religious experience, and while it

seems as if this does not apply to Nazi ideology, in reality the same questions animate it as well

but come to different conclusions, including even the very concept of a creative force in the

universe. One important aspect that makes this whole multifaceted question of significance to

this topic has to do with the fact that the Nazis did not just suddenly appear out of a vacuum – a

series of national and social factors shaped them, and a number of groups and individuals

preceded them and contributed significantly to the evolution of National Socialism. The earlier

groups which influenced the National Socialists came into existence in part from addressing their

own CNC-framing questions, and thus it is important to explore that to determine if the Nazis

were a direct incarnation of earlier groups, or if they were a distinct movement of their own.

This leads then to the second question that will animate the research. The question is

quite fundamental to understanding the evolution of National Socialism, and it determines the

identity of National Socialism in its final form. Essentially, the question is this: what attributes of

National Socialism are unique to it, and what attributes does it share with the movements that

preceded it? In addressing this question, it is important to look to the field of Personalist

philosophy, as it takes this question and frames the worldview of any individual or group within

it. The main source used to define this question is John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human

Person*. Crosby is a professor and Chair of Philosophy at Franciscan University of Steubenville,

and in this volume, he defines two classes of attributes that individuals in particular have –

communicable and incommunicable. By "communicable," Crosby means those attributes shared

by an individual with a community, and thus the term "universals" also is used in regard to these

attributes.[6] On the other hand, "incommunicable" refers to those attributes which are unique to the individual and not shared with other individuals. He further elaborates this by noting that there are two aspects of this as well – one is what he terms "existential incommunicability," meaning that the incommunicable attributes are largely in relation to universals.[7] The second Crosby defines as "essential incommunicability," which entails attributes which evolve independently of universals and thus not influenced by them.[8] Although in a philosophical context this applies largely to individual persons, there is a group dynamic as well in that certain organizations such as the National Socialists do possess many things in common with similar groups but also have distinct attributes of their own – the determination here is whether those attributes are existential or essential in origin. The question addresses the determination of what is a distinct ideology of National Socialism versus what it incorporated from earlier movements from which it evolved, such as *völkisch* ideology, and groups such as the *Freikorps* and the *Wandervögel.* While that will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 7, the question will be indirectly explored particularly in Chapters 2-4.

The third question to be addressed entails the political position of the National Socialist Party itself. While much of modern scholarship has identified the Nazi movement as being "right-wing," in recent years some debate over this classification has arisen, and there is an evolving position that the Nazis were actually more *left-wing* based on aspects of their ideology as well as the actual political spectrum of late 19th and early 20th century Germany and Austria

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[6] John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996): 42-43.

[7] Crosby, 59.

[8] Crosby, 62.

(Michael Lynch, Frank McDonough, and Richard Overy being some of the noted sources for the purposes here).[9] This bears a definition of the terms "conservative" and "liberal" as well, and in doing so comparing actual Nazi ideology to other movements to see how it measures. Additionally, the terms "authoritarian" and "totalitarian" would bear examination in determining which one Nazi political thought would fall into, in particular when Nazi ideology became national policy in the Third Reich. In defining the term "Authoritarian," historian Michael Lynch notes that an authoritarian government is characterized by a strong central control of a society but not to the extent that it restricts personal autonomy – freedom of the individual is allowed provided it does not conflict with the objectives of the ruling party.[10] By this definition, regimes such as Francisco Franco in Spain, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Vladimir Putin in Russia could be rightly labeled as authoritarian leaders. Totalitarianism is noted by Lynch as being a variant of authoritarianism, but much more restrictive – the individual is seen as being subject to the state, and thus rights, freedoms, and other measures are restricted as the state wants to exert total control over the individual given its objective to reshape the national culture into its own utopian vision. Lynch would identify the Third Reich as being totalitarian rather than authoritarian, and this definition would also be applicable to the regimes of Stalin, Mao, the Kims in North Korea, and Castro in Cuba. As Lynch identifies the Third Reich and National Socialism as totalitarian,

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[9] Richard Overy, professor of History at King's College in London, authored a comparative study of Hitler and Stalin noting the similarities between their regimes entitled *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004). Frank McDonough, a British historian of the Third Reich, has also authored a work in a similar vein that chronicles the rise of both National Socialism and Communism and notes similar factors in their emergence. The book is *Conflict, Communism, and Fascism: Europe 1890-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Two other books authored by McDonough that address the specifics of the factors that contributed to the rise of the Third Reich is *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party* (Routledge, 2012), and *The Weimar Years: The Rise and Fall 1918-1933* (Apollo, 2023). The third reference in this regard is Michael Lynch, *Authoritarian States* (London: Hatchette UK, 2013). Michael Lynch is Honorary Fellow at the School of Historical Studies at the University of Leicester. A further reference to note but not utilized here is A. James Gregor's *Faces of Janus: Marxism And Fascism In The Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[10] Michael Lynch, *Authoritarian States* (London: Hodder Education, 2013): 10.

the question therefore shifts to *why* Nazi rule was totalitarian, and thus the relevance of asking

the question. A third aspect of this same question would be defining whether or not National

Socialism and Fascism were two forms of the same ideology, or if they were distinct political

movements? It is the third aspect of the question defining exactly what the Third Reich under

National Socialism was.

The fourth question to be discussed is a bit more complex and will be discussed in greater

detail in Chapter 7. This question has to do with the contradictions in policies that the Nazi

regime carried out against those with whom it had earlier associated. For instance, despite the

proliferation of homosexuals (notably Rohm and Hess) in earlier Nazi circles, why was

homosexuality suddenly seen as illegal in the Third Reich, particularly after 1934? The same

complex relationship is also of note for occultists such as Rudolf von Sebottendorf, who founded

the occultic Thule Society from which National Socialism was later birthed. Additionally, there

were early political influences, such as Karl Haushofer, whose geopolitical ideas were central to

Hitler's idea of *Lebensraum.* Rohm, Haushofer, and Sebottendorf will be addressed more in

detail specifically, but Hitler would later outlaw other influences from his earlier years, such as

even noted *völkisch* occultist Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, whose writings were outlawed by the

Third Reich in 1939. The question that bears examination here is why Hitler in particular and

National Socialism in general turned on the very movements and individuals which influenced

its platform? Was it a utilitarian/pragmatic political maneuver on the part of Hitler to distance

himself from those things which could affect his political status negatively? Or was it something

more? Due to some historical debate and discussion over specifics relating to these particular

groups and individuals Hitler later targeted, it is a question that merits more attention.

The final question to be addressed focuses on the origins of National Socialism itself? Was it a reaction against Enlightenment ideas, a product of them, or could it be both? The fact that Hitler in particular as well as other leading Nazis were avid readers of philosophers such as Kant and Descartes, as well as early political theorists such as Machiavelli, lends credence to the fact that National Socialism had a complex relationship with Enlightenment thought. On the one hand, the *völkisch* reliance upon pre-industrial romanticism would suggest that the Nazis were against Enlightenment thought, but on the other Kant's influence in particular (as well as the Nazi adaptation of Darwinian biology) did play a role in shaping Nazi ideology[11]. Again, the complexity of this question will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

**Methodology and Synopsis of Chapters**

In constructing the methodology of the chapters, essentially it will be different in that each of the first four chapters will deal with a specific ideological strain of National Socialism. In doing so, the background of the particular ideological influence will be discussed, and then the focus will be narrowed to a couple of key concepts or personages in each. The research questions will not be addressed specifically as a section in the chapters, but rather will be incorporated into the chapter narrative as it is relevant. The topics of the chapters will somewhat overlap as well,

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[11] Several authors have noted Kantian influence, directly or indirectly, upon National Socialism. The earliest to make this correlation was William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London: George G. Harrap and Co., LTD., 1941). McGovern (1897-1964) was the Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University and a visiting lecturer on Government at Harvard at the time of this volume's publication, and he devotes a chapter in the book to Kant's ideology being filtered into National Socialism via its application to both racial and political theories. A second writer who connects Kant's ideas to National Socialism is Leonard Peikoff, who is an Ayn Rand scholar who taught philosophy at both New York University and at Hunter College. Peikoff's noted work, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Meridian, 1993), addresses Kantian influence upon National Socialism in that he connects it to the Nazis' application of Kantian ideas of selfhood to existence, and he also notes that Adolf Eichmann in particular claimed to be Kantian in his philosophical views. The third authority of note is George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998). Mosse (1918-1999) was an émigré from the Third Reich who later taught History at the University of Wisconsin. Mosse suggested that Kantian philosophy contributed in particular to the more *Völkisch* aspects of racial ideology that formed an integral part of the National Socialist platform later.

and this will be noted. As an example, the political and philosophical aspects of National

Socialism, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, will particularly have some overlap as in many cases

philosophy and politics are very intersectional. In the final summaries of each of these four

chapters, the original research questions will be addressed more in detail, and throughout the

narrative of each chapter there will be questions specific to particular areas that will be discussed

as well.

Chapter Two will examine the influence of occultic societies on the development of

National Socialist thought, particularly the mythological race-based aspects of these groups

which sought to advance a view of the superiority of race. In doing so, four primary questions

will be addressed throughout the chapter relating to the specifics of this topic. The first question

is to what extent did *völkisch* occultic societies influence National Socialism? The second is the

problem of separating fact from speculation regarding specific areas, such as the mythical "Vril"

idea, the Nazi fixations upon legends such as the Holy Grail and the Spear of Longinus, and

Hitler's own personal religious convictions. The third question deals with the particular occultists

who exerted the most influence over the National Socialist movement even into the Third Reich

era. The fourth question deals with how the occultic/mythological worldview shaped the central

narrative convictions of Nazi ideology. The occultist influence in Germany in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries also will be seen in light of a general trend in occultic activity throughout

western Europe and the United States. The connection between this romanticism which was

attractive to many Europeans and Americans has a surprising synthesis with more Enlightenment

views of Darwinian evolution, as the two seen together suggested that self-betterment was the

goal of the person who was involved in such endeavors. Occultism was seen in many cases as

being a way for people to apply Darwinian evolution in such a way that they would "evolve" into

their "higher selves."[12]  Noting George Orwell's observations regarding how the occult and

modernity connected, Marco Pasi asserts that Orwell connected a hate for the concept of human

equality (reinforced by Darwinian theories of biology – the "superior" will always dominate the

"inferior" in this view), a natural tendency to elitism ("superior" individuals possessed a special

insight and knowledge – this reflected a neo-gnostic concept), and a cyclical view of time and

history (meaning that everything from the past has potential to be restored in the future, an

important factor in constructing a mythological worldview) may explain why Nazi ideology (as

well as Fascism) was drawn to an occultic view of history.[13]  This will be explored in more detail

in  Chapter 2 itself. One of the major figures of the time who embodied this and actually

attempted to codify it was the Russian mystic Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), who

founded the Theosophical Society in 1875 in New York and published a two-volume work called

*The Secret Doctrine* in 1887. One of the ideas that Blavatsky has in regard to the "higher self"

was evolving to godhood via a series of successive "root races," of which the most advanced was

labeled "Aryan." Blavatsky is the key to understanding later Austrian and German occultists such

as Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, as they incorporated many of her ideas and then

recast them in a radically nationalist dimension which influenced many of the early proponents

of National Socialism. Due to Himmler and others in the Nazi leadership embracing this belief

system, it gave a quasi-pagan mythical dimension to Nazi racial policies. Specific Nazi

connections to the occult will also be examined, including the significance of the use of the

swastika, the infatuation of Hitler and other leading Nazis with the "Spear of Destiny," and the

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[12] Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011): 1.

[13] Marco Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Critical Aspects," in Walter Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenberg, Ed., *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2009): 60.

special SS department that was established which dealt specifically with occultic and mythological issues (the *Ahnenerbe,* or "Ancestral Heritage" Group). Attention will also be given to the role of Wewelsburg Castle in Himmler's plans, via the occultist Karl Maria Wiligut, by more or less attempting to borrow and redefine Jesuit spirituality as model for what was essentially a new occultic program for the SS in particular, as was noted by both Walter Schellenberg and others, and it essentially wanted to replace Christianity with a quasi-pagan Teutonic religious system.[14] As it relates to the central narrative conviction questions, this mythological occultic worldview as adapted by the Nazi platform was in essence a way of answering the question "who are we?" This will be summarized in the chapter itself.

Chapter Three will focus upon social influences, and in the context of this study, social also implies ethical factors. The questions specifically addressed in this chapter are focused in these areas. First, the extent to which Western (specifically American and British) influences regarding Darwinian biology and eugenics were factors in the development of Nazi racial policies will be addressed. Second, the pre-Nazi eugenicists and Darwinists in Germany will be identified as well as how their thinking was integrated into Nazi policies. Third, the connection between the mythological worldview of the *völkisch* occultists and how it merged with Darwinian biology will be explored. Finally, the connection of homosexuality to Darwinian biology, especially as it related to National Socialism, will be examined. For this part of the study, there will be two primary ethical/social factors to examine.

First, there is the influence of social Darwinian thought on the National Socialist view of race, and in particular the role that eugenics played in the more extremist of Nazi policies,

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[14] Kirsten John-Stucke and Daniela Siepe, ed., *Myths of Wewelsburg Castle: Facts and Fiction* (Paderborn, Germany: Brill Schoningh, 2022): 42-44.

including the Holocaust. Surprisingly, this was via American and British influences. Many

European eugenicists such as Hermann Lundborg of Sweden, even complained that America in

particular dominated the field of eugenics.[15]  Therefore, Jerry Bergman notes that early German

eugenicists relied heavily upon the research of American and British scientists, due to the fact the

field was more advanced in the United States.[16]  Under Himmler therefore, the concept of

*Lebensborn* was implemented to utilize eugenics to create the "superior" German race

"cleansed" of genetic "contaminants."[17]  Besides the notorious legacy of Josef Mengele, other

lesser-known German eugenicists, such as anatomist Hermann Voss, who also applied

Malthusian logic to this *Lebensborn* eugenics program of Himmler's SS in particular. Voss,

following the militaristic aspect of the Third Reich, also saw war as a Malthusian justification for

eliminating "inferior races" as well.[18]  Other German eugenicists that will be explored include

euthanasia measures taken against people with disabilities by psychiatrists Paul Nitsche and Carl

Schneider, both of whom were instrumental in the administration of "T4" killings which also

involved experimentation on children which Mengele built upon later.[19]  The background of how

official Nazi eugenics policy evolved from the influence of American and British eugenicists will

be explored, and how an idea would eventually lead to genocide and other atrocities as enshrined

state policy.  In light of central narrative convictions, this was the Nazi way of identifying a

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[15] Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012): 237.

[16] Jerry Bergman, *The Darwin Effect: Its Influence on Nazism, Eugenics, Racism, Communism, Capitalism, and Sexism* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014): 39.

[17] Jerry Bergman, *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Worldview* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2014): 253.

[18] Gotz Aly, Peter Croust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 106.

[19] Paul Weindling, "German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State,' in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 323.

problem and proposing a remedy, and it was entirely based on Darwinian evolution and the resulting field of eugenics that sprang from it.

Second, the topic of homosexuality and National Socialism has been a very heated topic of debate in recent decades, and the role of homosexuality in the National Socialist Party leadership merits discussion. The predominance of homosexuals in early Nazi leadership, as well as the Darwinian-based theories of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Magnus Hirshfeld, will be the underlying discussion for this section of the chapter. Also, the connection between eugenics and homosexuality will be explored, as the two do share many connections.

Chapter Four examines the political factors that contributed to the evolution of the National Socialist movement, as this was primarily a political movement and not so much cultural. One debate that has emerged in recent decades regards the rethinking of Nazism as a "right-wing" movement, and indeed Fascism in general as "right-wing," entertaining the assumption that Nazism was a variant of Fascism. The economist Allen Gindler, for example, points out that despite many modern scholars labeling both Italian Fascism and Nazism as "right-wing," the Nazis themselves considered their ideology to be on the political Left.[20]  This is a fact also noted by the economist F.A. Hayek, who points to the political theorists Fichte, Rodbertus, and Lassalle as the ideological ancestors of both National Socialism in particular and of socialism in general.[21]  While the whole "left/right" dynamic is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that this is a discussion of current historical relevance. The factors to discuss

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[20] Allen Gindler, "How and Why Nazism and Fascism Became the 'Right'," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2021): 272-303: 274.

[21] F.A. Hayek and Bruce Caldwell, ed., *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek, Volume II: The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2007): 182-183.

for this study include two separate but interrelated movements, as well as a political theorist who impacted Hitler and Hess during their incarceration in Landsberg Prison after the failed putsch of 1923. The second question addressed by this chapter will relate particularly to this factor, in that it is important to determine to what degree that earlier thinkers such as Machiavelli influenced Hitler in particular and the National Socialist movement in general. The third question to be addressed concerns what movements impacted National Socialism and aided in its formation, and what were three fundamental elements (ideological, youth movements, and militarism) that distinguished these movements? While the elements will not be addressed directly, they are fundamentally interconnected with the three primary movements which shaped National Socialism in its earliest stages, and thus provide a reference point for the policies later enacted by the Third Reich.

The first movement and factor to address is the *völkisch* ideology that was present among radical German-speaking nationalists in both Germany and Austria prior to World War I. To define *völkisch,* it was a system of heterogenous beliefs based on the common premise that arose in opposition to modernity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was fixed upon German ethnic superiority. Given its commonalities of practice – environmentalism, nudism, association with the occult, and agrarianism – it also became a significant subculture within a larger youth movement called the *Wandervögel.* The impact of *völkisch* ideology upon National Socialism was demonstrated by the terminology the latter used,[22] and it was given a political dimension by National Socialism particularly in the racial and geopolitical policies of the Third Reich. *Völkisch* ideology therefore was essentially a means of answering the identity question of the central narrative conviction and

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[22] Dietrich Orlow, *The Nazi Party 1919-1945; A Complete History.* (West Point, KY: Enigma Books, 2010): 135.

it expanded upon the earlier "root race" mythologies of Blavatsky and the occultists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A second movement that contributed to the formation of the National Socialist Party was the *Freikorps.* The *Freikorps* were an assortment of paramilitary units that were created in Weimar Germany at the conclusion of World War I by disaffected military veterans, with the first being formed by Kurt von Schleicher (1882-1934), who would later also be the last Chancellor of the Weimar Republic before Hitler came to power, in 1919.[23] The *Freikorps* also became a hotbed of radical German nationalism, and produced many early Nazi leaders such as Hermann Goering and Ernst Rohm. The motivating factor for the *Freikorps* and their Austrian counterpart, the *Heimwehr,* was the defeat of both nations in World War I, and therefore the remedy for the weak government instituted by the Allies at Versailles was paramilitary and vigilante militias, many of which also were influenced by the *völkisch* ideology and the mythological worldview it proposed (some *Freikorps* units were also Marxist as well).

The final political influence of note to this study would be the person of Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), a German political theorist and professor who mentored Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, and in turn introduced Hitler to Haushofer's geopolitical ideology. It was via Haushofer's geopolitical theories that Hitler's ideas of *Lebensraum* ("living space") evolved, and it was one of the primary factors during World War II that motivated Hitler to attack the Soviet Union. Despite that influence however, Haushofer himself was actually at variance with Nazi geopolitics and embarrassed to be associated with, and this led to his own internment in a concentration

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[23] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 98, 310-311.

camp in 1944.[24] While these were by no means the only political influences upon the National Socialist Party, they are significant enough to warrant attention as being integral to the evolution of Nazi ideology. An ancillary area of discussion is also merited regarding how Hitler's reading of Machiavelli and other early political theorists shaped his political ideology, and this also is intertwined with the National Socialist political platform as a whole.

Chapter Five examines the fourth and final area of ideological influence on National Socialism and its development, being the philosophical influences upon National Socialism as a movement. This entails some questions as to how earlier philosophers influenced what would become National Socialism. The first question in this regard would be how Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment philosophers – Marsilius of Padua, Descartes, Spinoza – contributed to the ideology from which National Socialism evolved. The second question addresses the particular influence of Kant upon Nazi thought. The third question centers around the role of Nietzsche in the evolution of Nazi ideology – was he a direct or indirect influence? The fourth question deals specifically with the more direct influence of Comte Arthur de Gobineau upon the more racial-driven aspects of Nazi philosophy. The final question will address the specific influence of Houston Stewart Chamberlain upon early Nazi Party members, mostly connected to Hitler via Chamberlain's relation to composer Richard Wagner. In conclusion, the chapter will analyze how ten fundamental philosophical aspects of these earlier influences then shaped the central narrative conviction of the Nazi narrative. The objective will be to determine a direct/indirect line of thought between earlier philosophical ideas and the ideology that shaped both National Socialism as well as the *völkisch* ideology it evolved from.

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[24] Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 173.

The influences that will be discussed will focus primarily on three individuals – Friedrich

Nietzsche (1844-1900), Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), and Arthur de Gobineau

(1816-1882). While there are others who could be noted, the focus is on these three because they

influenced the National Socialist movement in its early development.[25] The evidence suggests

that much of the philosophical background of Nazism stems from these three particular

individuals, and while in many cases some aspects of the overall philosophies of these

individuals – particularly Nietzsche – would actually be disavowed by them, the concepts they

advanced did carry weight. Another factor to consider as well would be how Enlightenment-era

philosophers such as Kant and Descartes may have indirectly contributed to the philosophical

worldview of the Nazis as well. Indirectly would also imply that the ideas of the earlier

philosophers were filtered through the latter ones. While more detail regarding the

Enlightenment influence upon National Socialism will be relegated to Chapter 7, it nonetheless

gives a background to whether or not the National Socialist movement was either a reaction

against Enlightenment ideas or a product of them.

Chamberlain is of particular interest as he was not German, but British, yet he was a

Germanophile and did espouse much of the *völkisch* ideology of the radical German nationalists,

including antisemitism.[26] Chamberlain also exerted some considerable influence over the

official "Nazi Party Philosopher," Alfred Rosenberg, who wrote his missive *The Myth of the 20th*

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[25] Among the other philosophical influences not included in this particular examination are Paul Anton de LaGarde (1827-1891), Julius Langbehn (1851-1907), and Arthur Moeller van der Bruck (1876-1925). Works focusing on these individuals include Stan Lauryssens, *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich: The Life and Times of Arthur Moeller van der Bruck* (New York: Sutton, 2003), Ulrich Sieg, *Deutschlands Prophet. Paul de Lagarde und die Ursprünge des modernen Antisemitismus* (München: Carl Hanser, 2007) and Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1974).
[26] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 130-131.

*Century* inspired by Chamberlain's views as well as those of Arthur de Gobineau.[27]  Chamberlain also was connected to composer Richard Wagner as his son-in-law, and Wagner's operas were highly influential upon the young Adolf Hitler during his Vienna years, as was noted by his childhood friend August Kubizek.[28]  Nietzsche is also of note, in that although the National Socialists did seize upon his ideas, in particular the *Übermensch* concept, most of the ideas of Nietzsche were filtered through his sister Elizabeth, who gave them a more radically German nationalist and *völkisch* reading.[29]  Like the political influences upon the National Socialists, there were also other philosophical influences, but these three figures figure prominently in the evolution of Nazi ideology.

Chapter Six addresses the original questions posed in more detail, and in doing so it also will address some contradictions. The main and most glaring contradictions entailed Hitler and the Nazi regime turning on groups and individuals who had initially influenced its development. This included in particular the punishment of three pivotal individuals – Ernst Rohm, Rudolf von Sebottendorf, and Karl Haushofer. In doing so, it broadly will address the persecution of both homosexuals and occultists during the Third Reich, despite the pivotal role both played in the development of National Socialism. The question here is to whether this persecution was politically motivated as a means of appeasing the German public, or did their very existence actually provide an embarrassment to the Nazi regime?

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[27] Bergman, *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Worldview*, 235.

[28] August Kubizek, and Geoffrey Brooks, trans. *The Young Hitler I Knew* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021): 83.

[29] Robert Holub, *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016): 20-26.

Addressing as well the role of eugenics, this will be the central issue that more or less binds the various aspects of the central narrative conviction questions together as they seek to define German identity, as well as attempting to identify and purge those things in German society that National Socialist propaganda as well as the earlier groups that preceded it regarded as detrimental to the survival of Germany as a nation. As Paul Weindling notes, the German adaptation of eugenics adopted two traits – racial identity and social welfare.[30] This led to the formation of the world's first eugenics organization, the *Gesellschaft fur Rassenhygeine* (Racial Hygiene Society) in 1905. However, this German eugenics movement had its origins in American and British eugenics, and was influenced by the writings of such individuals as Charles Benedict Davenport, Paul Popenoe, David Starr Jordan, Karl Pearson, Joseph C. Nott, and R.A. Fisher. The "social welfare" aspect that characterized German eugenics was an adaptation of a combination of the ideas of Thomas Malthus and Herbert Spencer, which applied Darwinian principles to social engineering. These interactions of the various influences are crucial to understanding Nazism and its ideology.

Chapter Seven attempts to present conclusions in the form of findings which provide the answers to the four questions (who are we/ where are we/what's wrong/what's the remedy) that form the basis of the central narrative conviction of National Socialism as a movement. It then seeks to revisit the earlier question as to what is original to Nazi thought and what it shared with earlier movements. From this vantage, the question of political identity will be explored and summarized – was National Socialism fascist, right-wing or left-wing, totalitarian, or authoritarian. Finally, the influence of the Enlightenment upon National Socialism will be

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[30] Paul Weindling, "German Eugenics and the Wider World," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 315.

analyzed, and the question of whether National Socialism was a product of or reaction against Enlightenment principles will be explored. The findings and conclusion of the study will then be synthesized in such a way as to present what is hopefully a synopsis of the Nazi worldview based on the adaptations it made from other sources.

Another issue of note that is imperative entails the use of terminology. As previously noted, the terms for the various streams of ideological influence have been identified and defined, and are narrowed to four particular areas – religious, political, philosophical, and social/ethical. The other terminology that will also be utilized will be the terms "Nazi" and "National Socialist," or "National Socialist Party."  The term "Nazi" is actually an acronym for National Socialist, and thus the terms can be used interchangeably. This will provide some clarity in the language employed in this project. It is also of note that these designations for categories utilize terminology that can be broad in interpretation, yet the focus within each will be refined to the particular and primary influences that shaped National Socialism.

Another aspect of the terminology deals with the structure itself. The four ideological streams that will be examined are noted by specific terms, and in the case of "social" in this context, the term is synonymous with cultural. The reason the term "social" will be utilized here is due to the reality of the impact the two areas had not only on National Socialism itself, but also on the Third Reich as a whole. The two areas - social Darwinism/eugenics and the complex relationship the Nazis had with the practice of homosexuality – are of interest as they are interconnected but also because they more or less did influence each other, and especially as will be seen later in the discussion of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, homosexuality was viewed by some as a natural aspect of Darwinian evolution. As Darwinian evolution did form a foundation for Nazi

racial policies and other aspects of their political platform, it is an important discussion.

Therefore, "social" in the context of this study could also be interpreted as ethical issues.

The other critical issue to note is that this study is by no means exhaustive – in all honesty, an exhaustive study of this topic would be far more involved and would assume multiple volumes. Therefore, for the sake of keeping within established limits for this study, the breakdown of each individual topic will be focused on particular individuals and organizations/movements within that particular area, and the most influential of these will be focused upon fairly exclusively. Effort will also be attempted to be as chronological as possible throughout the course of each chapter, as it provides a more even flow for discourse. In addition to the aforementioned individuals and movements, the purpose of this project is to provide a background to the narrative (or "story") which animated National Socialism as a political force in early 20th-century Germany.

In the organization of the project, the idea is to maintain a structure in line with the initial research questions posed. The first four chapters, for instance, will deal specifically with a different area of ideological influence. The order of these chapters will also be determined by the source material available and thus will be organized according to which area has more abundant source material. At this point, the second chapter will deal with the influences of the occult upon Nazism in its formation, including the particularly important fact that the Nazis did originate as the political arm of an occultic group called the Thule Society[31]. The chapters are noted here as

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[31] The major work on this in recent years is David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012). Luhrssen taught at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and has lectured at both Marquette University and Beloit College. A second foundational work that examines the role the Thule Society played in the formation of the National Socialist Party is Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1985). Goodrick-Clarke (1953-2012) was a British historian and professor of Western esotericism at the University of Exeter, and has written extensively on this topic.

"first, second, third, etc." for reference purposes, as in reality the first chapter dealing with the first issue is the second chapter of the project.

Another point of clarification that applies to the overall project is the personage of Hitler. Except where Hitler's personal views on issues intersect with the general National Socialist Party agenda, the objective here is to refrain from focusing as much on Hitler's individual convictions and thus sources such as *Mein Kampf* will be utilized sparingly if at all. Much of what shaped the National Socialist agenda existed prior to Hitler's involvement, and the National Socialist Party existed actually before Hitler's involvement. This by no means denigrates Hitler's role, but there have been significant other studies which have focused more on the particulars of Hitler's individual viewpoints and thus they are beyond the scope of this project. Hitler's overall views in many ways also parallel the evolution of Nazi ideology, so mentioning Hitler specifically could risk redundancy.

In some circles of discussion on this topic, a position has been forwarded that would assert the National Socialist movement was created by an assortment of political/social eccentrics and "misfits" who advanced a more utilitarian approach to how they adopted ideology, which is a fair assessment. However, it must be understood that the National Socialist movement *was* an organized political force with its own ideology, political platform, and organization. The significance of a study like this therefore would be to underscore that although a negative political force that was responsible for countless atrocities, the National Socialist movement did have a well-defined ideology that built upon previous figures and movements. However, there is in all fairness a sort of utilitarian aspect to the way that the National Socialist movement incorporated views that aligned with its objectives, and the fact that certain groups and

individuals were discarded once they outlived their usefulness is something to keep in mind as well. That will be addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 of the final project.

In summary, the methodology employed will be an examination of the ideological history of National Socialism:  how it developed, what its final form was, and why it then discarded those particular influences after it achieved power as the sole political movement in the Third Reich. In doing so, the focus will be narrowed to a few prominent examples in each category of ideological influence, and how the ideas the National Socialists adopted from said movements converged to create an ideology. This could therefore be classified as intellectual history, but it is more ideological in many aspects than it is intellectual, so for the purposes of this project it will be primarily ideological history that will be examined.

**Historiography**

The problem with much of the historiography on these issues is that it comes often from non-academic sources which tend to be considered 'conspiratorial" but with a clear dialectic. Those will be discussed further in the historiographical overview of this topic. Other areas of contradictory evidence - including the confinement in a concentration camp of Karl Haushofer, the forced exile of Rudolf von Sebottendorf, and the murder of Ernst Rohm, as well as other early political influences upon National Socialism – will be briefly touched upon but not addressed in detail. These contradictions represent very real gaps in scholarship and merit examination due to their importance to having a more comprehensive understanding of the actual ideology of National Socialism as a whole. Further, it relates to the earlier question as to the whole "cherry-picking" aspect of Nazi adaptation of diverse ideological sources as well.

The chronological period will not focus on the timeframe as much of the actual Third Reich or World War II, but rather will focus on the formative aspects of the National Socialist movement. To this end, some understanding of the general history of both Germany and Austria is warranted. There are two major texts which will be utilized to place the background of the evolution of National Socialism within the wider context of general German history. The first is Hans Ulrich-Wehler, *The German Empire: 1871-1918* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). Ulrich-Wehler (1931-2014) was the Professor of History at the University of Bielfeld, and has also taught at Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford between the years 1972 and 1984. He pioneered what was called the "Bielefeld School" of historical research, which sought to integrate social and political history with the disciplines of sociology and political science. Ulrich-Wehler's work is therefore important to this thesis for two reasons. First, given the ideological focus of the following chapters, this approach is crucial. Secondly, Ulrich-Wehler's work is an important secondary historical text to understand the German nation prior to World War I. The second text in this regard which will be utilized for a general overview of the historical background leading to National Socialism's emergence would be Pieter M. Judson, *The Hapsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016). Judson is a Professor of 19th and 20th Century History at the European Institute of Florence in Italy, and his work provides a general yet comprehensive overview of the second nation which played a role in the rise of National Socialism, which being the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While primarily focusing on the reign of the Hapsburgs, Judson's text does provide historical insight to the climate leading up to and immediately following the First World War. A third text proves to be of significant importance as well, this being Hagen Schulze, *The Course of German Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Hagen Schulze (1943-2014) was a German

historian who served as Professor and head of the Department of History at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich. The thesis of this work is essentially that German Nationalism was a result of reactions to Napoleon and rapid industrialization, which set into motion a chain of revolutionary actions that continued to shape German history from 1871 until the emergence of the Third Reich in 1934. With Bismarck being the pivotal figure who forged a pan-German identity from a collection of several contentious states, it would also be influential in the rise of other more extreme aspects of German nationalism, including *völkisch* ideology. Therefore, the rough chronological span of this project will be from 1880 to about 1930, with some forays into the emergence of the Third Reich as well as consequences resulting from World War I, as these particular influences do contribute to the overall picture.

While there will be a prominence of English-language secondary source material utilized, there will also be a reliance upon German-language sources, particularly archived and/or unpublished material which will be accessed via visits to the National Archives in Washington, DC. The items of focus in that regard include personal correspondences, official government documents from the period, and some published books in German that would constitute primary source material. There will also be a degree of theoretical analysis too based on multiple works of different scholars such as Ian Kershaw and Richard Weikart, although other relevant sources could be utilized as well which will be utilized throughout the chapter sequence. Unfortunately, due to the chronological framework of the project, oral history interviews will not be an option since many of the individuals involved – including many of the secondary source scholars – are no longer living. The overall conclusions that should result from the research ideally should encompass convergence of ideas, addressing contradictions in policies, and identifying key areas of influence regarding the ideological evolution of what became National Socialism.

A limited number of general reference works will also be utilized, primarily for dates as well as direction for primary source material and other items of interest. Four of these will be extensively utilized, but a couple of others bear mention as well. The first is Donald de Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). This particular work will be of interest in Chapter 3, as it provides important links between German eugenicists who impacted Nazi racial policies and their British and American sources – individuals such as Margaret Sanger, Simone de Beauvoir, and Charles Darwin. A second source which underlies the philosophical background of National Socialism, tracing some of its roots back to the Enlightenment, is another work by Wiker co-authored with Scott Hahn, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture: 1300-1700* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013). A third source is a comprehensive reference regarding the role of eugenics in its evolution from a population-control mechanism of Thomas Malthus to outright national policies in the Third Reich (as well as some Western countries to different degrees), this being Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). In order to understand the Nazi racial policies that led to the Holocaust, a clear understanding of the role of eugenics and Darwinian science is integral. The final two sources in this regard are general reference works on specific topics. The first is Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976). This volume is integral for quickly referencing biographical information on certain personalities who both preceded National Socialism as well as being involved in it directly. The second is Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). While Snyder's book is somewhat dated, Rees compliments Snyder's information based on further historical information which updates

some of the material in Snyder's volume. In relation to the impact of occultism on the Nazi worldview, an important reference for the different religious movements which constituted early occultism which still exist today is George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Much like Snyder and Rees, Mather's and Nichols' text is convenient for quick reference of dates and source material. These general references will not be extensively utilized but will serve as citing vital statistics and also direction to primary source material relevant to their specific content.

In considering the ideological roots of National Socialism, the first thing to note is that the areas of ideological concern often do intersect, and thus it is important to understand ideology as part of the broader spectrum of the history of the Third Reich from its origins to its decline. In doing so, foundational research with select general histories is essential. The first of these relevant to this study would be the works by William Shirer. Although William Shirer's role in academic discussion could be considered debatable, he does provide a primary source of information which gives some perspective on the inner workings in particular of the Third Reich as well as the years leading up to it. William L. Shirer (1904-1993) was an American journalist who was also in Berlin during the first few years of the Third Reich as well as the years preceding it. His most notable book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), was a more comprehensive history albeit based on his own experiences and not considered a peer-reviewed academic resource. The part of the book of most interest to this study would be the first four chapters, which cover eighty pages and address topics such as the rise of the Nazis themselves, of Hitler in particular, and of the beginning of the Third Reich. Shirer

notes that the Nazis started as essentially a "weird assortment of misfits."[32]  In his second book,

*The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984), Shirer is more

introspective and places his experiences in Germany in light of his other travels in Spain and

Afghanistan during the 1930s. Chapters 6-8 of the book, comprising a section subtitled "Life and

Work in the Third Reich," Shirer gives a fairly descriptive account of many of the leading Nazis

in the regime, including the fact that the Nazis were wanting to remake the Christian churches in

their own image, and Shirer notes that upon attending a meeting of one of these "German

Christian Churches," it appeared more pagan than Christian to him.[33]  Shirer's book does not

claim to be an ideological history of the Third Reich, and is more of a set of memoirs than an

official history, but it is of interest that he includes some insight into the Nazification of religion

in the Third Reich, and it creates a question as to what role some of the more occultic mindsets

of the leading Nazis played in this Nazification of Christian churches, including the observations

of Shirer regarding their pagan appearance. This would constitute a gap in research that would

need to be filled in order to determine how the ideological influences that shaped the Nazis

actually were implemented in official policy.

A second historian whose work is integral to this study would be Ian Kershaw (b. 1943).

Kershaw is a British historian who taught at the University of Sheffield, and his primary

emphasis in his research was on the various issues entailed in incompatible views regarding

studies of Nazism and the historiography of the Third Reich. He published a series of books

focusing on the person of Hitler, but also viewing Hitler in the overall historical panorama of the

Third Reich itself. The first volume, *Hitler: 1889-1936 – Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton and

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[32] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959): 39.

[33] William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984): 151.

Company, 1998), is an overview of Hitler's early life, and citing the work of Hitler's childhood friend August Kubizek, Kershaw focuses on the composer Richard Wagner's influence on Hitler from an early age, noting that for Hitler, Wagner represented a quintessential artistic genius he dreamed of becoming but could never emulate.[34]  The major issue to resolve based on this, which is also noted by Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), is whether Wagner was a composer, a philosopher, or both to Hitler – Waite argues that Wagner's opera *Parsival,* while embodying quasi-Biblical symbolism, was as much philosophical and religious for Hitler as it was artistic, as Wagner's imagery also embodies the *völkisch* political and social ideology that was later incorporated into National Socialism.[35] Being that Wagner's son-in-law was the racial British philosopher Houston Stuart Chamberlain (1855-1927), the conclusion that could be drawn would be that Chamberlain took Wagner's imagery and turned into a philosophical position, and Chamberlain would also be noted as a philosophical precursor to the Nazis as well. The second book of Kershaw's, *Hitler: 1936-1945 – Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), is the sequel to the first and covers the apex and decline of Hitler's power from the first few years of the Third Reich to its defeat in 1945 at the end of World War II. While this volume of Kershaw's work does not specifically deal with ideology, it does address its social implementation and consequences by tying many Nazi policies to earlier ideology. Kershaw notes that the National Socialism was born out of a lost war, and the remedy of "National Renewal" via a new racial and political emphasis that stressed the whole intentional rise of Nazism as a movement and not merely as a *Betriebsunnfal* (industrial accident of history) or as strictly an *Alltagsgeschichte,* a form of social history that is rooted

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[34] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 – Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998): 43.

*[35]* Robert G.L. Waite*, Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 128-129.

primarily in a Marxist interpretation of history and thus was not just a development of an

"oppressed class." Rather, Kershaw notes that these ideas had deep roots, and came into Nazi

ideology via Karl Haushofer's geopolitical ideas, introduced to Hitler by Hess, a former student

of Haushofer's, and thus evolved into the *Lebensraum* idea that Hitler promoted and

incorporated a form of social Darwinism that advocated for "ethnic cleansing" via

*Volkstumskampf* ("ethnic struggle") to accelerate *Lebensraum*.[36]  This is where essentially

political, social, and religious (occult) influence intersect in the Nazi worldview. These

intersections also bookend the thesis and address the primary research questions posed here.

In examining specific ideological areas, the first area of note is occultic/mythological

influence on the National Socialist movement and on Hitler in particular. In order to present a

background to Nazi occult influence, the major source for where much of the ideology is derived

would be Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine (Reprint)* (Pasadena, CA:

Theosophical University Press, 2019). Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) was a Russian occultist

and mystic who provided the influence for much of the occultic activity that influenced figures

as diverse as Aleister Crowley and Rudolf Steiner. Much of the occultic influence that could be

attributed to Blavatsky, however, also impacted Europe and America as a whole during the

Victorian era when Blavatsky's ideas were published. This topic is dealt with more in Alison

Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (New York:

Palgrave McMillan, 2011). Like the rest of the West, Germany and Austria were also impacted

by this, giving rise to a unique form of occultism that was blended with German nationalism in

such works as Guido von List, *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk: Esoteric and Exoteric*

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[36] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945 – Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Sons, 2000): 243.

(Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2005), Theodore Fritsch, *Antisemiten Katechismus* (self-published, 1892), and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology: or the Science of Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (New York: Europa House, 2004). Guido von List (1848-1919) and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954), were early German/Austrian occultists associated with the *Völkisch* movement, and they created a German nationalist variant of Blavatsky's Theosophy called *Ariosophy* (in Liebenfels' case, it was also called "Theozoology,"as well as the term Irminism being used, but the same ideas). Both of these figures were also the inspiration for the creation of the Thule Society. Theodor Fritsch (1852-1933) was a German journalist who adapted von List's ideas to the political realm, and his movement was one of the first to appropriate the swastika as a German Nationalist symbol.

Although there was a shift in Nazi attitudes toward occultism during the Third Reich era, influential occultists still exerted some influence. Two of the most noted were the Greek-born occultist and mystic Savitri Devi (1905-1982), and the occultist Karl Maria Wiligut (1866-1946), the latter who served in a division of the SS under Himmler that sought to reinterpret history from a Teutonic mythical worldview. The two principle works of these occultists were Savitri Devi, *Gold in the Furnace* (Calcutta: self-published, 1952), and Karl Maria Wiligut, *Seifrid's Runen* (no extant copy available). These constitute a general background of the occultic influences upon the National Socialist movement, and in many cases they dovetailed Hitler's personal influences as well.

Given a whole study could be focused on Hitler's personal beliefs, for the purposes of this study the focus is upon how Hitler's overall worldview intersected and fit into the overall Nazi worldview, as in many cases they were identical but there were also some distinctives of Hitler's individual views that were unique to him. The two main sources that examine Hitler's

personal views include Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), and Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016). Robert G.L. Waite (1919-1999) was a Canadian psychohistorian who was also the Brown Professor of History at Williams College and specialized in the Nazi movement. Waite's book deals primarily with the underlying psychological history of Hitler, but also includes extensive sections on Hitler's ideological influences and how his own psychological profile aided in piecing together Hitler's personal ideology. Waite notes that many of the ideological concepts Hitler would subscribe to were also generally ideas that shaped Nazi ideology in general, although there was a more personal dimension (Wagner, for example) in regard to Hitler.

Richard Weikart (b. 1958) is a historian and Professor of History at California State University Stanislaus as well as Senior Fellow at the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute and has published many books dealing specifically with ideological aspects of the Nazis. *Hitler's Religion* primarily examines Hitler's own religious views and attempts to identify specifically what Hitler's religion actually was, and Weikart concludes that he was a pseudoscientific evolutionary pantheist[37] who had some occultic influences on his thinking while rejecting the occultist convictions held by other Nazi leaders, including his mentor Dietrich Eckart, as well as Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolf Hess, and Heinrich Himmler. This view is more specifically noted by Jimmy Akin who uses the exact terminology while Weikart just refers to Hitler's subscription to Darwinian evolution and a pantheist view of deity.[38] While pantheism is an underlying cosmological view of the occult, evidence does not verify that Hitler was

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[37] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: the Twisted Beliefs That Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016): 197.

[38] Jimmy Akin, "What Was Hitler's Religion?" *Catholic Answers,* May 1, 2019, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/what-was-hitlers-religion.

personally an occultist. Therefore, the next area for examination is the occultic influence on the Nazis themselves.

The influences of occultism on the development of National Socialism are divided into two types of literature. The first aspect is more speculative, and could be even characterized as "conspiratorial," and began to gain some prominence in some circles beginning in the late 1970s. These sources would be more for a popular reading than for academic usage, and thus they are not peer-reviewed and are generally dismissed by the wider academic community as not being serious scholarship. While this type of literature should not be taken as necessarily authoritative, it can be utilized as a starting-point for researching primary source material and thus has some value. One of the earliest books in this regard is Joseph Carr, *The Twisted Cross* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1985). Carr was an Evangelical Christian author, and his book was an effort to connect Nazism to the "New Age" movement that was the focus of much Evangelical Protestant literature of the mid-1980s. While the overall thesis of the book was weak in many areas – including identifying National Socialism as a religion rather than a political movement – it is extensively documented and a large number of primary sources including many in German are provided that aid in further research.

A second book in this vein is Michael Fitzgerald, *Hitler's Occult War* (London: Robert Hale, 1990). Fitzgerald's book is more secular than Carr's in approach, and even sympathetic to the occult as a whole, saying that the Nazis more or less corrupted the occult and made it into a "satanic" religion. There are two areas where Fitzgerald's book has some merit however, the first being a section of it that documents occultic opposition to the Nazis – he notes that some occultists, in particular Aleister Crowley, Louis de Wohl, and Dr. Walter Johannes Stein, actually contributed to the Allied war effort. Therefore, Fitzgerald notes that the underlying aspect of

World War II was a spiritual one – "good' occultists fighting "bad" occultists, and using occultic powers as a weapon of war.[39]

In a similar vein is Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of the Nazi Involvement with the Occult* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2019). Not much is known of Levenda's credentials, except that he specializes in writing about esoteric and historical subjects. Levenda connects the various occultic influences to Nazism as a religion itself, as do Carr and Fitzgerald, and thus a more conspiratorial element is present in Levenda's thesis. Again, while Levenda's book is useful for primary source research as it is extensively footnoted with both English and German source material, the argument in this genre of books tends to be somewhat weak in identifying National Socialism as a religion rather than a political movement, and evidence suggests that the Nazis were in reality *anti-religious,* particularly in regard to Martin Bormann, who British historian Richard Overy notes was an atheist.[40]  Fitzgerald, who labeled Bormann a satanist, also admits however that Bormann declared there was no common ground between Christianity and National Socialism.[41]  This will be discussed more at length later.

In a similar vein would be the phenomenon known as *Vril,* which at its root was a mythical life-force substance that on the surface would echo fictional writers such as George Lucas, as it sounds similar in many aspects to "the Force" in the *Star Wars* canon. Fitzgerald, as well as other writers such as Theo Paijmans, assert that there was a "Vril Society" which operated simultaneously with the more historically substantiated Thule Society. A documentary

[39] Michael Fitzgerald, *Hitler's Occult War* (London: Robert Hale, 1990): 174, 185.

[40] Richard Overy, *Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin, 2005): 465.

[41] Fitzgerald, 138.

film about this was produced and directed by Matthew Bennett about this "Vril Society" titled

*Dark Fellowships: The Vril* in 2009, but the major issue with Bennett's documentary is that much

of the information he utilizes comes from more speculative sources such as Michael Fitzgerald,

and in reality the existence of a substance called *"Vril"* could be traced back to a reference in a

pioneering science fiction book, Edward Bulwer-Litton's *The Coming Race* (New York: The

Mershon Company Publishers, 1871). Others who have embraced the "Vril" theory point as well

to the existence of a current "Church of Vril" that exists as a neo-pagan group in the US, as well

as claiming that the early V-2 rocket developed by the Nazis toward the end of World War II

derived its name from "Vril," which those who subscribe to this theory say the "V" represents –

this is a premise presented in Bennett's film. In reality, the V-2 was named for a German word

for "vengeance," namely the noun "*Verteilung*," which roughly translates "distribution," but used

in the context of retaliatory action. As Benjamin King notes, the idea behind it dates back to the

Weimar period and is an expression of German antipathy towards the Versailles treaty. He notes

that it was realized later in its creation by the Third Reich as an instrument of retaliation against

its enemies.[42] Therefore, the idea of the mystical "Vril" substance has no relationship to the V-2

weapon technology.

In more conventional scholarship dealing with occultic influence on Nazi ideology, the

most lucrative author in this regard is Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. Goodrick-Clarke authored two

books specifically addressing this topic, the first being *Occult Roots of Nazism* (Washington

Square, NY: New York University Press, 1992), and the second dealing specifically with the

significance of the swastika, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of*

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[42] Benjamin King, *Impact: The History of Germany's V Weapons in World War II* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount Publishers LTD, 1998): 15.

*Identity* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 2002). Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (1953-2012) was a British historian and Professor of Esotericism at the University of Exeter, and these are two of several books he authored on this topic. In *The Occult Roots of Nazism,* for instance, he attributes occultic principles espoused by German and Austrian occultic groups like the Ariosophists to the motivating ideology that drove the Holocaust, noting that the racial theories of *völkisch* occultists that were appropriated from Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* were an impetus for essentially creating self-fulfilling prophecies of "Aryan revivalism" and other such ideologies connected to the myth of Atlantis and other sources.

The other more scholarly source dealing with this topic relates to the Thule Society, the occultic group that gave birth to the Nazi Party in 1919, and it is David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012). David Luhrssen taught and lectured in History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Beloit College, and worked as an editor and cultural critic. Luhrssen notes a significant factor in the evolution of German and Austrian *völkisch* occultism by tracing its influence further back than Blavatsky, noting that there had been a trend among Western intellectuals since the Enlightenment to use Asia to indict Europe on religious grounds, and the various other factors – a growing secularism, the rise of Darwinian theory, etc. – contributed to a more general rise in occultism in the late 19th century in both Europe and America that Germany and Austria were impacted by.[43]

The final aspect of occultism would examine why later in the Third Reich there seemed to be a persecution of occultists, even those who would agree with Hitler and the Nazis on basic

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[43] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012): 3.

principles. This is the one gap in studying occultic influence that would bear more examination, as it has caused much debate in recent years. Fitzgerald's assertion that this was due to "rival" occultic forces is often contested by the fact that one of the founders of the Ariosophic Thule Society, Rudolf von Sebottendorf, was actually declared a sort of *persona non grata* after the Nazis came to power in 1933 and he was eventually imprisoned by the Nazis after eventually leaving the Ariosophist form of occultism to embrace Sufism.[44]  It indicates a complex relationship between Nazism and the occult that is seen in other areas as well, particularly in social aspects of Nazi ideology dealing with homosexuality, and even some political influences later abandoned by the Nazis, such as that of Karl Haushofer.

The social aspects of Nazi ideology, for the purposes of this study, will focus on two primary areas. The first is the Nazi appropriation of social Darwinism, in particular the adaptation of eugenics policies which led to the Holocaust and other atrocities. The second is the complex association between National Socialism and homosexuality. Again, much like the religious aspects (in particular occultism) that shaped National Socialism, these areas were embraced in a utilitarian fashion by the Nazis in general, and often more so by individual Nazis. In examination of how social Darwinism influenced National Socialist policies, the major books published on this topic are both by Richard Weikart. The first is *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). Weikart's contention, as noted on page 6, is that although social Darwinism was a principal component of Nazi ideology, it is less directly connected to the Holocaust and more so to the

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[44] Ibid., 199.

central ethics of both Hitler and the Nazis in general.[45]  His second book, *Darwinian Racism: How Darwin Influenced Hitler, Nazism, and White Nationalism* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2022), notes that those holding Darwinian scientific views utilized them to give scientific underpinning to racism and even genocidal acts, and this found fertile ground in Germany via Ernst Haeckel and similar figures.

The eugenics movement is also of importance to Chapter 3, and there are several works which will be consulted. Of particular interest in this volume would be the Paul Weindling's chapter on German Eugenics. Paul Weindling is the Wellcome Trust Research Professor in the History of Medicine at Oxford Brookes University, and has written extensively on this topic, notably his 2004 volume *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials* (Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2004). One of the issues that Weindling notes in that volume is the fact that at the Nuremberg trials the Nazi foray into eugenics which facilitated many Holocaust atrocities was not examined as thoroughly as it should have been.[46]  This idea had some pre-Darwin sentiments, including the theories of Thomas Malthus in regard to population control, and also post-Darwin individuals such as Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin who is credited with being the "Father of Modern Eugenics."  It is in John Cornwell, *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (New York: Viking, 2003) that there is a connection between the rise of German nationalism after the unification of Germany in 1871 and the growing acceptance of Darwinism in figures such as Haeckel, which in turn would lead to the rise of *völkisch* ideology and the accompanying racial ideas that would influence the Nazis. However, this uniquely

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[45] Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004): 6.

[46] Michael H. Kater, "Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials: From Medical War Crimes to Informed Consent," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine – John Hopkins University,* 80, no. 4 (2006), 786.

German take on social Darwinism had British and American roots, as noted by Richard

Hofstadter (1916-1970) in *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press,

1983). Hofstadter was the Dewitt Clinton Professor of American History at Columbia University,

and his thesis was that while Darwinism was a seemingly politically neutral theory, it was

adopted by British philosopher, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) to economic principles and this

was spelled out in his multi-volume work, *The Principles of Ethics Vol. 1 and 2* (New York: D.

Appleton and Co., 1895-1898), in which Hofstadter notes borrowed heavily from Haeckel as

well, in particular Haeckel's Biogenetic Law, which posits that certain races were biologically

less-developed than others.[47]

Therefore, in contrasting Weikart's and Hofstadter's approaches, Weikart would maintain

that a pseudo-scientific origin of the social Darwinist flavor of Nazi policies was rooted in

Haeckel's adaptation of Darwinian evolution that later was infused with German nationalism,

while Hofstadter primarily deals with American origins of social Darwinism as a primarily

economic theory but does attribute cross-fertilization of ideology from Haeckel. Thus, the

conclusion that could be drawn was that economics dictated ethics, and in turn economics could

be influenced by scientific (or pseudo-scientific) sources.

The issue of homosexuality in the Nazi Party is a little more complex, and while the

contradictory aspects of that relationship will be explored later, it is important to understand the

major ideologies that shaped it. Unfortunately, the major secondary source for this is written as a

non-scholastic work and does tend to reflect some sentiments of the authors. That particular book

is Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Keiser,

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[47] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983): 193.

OR: Founders Publishing, 1995). Much like sources dealing with the Nazis and the occult, Lively and Abrams are writing their text from a particular worldview, but it does give some historical background of note. Again, this is a connection to social Darwinism, particularly in the work of openly homosexual sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895). Ulrichs' major work, *Forschungen uber Das Ratsel der Mannmannichen Liebe* (Max Spohr, 1898) proposed that homosexuals and lesbians constituted a "Third Sex" evolving via Darwinian evolutionary processes, and this meant that the person who had these proclivities would be a "superior" biological evolution of the human race.

The German-Jewish openly homosexual sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), expanded upon this in his book, *Urnish People: Causes and Nature of Uranism* (1903 original German) by naming this "third sex" by the moniker "*Uranian*," and Hirschfeld used the same evolutionary conclusions of Ulrichs earlier to expand upon this by noting that transvestism was a stage in that evolution. Due to his Jewish heritage however, the Nazis persecuted Hirschfeld and he actively opposed their racial policies. However, many of his ideas were incorporated into the Nazi ethos due to their connection to the earlier "Aryan" Ulrichs. In reading Lively's and Abrams' texts, the Nazis felt that Hirschfeld's ideas were robbed from Ulrichs, and because the former was Jewish, he did not have original ideology. This will warrant more of a discussion under alleged contradictions in Nazi practice versus policy.

A third source of note would be Samuel Igra, *Germany's National Vice* (London: Quality Press, 1945). Igra was a German-Jewish sociologist, and his book contends that the militaristic aspects of Prussian identity encouraged misogynic tendencies and thus led to homosexual acts even as far back as German unification in 1871. Igra also argues that this tendency was a natural trait of extreme German nationalism, and thus naturally manifested itself among the Nazis from

their beginnings. Again, this led to some contradictions in Third Reich policies, which will be discussed later as well. The rampant homosexuality manifested by the Nazis was also noted in Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960) when he notes in describing Ernst Rohm, who was the openly homosexual leader of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Troopers, or "Brown Shirts"), that many of the leading Nazis were homosexual.[48]  Robert G.L. Waite in *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (1975) also proposes that Hitler himself may have had what are called "homoerotic" tendencies and tried to conceal them by being overly masculine to compensate. This may have provided impetus, in Waite's assessment, for Hitler's persecution of *certain* homosexuals.[49]  These are areas that Lively and Abrams notice and expand upon in their book as well. Therefore, the ethical paradox of Nazi attitudes regarding homosexual behavior is complex and contradictory.

In assessing the development of political thought in relation to Hitler and the Nazis, the obvious influence of Benito Mussolini and earlier Fascists is well-documented. Many authors though have asserted that Hitler borrowed heavily from Machiavelli, and among those who contend this are Charles McCoy, "The Place of Machiavelli in the History of Political Thought," and Michael Giles, "Hitler's Reading of Machiavelli." According to both Giles and McCoy, Hitler avidly read German translations of Machiavelli's works, especially during his incarceration after the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch.

Three other movements of note also contributed to the political evolution of the National Socialist Party, and the first of these was a group called the *Wandervögel* that arose during the

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[48] William L.. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960): 38.

[49] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 272-273.

late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a youth movement. The most extensive study of this movement is contained in Peter D. Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900-1945: An Interpretative and Documentary History* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1981). Peter Stachura (b. 1944) is a British historian and essayist who specializes in the history of the rise of Nazism. A more militant faction of the *Wandervögel* later emerged that was more nationalistic and heavily influenced by occultism called the *völkisch* movement, and many early Nazi leaders were associated with this.

The most extensive study of the *völkisch* movement would be Guy Tourlamain, *Völkisch Writers and National Socialism:  A Study of Right-Wing Political Culture in Germany, 1890-1960: Vol. 21.* (Bern:  Peter Lang, 2014). Guy Tourlamain was the visiting lecturer in Modern history at Liverpool Hope University. Stachura's work would provide the framework for Tourlamain's, as the *völkisch* movement was not confined to being a youth movement necessarily, but it did appeal to a faction of the *Wandervögel.* In both movements, there was also an emphasis on issues such as environmentalism, nudism, and occultic associations, and these would play a later role as well in Nazi racial policies. The early incorporation of environmentalism into Nazi political thought is explored in more detail by Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005). The authors, all professors of History, note that one of the assertions made over the years was the association of environmentalism with the whole "*Blut und Boden*" (Blood and Soil) emphasis of the Nazi Party platform, as it was also tied to racial ideology as well. The most specific text in regard to this aspect of Nazi ideology is Ann Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darre and Hitler's "Green Party."*(The Kensal Press, 1985), as well as Walther Darre's own treatise on this topic as

the leading proponent of the idea*, Blut und Boden: ein Grundgedanke des Nationalsozialismus. (*Berlin: Gedruckt in der Reichsdruckerei, 1936).

 The third political movement that played a role in the rise of the Nazis was the *Freikorps,* which consisted of informally-organized militias formed by disillusioned German military veterans at the end of World War I – Ernst Rohm, Hermann Goering, and other leading Nazis were associated initially with *Freikorps* groups. The comprehensive study available on the *Freikorps* would be Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds: The Story of the Freikorps 1918-1923* (London: John Murray, 1987). Nigel Jones (b. 1951) is a British journalist and biographer who notes that many early Nazis achieved their early activist tendencies from prior involvement in the *Freikorps* groups. Therefore, with the youth movement (*Wandervögel* and the *völkisch* subculture within it) and the militant *Freikorps* as fertile recruiting grounds, the Nazis were able to capitalize upon the sentiments of the earlier movements and crystalize them into something different.

 The other political motivation for the National Socialist movement was geopolitics, which would also play a later role in Hitler's objectives of *Lebensraum.* The main influence here would be Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), whose work was introduced to Hitler via a former student of his, Rudolf Hess. The main work that Haushofer enunciated his theories was *Baustein zur Geopolitik* (Heidelberg: Kurk Vowinckel Verlag, 1928), but also in *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans : Studien über die Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Geographie und Geschichte* (Heidelberg : Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1925). The theories borrowed from Haushofer, via Hess, later would play a role in the formation of Hitler's own political ideology as expressed in *Mein Kampf.*

Related closely to the influences of occultism, social trends, and political evolution is philosophical formation. The Nazis relied on several philosophical influences, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Martin Heidegger, and other postmodernist philosophical figures that expressed ideas which fed German nationalism in general but specifically the more militant variety of nationalism espoused by the Nazis. The ideas from Nietzsche were derived from his posthumously published compilation of notes *Der Will zur Macht* (1901), which was edited by his sister Elizabeth and contained many of the ideas that evolved into the more antisemitic aspects associated with Nietzsche. There is also much derived from his work *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1885), a fictional work which nonetheless did notice the ideology of the *Übermensch* being the "Aryan superman" that was idealized by the Nazi platform as well as by earlier German and Austrian *völkisch* occultists such as Guido von List. Nietzsche in turn did influence later German philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), as seen in his multi-volume work *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Verlag Gunther Neske, 1961).

The influence of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), the British-born Germanophile philosopher as well as son-in-law of composer Richard Wagner, is also noted by Waite to have contributed to much of the racial ideology of the National Socialist movement[50] primarily via his *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899), and *Politische Ideale* (1915). The influences of Heidegger, Chamberlain, and Nietzsche gave philosophical underpinning to National Socialist ideology on race and politics, although it must be noted that Nietzsche himself was not overtly racist, and most writers agree that Nietzsche's writings were given a more racial dimension by his sister Elizabeth.

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[50] Waite, 130-131.

The questions concerning how these ideas intersected and fused together are also discussed in many of the aforementioned works, and the question of conflicting ideas concerning the persecution of occultists and homosexuals particularly is taken up in Lively and Abrams, but also to a degree by Luhrssen, Weikart, and Fitzgerald. Other sources that address this latter question include Hans Thomas Hakl, *Nationalsozialismus und Okkultismus* (Graz, Austria: Stocker, 1997), and in particular interest regarding Rudolf Steiner, there is Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Boston: Brill, 2014). In relation to the persecution of Aleister Crowley's followers in the Third Reich, the main source would be Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley - The Beast in Berlin: Art, Sex and Magick in the Weimar Republic* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014). Churton is a British researcher of esoteric and Masonic history, and also an Honorary Fellow at Exeter University. Steiner and Crowley represent the two pivotal occultic figures who were targets of Nazi persecution, but in the case of Crowley, there could have been political reasons as well.

In regard to the persecution of homosexuals and the contradictory evidence of homosexuality being more accepted among notable Nazis, the first item is a historical overview of the topic by Illinois Wesleyan University faculty member Eliot H. Boden, "The Enemy Within: Homosexuality in the Third Reich 1933-1945," *Constructing the Past* 12, no. 1 (2011) https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/constructing/vol12/iss1/4 (Accessed May 26, 2023). Boden contends that the official repudiation of homosexual behavior in the Nazi Party contradicted practice in many cases, particularly in the SS and the earlier SA. This concurs with Shirer's and Lively's and Abrams' earlier assumptions that homosexuality was commonplace especially among the early Nazis, and that it is possible that many homosexuals were targeted by the Nazis for other reasons besides their activities.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the ideological overview of the National Socialist movement entails many intersectional areas of overlap, but also embodies some contradictions. As to how the Nazis adapted these ideas, that will be examined in the subsequent chapters.

Again, the idea behind the thesis of this study is to utilize some sociological and even hermeneutical concepts borrowed from other disciplines such as Biblical interpretation and Philosophy in order to frame National Socialism in a way that suggests that as a group its members shared a commonality of central convictions. While understandably the National Socialist movement is generally accepted as being an evil phenomenon, it nonetheless shares in common with other groups components which define it, and thus the purpose of this study.

As the first four chapters primarily deal with the streams of influence which impacted Nazi ideology, the primary research questions will be factored into the relevant sections accordingly. The last two chapters (6 and 7) will attempt to synthesize all the ideological streams together, and in Chapter 7 in particular, they will be framed within the context of the original questions themselves. Within the narrative, it will be expected that some repetition of ideas, overlap, and some contradictions will be found, and that will be addressed as well. Given the complexity of the topic, the purpose here is not to comprehensively address every aspect, but this will serve as an overview for further inquiry and addressing the individual topics presented in a more comprehensive fashion in future research.

**Chapter 2**

**The Mythological/Occultic Influence**

The date was January 30, 1933. The aging President of the Weimar Republic of Germany, Paul von Hindenburg, appointed as his Chancellor an Austrian-born former corporal of the German Army who was also a veteran of World War I. The individual who assumed this office had been involved in politics since the early 1920s as the leader of a very extremist German nationalist party that rose from obscurity to being a formidable force in German political affairs. This man, Adolf Hitler, assumed the leadership of Germany a little over a year later when President von Hindenburg suddenly passed away. Hitler consolidated the two offices of President and Chancellor into one absolute leadership role, and what was democratic Weimar Germany was transformed into a totalitarian regime called the Third Reich. The political party Hitler led was the National Socialist German Worker's Party (better known as the Nazi Party), and it came into being in 1920 due to the efforts of a small group of radical elites who espoused an occultic worldview that centered on racial identity, and in particular antisemitism. The factors that brought this political grouping into being were due in large part to Germany's losses in World War I, in particular the rather harsh conditions of the Versailles Treaty which many rabid German nationalists believed was insulting to their "Fatherland." The radical elite occultists belonged to an occultic society called Thule, and this shaped the political movement that arose from it, the Nazi Party. It is the genesis of the Nazi Party's creation by this secretive Thule Society that creates the need for an examination as to how influential occult teachings and the people who advanced them were upon the formation and later the policies of the Nazis.

To what extent did the occultic societies that were identified with the *völkisch* movement in particular influence the Nazis? Further, who were the pivotal figures, both prior to the Third

Reich and during Hitler's leadership, which exerted the most influence over Nazi views of race, antisemitism, and other characteristic views they espoused? This chapter will attempt to analyze those influences and the role they played in the eventual culmination of both World War II and the Holocaust. Beginning with a discussion on common themes that many writers – both academic and popular – have focused upon, it will be determined as to whether the Nazis were occultists in general or influenced by occultic concepts. It also will provide a premise as to how the occultic/mythological worldview of the early National Socialist Party was utilized to address central narrative convictions of its founders and leaders.

**Historical Background**

In discerning the origins of the rise of occultism that assimilated into Nazi ideology, it is important to look at the circumstances in view of the wider Western society of the time. With the rise of the Enlightenment and of industrialization, a new form of rationalism arose which divorced faith from philosophy, and the consequence of that was a void in regard to the role of faith in both the life of the individual and of society as a whole. While many in the West who had embraced the Enlightenment ideals were open to alternatives, the relationship of Christianity to the new mindsets was often ambivalent, and therefore many individuals began looking for alternatives to Christianity to fill the void left by its ejection from many circles. A second factor in this which was closely related was the publication in 1859 of naturalist Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species,* which represented a paradigm shift in cosmology for many. Although the effects of Darwin's position will be discussed in the next chapter, it bears mention here because in many instances a new type of religious faith was being forged in many Western nations, and it would impact Christianity as well. In regard to Christianity, the "higher criticism" movements of liberalism, as personified in particular by Friedrich Schleiermacher, impacted the overall

religious faith of many. A less dogmatic and more secularized form of Christianity therefore meant that people were seeking alternatives to fill the niche left by the liberalization of Christianity. This contributed immensely to the rise of interest in occultism during late 19th century.

In England, for instance, although a growing secularism often dismissed notions of a literal Satan or hell, the concept of Satan was nonetheless used to support anti-religious arguments. This led to essentially an interest in what some writers called "popular antiquities," which was a blanket term for folklore, superstitions, and occultic phenomena, and it was seen being closely related to movements such as the whole "back to the land" transcendentalism many embraced in response to rapid industrialization.[1]  As it connects to the German fascination with occultism that would arise later, this was to be found in the work of German philologist and orientalist Max Muller (1823-1900), who theorized that Sanskrit was the language of the "ancient Aryans" and thus the most pure form of Indo-European linguistic expression. In expressing this theory, he elaborated upon it by linking religion and language together in that religious faith was the genesis of linguistic expression[2]. In his 1866 book *The Science of Language,* Muller makes clear his thesis on this when he writes, "Mythology, which was the bane of the ancient world, is in truth a disease of language."[3]  In tying religious faith to linguistic expression, Muller inadvertently gave a basis for the connection between German nationalism and pre-Christian paganism, which many *völkisch* proponents saw as a natural inclination. Although Muller, who had emigrated to England and eventually was a professor at Oxford, was

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[1] Sarah Bartels, *The Devil and the Victorians: Supernatural Evil in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2021): 77.

[2] Bartels, 78.

[3] Max Muller, *The Science of Language* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866): 12.

not directly connected to the later Nazi Party, he espoused views that nonetheless were consistent

with the rising *völkisch* movement in Germany, which itself was a subset of a Romanticist

German youth movement called the *Wandervögel.* The major difference, however, between

Muller and the later *völkisch* nationalists was fundamental – Muller was a religious universalist

in many respects, and his basic premise was that religious expression was integral to human

evolution and therefore to him all religions had the same source. In his book *Thoughts on Life*

*and Religion,* he expresses this sentiment: "Each religion has its own peculiar growth, but the

seed from which they spring is everywhere the same. That seed is the perception of the infinite,

from which no one can escape who does not willfully shut his eyes."[4]  Although earlier academic

discourse had confined magic and occultism to more "primitive" and "irrational" times, and

some writers such as Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) defined magic as a distinct phenomenon from

both religion and science,[5] there was a movement beginning in the later Victorian era to identify

magic as more natural and rational, and as Alison Butler notes, it sought to synthesize

evolutionism, rationalism, and earlier occultic practices into a new form of occultism which

found its expression in groups such as the Order of the Golden Dawn as well as in the writings of

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, although it was Francis Barrett's 1801 publication *The Magus or*

*Celestial Intelligencer* which preceded these by several decades.[6]  In the third volume of Frazer's

*The Golden Bough,* the author further distinguishes magic from both religion and science by

noting that civil and sacred power were purposely divorced from each other as one was

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[4] Max Muller, *Thoughts on Life and Religion* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., LTD, 1905): 161-162.

[5] Alison Butler, "Magical Beginnings: The Intellectual Origins of the Victorian Occult Revival," *Limina* 9, no. 1 (2003): 79-80.

[6] Butler, 82-83.

considered more practical than the other – a separation, in essence, of priest from king.[7]  This

secularized divorce of religion from other aspects of life (especially science) was influenced in

large part by the adaptation of both Enlightenment rationalism as well as Darwinian theories that

abounded in the late 19th century. However, those like Muller and Frazer sought to reconcile the

magical aspects of mythology with the theories of evolution propagated by Darwin and others,

and this would also contribute to the rise of interest in the occult, in particular from the East

which was beginning to attract influence from upper-class Victorians. One of the earliest writers

to do this was the Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical

Society. In her book *The Secret Doctrine,* Blavatsky adds a more mystical dimension to Muller's

thesis that all religions were of the same source by noting that language began with symbols,

which as man "evolved" into the perfect root race became linguistic expression, and thus

Blavatsky is stating in essence that Nature was the original deity, and that man's linguistic

development helped him "evolve" into actual godhood.[8]  As variants of Theosophy were picked

up by the German *völkisch* movement, this was carried further by its proponents in stating that

the "Aryan" race was an actual race of gods, and that the Germans were that race and thus the

religion of the German people must be therefore purified and exert dominion over "lesser races."

While many of these ideas had their sources in British and American writers, it was

enthusiastically embraced by radical German nationalists and occultists as a "proof" of their own

superiority, and this would underwrite the racial and other policies of the Nazis in future years,

as the Nazis were rooted in these movements.

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[7] James Frazer, *The Golden Bough Vol. 3* (London: McMillan and Co., 1911): 17.

[8] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Co., 1888): 320

There were some areas of compatibility with these occultic groups and National

Socialism, as is pointed out by Marco Pasi. Pasi notes that the appeal of occultism to groups like

the Nazis was due to a couple of factors. First, he cites George Orwell's essay on William Butler

Yeats, and he notes that Orwell made three important observations in regard to Yeats's private

occult convictions and his involvement in radical politics:[9]

1. A hatred for the concept of human equality

2. Occultism linked to elitism

3. A profound hostility to the Judeo-Christian ethical code

Pasi goes further by noting James Webb's research that suggests that the interest in

occultism that arose in the 19th century West was tied to a reaction against industrialization and

some Enlightenment sentiments which sought to divorce faith from reason, and thus left a void

via its rejection of Christianity for a resurgence in mysticism and paganism. This played out,

according to Webb, by also appealing to a similar political strain of radical nationalism which

often was characterized as reactionary and thus it was compatible with esotericism in that the

resulting synthesis also gave rise to a resurgence of antisemitism in particular.[10]  Nicholas

Goodrick-Clarke takes this a step further by noting that this merging of radical politics and

esotericism also served as a coping mechanism to address what they saw as a decline in their

own racial uniqueness.[11]  In terms of CNCs, this fusion of National Socialism with esoteric

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[9] Marco Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Crucial Aspects,"  in Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenberg, eds., *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2009): 60.

[10] Pasi, 62.

[11] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 304.

occultism sought to answer the question "who are we?" by appealing to a mythological worldview of origins, and thus the question "who are we?" would be intrinsically linked to the question "what's wrong?" The target for this second question, therefore, would require a culprit as to why the once-great "Aryan" was diminished, and the Jewish people (and, by extension, the Christian tradition) are seen as "what's wrong?" The "remedy" therefore would be removing the problem and then rediscovering self-identity, and many Nazi figures (in particular Himmler) saw in pre-Christian Teutonic myth the supposed "true identity" of the German people. Again, while this does not officially label the National Socialist movement as a whole as occultic, the root ideology of the movement had at its source an occultic/mythological worldview that served two purposes. First, it gave the radical *völkisch* nationalist a sense of identity. Second, it also attempted to identify an enemy (Jews, and the Christian faith which had its roots in Judaic tradition) which is seen as a pathogen and thus in need of eradication if the "true" identity of nation was to be restored. While it is not clear as to what degree early Nazi leadership – particularly Anton Drexler – embraced occultism on a personal level, the influence of this mythological worldview did in many ways facilitate the development of the National Socialist platform. In his one written publication, *My Political Awakening,* the majority of his reflections are more political than occultic in nature, but there are two passages of significance that stand out in relation to Drexler's indirect endorsement of an occultic/mythological worldview as opposed to the Judeo-Christian view, and the first of these is as follows:

> I ask now: Have we not literally experienced the execution of
> these devilish principles? Who still doubts the existence of such
> a secret, folk-killing power? And what has been done about it for
> decades by our Aryan rulers, statesmen, party and folk leaders,
> by our humanitarian gabbers and Centrists babbling about
> Christian charity? Would it not have been the crowning of
> humanity, quite regardless of in what manner, to protect these
> millions of honest working people who have been literally

devoured by this parasite race out of greed and lust for power?[12]

A second passage in Drexler's work that alludes to some occultic influence is a direct citation from Dietrich Eckart, a Thulist and co-founder of the National Socialist Party. In citing a poem of Eckart's, Drexler is more or less repeating a standard *völkisch* sentiment that Christianity, being a bi-product of "the Talmud," is essentially foreign to true Germans, and thus is the source of "what's wrong" with German society[13]. Although Drexler's own work does not imply it, this was also the same sentiment that many early *völkisch* occultists and radical political activists would adopt to justify replacing Christianity in Germany with a more "Teutonic" or "Aryan" spirituality.

Although there is little evidence suggesting that Drexler himself was an active occultist, he adapted the language of *völkisch* occultists in a political context, and thus he mirrored the sentiments of many of his Thulist sponsors once the National Socialist Party was established in 1919. However, another individual who also was instrumental in the establishment of the National Socialist Party, Gottfried Feder (1883-1941), was also an active Thulist and additionally co-founded with Drexler, Karl Harrer, and Dietrich Eckart the precursor to the National Socialist Party, the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (DAP) in 1919 – Drexler, the key leader of this early party, had originally founded it in 1918 with Karl Harrer as the "Political Worker's Circle," on the basis that Drexler felt that groups like Thule were insufficient to create a new Germany[14].  Feder was also the key individual to influence Hitler's participation in the party via a lecture he gave in September 1919. In his book *The German State on a Nationalist and Socialist Foundation*

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[12] Anton Drexler, *Mein Politisches Erwachen* (Munich: Deutscher Volksvertag, 1923): 66.

[13] Drexler, 49-50.

[14] Waite, 132.

published in 1923, Feder outlines the program of the Party by noting a couple of contradictory things:[15]

1. Special protection of the Christian faith

2. Suppression of religious doctrines that opposed the agenda

One aspect noted by Alexander Jacob, the English translator of Feder's text, was that he stated that both Drexler, as well as Karl Harrer, were actually members of the Thule Society themselves,[16] which is also stated by Robert G.L. Waite, who identified Drexler as being an adjunct member *odisagreeation* that Feder had in his two program items above was that while a nominal *protdisagreech* was affirmed (this in likelihood was to garner support from the general German population by clothing their ideas in "Christian" verbiage), the "State" would determine what the Church would teach and could actively suppress certain doctrines which would be in disagreement with the state agenda. In examining other occultic sources (notably von List and Liebenfels), this would be predicated on the redefinition of Christian doctrine in a more esoteric/occultic context that would favor *völkisch* sentiments. It also suggested that these early *völkisch* nationalists saw Christianity as a Jewish import and thus it needed to be gradually purged from German society in order to allow for a "purer" Germanic religion to emerge and replace it. This inclusion in the official Nazi platform as constructed by Feder, Drexler, and Hitler would therefore presuppose that occultism was the authentic faith of Germany, and thus to eradicate the "foreign" Christian faith, a redefinition of "Christianity" in a more mythological occultic context must be implemented by the state.

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[15] Gottfried Feder, *The German State on a Nationalist and Socialist Foundation* (Munich, 1923): 45

[16] Gottfried Feder, and Alexander Jacob trans., *The German State on a Nationalist and Socialist Foundation (English Translation)* (London: Historical Review Press, 1993): i

These are factors which would come into play later when the Third Reich began its systematic extermination of its enemies in the "Final Solution." The horrors of Auschwitz and the genocidal aspect of National Socialism then could be interpreted to the "remedy" for what National Socialism saw as "what's wrong," and thus in the eyes of the Nazi perpetrators of what is perhaps one of the most violent and cruel genocides of the 20th century it was a way of making a "remedy" to a specific problem that hindered self-discovery in the German race. Occultism provided a platform and foundational worldview for the future Nazis to justify their atrocities in other words.

The antecedents of the racial policies of the Nazis, therefore, were rooted in an esoteric occultic worldview. The question then would arise as to how Hitler and the Nazis would market this worldview to the German people, many of whom at the time were at least nominally Christian and did follow a more traditional Judeo-Christian idea of cosmology. As it will be seen, some of the *völkisch* proponents were able to couch occultic concepts in Christian terminology, notably present in the writings of Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, a former Cistercian monk who later apostatized from the Catholic Church but still attempted to couch occultic worldview in Biblical language. Although Liebenfels had an affinity for the occult and was influenced by it, some writers do characterize Liebenfels as the progenitor of a heretical school of Christian theology that was rooted in earlier heretical movements as well as religious antisemitism.[17] While there is some validity to this, it must also be noted that Liebenfels was more or less using what he had learned and was redefining it in an oddly syncretistic union of occultic worldview with Christian and Biblical language. The same could be said as well of

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[17] Stephen Michael Borthwick, "Heresiarch of the Master Race: Lanz von Liebenfels, Catholicism, and Occultism" (master's thesis, June 2011), 3.

Borthwick's analysis, in that the references to earlier heretical movements also aided in the later development of occultism as well, in particular the Gnostic dualism present in much of that literature. In the case of Liebenfels, it was an equating of the old pre-Christian Teutonic paganism of ancient Germans with a "superior" form of Christianity. In this regard, he writes in his book *Theozoology* the following:  "The great secret of Christianity -- the Trinity -- now reveals itself as a great anthropology. Father, Spirit and Son are the three stages of evolution of higher (white) mankind."[18]  In this regard, he is consistent with Muller's aforementioned thesis that all religious traditions had a common source. This also would be more consistent with Blavatsky's view of the "ascended Masters" being the "Fifth Root-Race," and thus despite the Biblical association with the Trinity, Liebenfels is clearly articulating more of an occultic/Gnostic interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This would prove useful later to Hitler as he ascended to power.

In Germany in particular, this found expression in a variety of movements among adolescents and young adults collectively called the "German Youth Movement."  This movement was by no means homogenous, in that it encompassed many eccentric practices including homosexuality, veganism, epicurean practices, atheism, pacifism, folkish nationalism, occultic experimentation, and other practices often associated with later youth movements in other societies such as the hippies and the more radical Millennial mindsets displayed in recent decades. It was essentially a revolt of discontented bourgeois youth against an increasingly liberalized society, as noted by Robert G.L. Waite.[19]  The overall youth movement, or *Jugendbewegung,* was dominated by a

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[18] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology, or The Science of the Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (Vienna: self-published, 1905): 54.

[19] Robert G.L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany*, 1918-1923 (New York: WW Norton and Co., 1969): 18-19.

group of nature enthusiasts called the *Wandervögel,* or "Wandering Birds," due to their

organized hikes which they viewed as a pilgrimage to nature – sexual experimentation and

dabbling in vague religious mysticism were characteristic of the *Wandervögel,* as well as a

contempt against the rapid industrialization of Germany during the mid-19th century.[20] While

this is specifically German, it also was concurrent with and influenced by the more widespread

interest in occultism and other phenomena associated with the Victorian/Romantic era (also

reflected in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in the United

States). A radically militant variant of the *Wandervögel* movement also embraced a radical

nationalist ideology called *völkisch* ideology, and it was advanced in the context of an occultic

worldview that adapted a variation of Blavatsky's ideas in *The Secret Doctrine* and its chief

proponents were leading German occultists Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels. The

latter would also be the one who would couch the worldview in "Christian" language which

would make it more palatable to the German masses once the Nazis began to gain influence.

While the *Wandervögel* and the *völkisch* ideology will be discussed in more detail later in the

section on political influences, they represent an occult-based worldview that would easily be

adapted by the Nazis later and would evolve into much of the ideology that is associated with the

Third Reich in general, and Hitler in particular.

I.      **Discerning Fact From Speculation**

In conducting research on a subject like this, a number of theories, conspiracies, and other

notions tend to emerge which often causes more serious academic discourse to be dismissive of

such studies. Speculation and conspiracy surrounding occultic influences upon the Nazis have

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[20] Nigel Jones, *The Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* (London: Robinson, 1987): 115-116.

been the source of a number of popular cinematic works and fictional novels (one example being

the popular *Indiana Jones* movie franchise). Further, the Nazis themselves constructed a lot of

mythology as a basis for their ideology, and that has been pinpointed by popular authors and

some conspiracists as "fact" of the speculations they focus upon in their writings. While there are

a number of these circulating in popular media and culture, three in particular bear enough

significance to warrant further examination. The first of these is the concept of some mystical

force called "Vril," the second is the whole legend and mythos surrounding the Spear of

Longinus (or Spear of Destiny), and the third regards Hitler's own religious identification.

### A. Vril and a Mystical Occultic Society

In 1871, a British aristocrat by the name of Edward Bulwer-Lytton authored one of the

earliest science fiction novels entitled *The Coming Race.* While not racist or antisemitic in itself,

and no evidence suggests that Bulwer-Lytton was a racist or extremist, his book nonetheless

would be the source of a substantial body of mythology that would be advanced by both the later

Nazis and the many popular and conspiratorial writings that would circulate later. What makes

this particular work of fiction of significance is that Bulwer-Lytton creates a fictional

subterranean super-race of people who are animated by an enigmatic substance called *vril*. He

accounted for this with his fictional character on page 37 of the novel as follows:

> "What is the vril?" I asked
>
> Therewith Zee began to enter into an explanation of which I understood truly
> little, for there is no word in any language I know which is an exact synonym for
> vril. I should call it electricity, except that it comprehends in its manifold
> branches other forces of nature, to which, in our scientific nomenclature, differing
> names are assigned, such as magnetism, galvanism, etc. These people consider
> that in vril they have arrived at the unity in natural energic agencies, which has
> been conjectured by many philosophers above ground…[21]

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[21] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, (New York: The Mershon Company, 1871):  p. 37

In reading Bulwer-Lytton's fictional description of this "substance" called *vril,* it is reminiscent of what other fictional writers have conceived, notably George Lucas's idea of "the Force" in the *Star Wars* franchise. However, as nationalist aspirations began to emerge especially in early 20th-century Germany and Austria, some understood these concepts to be factual, and thus built up a mythology around them that often corresponded with other ideas they espoused. This was particularly true with many early Nazis as well as the *völkisch* groups and individuals that preceded them. This led to the theory that a secretive society of some sort emerged that capitalized on harnessing the energy of this *vril* substance in order to usher in a sort of new order of society. Out of this came speculations that an enigmatic "Vril Society" actually existed, and as a popular researcher Michael Fitzgerald notes, the objective was to research the origins of the Aryan race, particularly regarding Atlantis, so that the magical powers encrypted in Aryan blood (due to containing residual amounts of *vril)* and then harness that energy to resurrect the magical powers believed to be endowed upon this Aryan race. This would lead to an evolution of Aryan descendants into some sort of super-beings possessed with phenomenal powers which was believed to have been initiated in the year 1909.[22] While the Nazis did have, via the SS, a group who researched antiquity for substantiation of their racial views, little evidence exists about an earlier society by this name doing this sort of thing. However, it has been the impetus of many conspiracy theories and popular speculations about exactly what *vril* was, and these types of accounts have garnered popularity but little scholastic inquiry.[23] Despite

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[22] Michael Fitzgerald, *Hitler's Occult War* (London: Robert Hale, 1990): 85-86.

[23] In dealing with the Nazi connection to occultic societies, a number of publications have been released over the years that rely on more popular and even conspiratorial viewpoints. While many have some factual information that makes them of value, they are not considered academic sources and must be assessed accordingly. There have been Christian evaluations of the occultic influences on Nazism, one in particular being Joseph Carr, *The Twisted Cross* (Monroe, LA, 1983). Carr ties the occultic facets of Nazism to the modern "New Age" movement based on the influence of Blavatsky's writings. Other writers, from a more secular standpoint, focus on the various occultic societies that presaged the Nazis, and often advance theories regarding an enigmatic "Vril Society," These include

this fact, there may be some evidence that the Nazis themselves were looking for something similar to *vril,* although much like conspiratorial literature, it was mythological and thus without empirical evidence that such a substance existed.

There are some writers, however, that do assert that there was an actual "Vril Society" that existed, one of whom is David Luhrssen in his 2012 book *Hammer of the Gods.* Luhrssen notes that there is a connection between the UFO phenomenon and the V-series rockets that were being developed by Werner von Braun and others in Germany at the end of World War II – "V" is seen by many writers (including Luhrssen) as being a reference to *vril.* Luhrssen notes that a German rocket engineer, Willy Ley, first publicized the existence of a Vril Society in Nazi Germany. Luhrssen then asserts that in very recent discoveries an actual "Vril Society" did actually exist, and he cites the writers Peter Bahn's and Heiner Gehring's 1997 work *Der Vril-Mythos.*[24] Eric Kurlander, however, counters this notion that this mystical "Vril Society" has no evidence to substantiate it existed, although the Thule Society definitely did exist.[25] Further, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke ties these Vril legends to much of the Nazi/UFO mythologies that many non-scholastic sources have promulgated in recent years, although he acknowledges that the Nazis may have had an interest in the whole *vril* phenomenon based upon a brochure published in 1930 entitled *Vril: Die kosmische Urkraft,* which among other things attributed an

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Michael Fitzgerald, *Hitler's Occult War* (London, 1990), Theo Paijmans, *The Vril Society* (Los Angeles, 2008), and William A. Hinson, *Castle Werfenstein and the Wonder Women of Vril* (self-published, 2017). A documentary movie by Discovery entitled *Dark Fellowships: The Vril* (Silver Spring, MD, 2009) further elaborates on these views. Other sources refute that an entity such as the Vril Society existed, including David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC, 2012), and Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven, 2017).

[24] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012): 206-207.

[25] Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich.* (New haven: Yale University Press, 2017): 184.

extraterrestrial endowment of this *vril* to the Aztecs, Egyptians, and other ancient civilizations, which gifted these said civilizations with pyramid technology that was passed to them by the fabled Atlantean race as a sort of "dynamo-technology."[26]  Conclusively, then, it appears as if some belief in this mythic *vril* substance was embraced by some Nazis and their related and predecessor groups, as well as garnering significant attention by popular and conspiratorial writers to theorize about what exactly *vril* was.

The other major issue with the theory that some cryptic "Vril Society" existed is that many of its supposed membership overlap considerably with the Thule Society, which did exist. It begs the question therefore if maybe some of the more clandestine actions attributed to this "Vril Society" may have actually been Thulists instead? The origins of the Thule Society will be discussed later, as it is documented that it gave birth to the Nazi Party. However, this idea of *vril* is a significant issue to discuss, as it figures prominently among some Nazis who believed in its existence as well as modern writers who wish to substantiate the existence of a secret society built around its concept. Ultimately however, it was simply something that was appropriated from science fiction that attracted certain occultists, and thus it bears mentioning as it also would give "proof" of the racial identity politics the Nazis would be notorious for.

### B.  The Spear of Longinus (aka "Spear of Destiny)

One of the more interesting forays into occultic belief the Nazis were associated with was the existence of an object called "the Spear of Longinus."  This particular subject has its roots in the Bible, particularly the passage in John 19:33-34, where upon Christ breathing his last on the Cross, a Roman soldier pierces his side with a spear and blood and water flow from the wound.

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[26] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 166.

As a result, the soldier has a miraculous conversion. In the context of the Church, this soldier was given the name "Longinus," which is believed to be of Greek origin and comes from the Greek word λουγχηε, meaning "lance."[27]  Although given this name in regard to his canonization, not a lot of records outside the account of the Gospels exist although he is believed to be a real person, and as a saint in the Church his feast day is celebrated on March 15th (1962 *Roman Missal)* or October 16th in the current *Roman Martyrology.* The personage of St. Longinus therefore is the result of the legend surrounding his spearhead.

The spearhead itself has been reported in several locations, one being Armenia, the other being Rome, and the one which is relevant to this subject was kept in Vienna. This particular one is closest, via dating, to the time period of the Crucifixion, and it was reported to have been in the possession of St. Maurice and of St. Constantine the Great before being deposited in Vienna.[28]  As to how the spearhead ended up in Vienna, it is believed that it was granted to the custodianship of the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I in the 10th century, and it was housed in the Imperial Treasury.[29]  It was this spear that caught Hitler's attention as well as the attention of many prominent German occultists in the late 19th century, and a mythology grew up around this object which intersected at the time with the "Holy Grail" legends and was at times even thought to *be* the fabled "Grail."  One aspect of the mythology surrounding the spear was that the person who possessed it would wield unimaginable power. This was one reason Hitler and the Nazis

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[27] Theresa Doyle-Nelson, "St. Longinus: A Saint for Conversions," *National Catholic Register,* October 16, 2017, https://www.ncregister.com/blog/st-longinus-a-saint-for-conversions.

[28] J.P. Mauro, "Where Is the True Holy Lance That Pierced the Side of Christ," *Aleteia,* January 16, 2020, https://aleteia.org/2020/01/16/where-is-the-true-holy-lance-which-pierced-the-side-of-christ/.

[29] Aleksa Vukovic, "Piercing the Veil: Uncovering the Mysteries of the Holy Lance," *Ancient Origins,* December 13, 2019, https://www.ancient-origins.net/human-origins-religions/holy-lance-0012997.

were actually interested in possessing it, and the background for this goes back to the operas of Richard Wagner in Hitler's case.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was a German composer who wrote several operas, and one of his personal traits was being an ardent German nationalist as well as possessing antisemitic views. Two of his operas impacted the young Hitler in particular, those being *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin.* Hitler shared with Wagner an avid interest in primitive German mythology, and a desire of Hitler was to re-create this "Valhalla" and in both operas the idea of both the "Holy Grail" and the spear, particularly in *Parsifal* – the quasi-Christian imagery in this opera was turned into a celebration of Teutonic racial glory, and the spear that the main character Parsifal possesses is supposed to be protected by the "noble race."[30]  The spear of Parsifal bears an uncanny resemblance to the Spear of Longinus, and it is possible that Wagner may have gotten inspiration from that. Another interesting parallel is a similar object called the "spearhead of Kovel," which was reportedly said to be in Poland and was looted by the SS from the Poles in 1939 for a similar reason as the Spear of Longinus was taken from Vienna to Berlin not long after the *Anschluss.*[31]  The spear motif was indeed of great importance both to a young Hitler as well as to the Nazis until the end of the war. In his book, *The Spear of Destiny,* Theodore Ravenscroft notes that Hitler originally saw the spear in the Imperial Treasury museum as a young man in Vienna, and upon seeing it he was captivated by it and wrote the following about it:

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[30] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1977): 126-129.

[31] Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017): 204.

"The Spear appeared to be some sort of magical medium of revelation for it brought the world of ideas into such close and living perspective that human imagination became more real than the world of sense."[32]

The spear (or spears) then represented both a recovery of Teutonic glory as well as a personal endowment of power upon the possessor of it, and that is what made it significant to the Nazis. In conclusion, the Spear of Longinus was an occultic talisman which was appropriated from Biblical and Christian tradition and therefore was integral to the racial worldview of the Nazis in general but also of Hitler in particular. However, although Hitler appropriated concepts such as the spear from whatever fit his own worldview, his own religious convictions are another problematic area. This is therefore the next item of discussion.

## C. Hitler's Religious Ideas and Identity

The enigma of Hitler's religious identification has been a much-discussed and debated topic in the decades following World War II. There have been a number of speculations as to what sort of faith or belief Hitler had – he has been called a Teutonic neo-pagan, an atheist, an occultist, a rogue Catholic, a Satanist, and many alt-right figures over the years have touted him as the purest form of Christian (such as the late Rev. Richard Butler, who founded and led the Aryan Nations Church in Idaho, as well as William Pierce, author of the notorious *Turner Diaries,* and former American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell).[33]  However, was he

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[32] Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny* (Boston: Weiser Books, 1982): 21.

[33] The so-called "Christian Identity" movement, of which the late Richard Butler was a major figure, often considers Hitler as a messianic or even prophetic figure. "Christian Identity" is an outgrowth of an earlier movement called British-Israelism, which was propagated by ministers such as Wesley Swift, and in milder form by the late Herbert W. Armstrong who founded the Worldwide Church of God sect. Michael Barkun notes that Butler was a direct disciple of Swift (Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* {Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997}: 70). Barkun is the professor of political science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Another source that documents the ideology of both George Lincoln Rockwell, the leader of the American Nazi Party, as well as *Turner Diaries* author William Pierce, is Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Markgraf Publications Group, 1990). Canedy is a historian who also served as TRADOC G2 Chief of Staff for the US Army. While Canedy's book focuses more on Fritz Kuhn's German-American Bund of the 1940s, she connects it with Rockwell's neo-Nazi movement in the 1960s. A more in-depth study of William Pierce is also examined in Carol Swain, *Contemporary*

any of these, or did Hitler have a religion of his own creation he followed? This bears

examination in lieu of the topic regarding how occultism did influence the Nazi Party and its

formation, and thus Hitler's occasional references to certain religious themes in his writings and

speeches also bear consideration.

In examining what his childhood friend, August Kubizek, wrote in his memoirs about his

friendship with the young Hitler, he notes a couple of things. First, Kubizek noted that Hitler was

the product of a devout mother who was a faithful Catholic, and a religiously-indifferent father.

Second, Kubizek notes that Hitler was actually quite pious as a child, but with his father's later

influence, he drifted away and into the extreme views he would espouse later. Third, Kubizek

believed that Hitler was not necessarily dismissive of the Church's relevance, but that it offered

little to him, so he simply avoided it, as it had little to do with his German nationalist

aspirations[34]. However, later Kubizek notes that Hitler's ideals put him at odds with the clergy,

and thus he found no spiritual home for them in the Church.[35]  However, his intense persecution

of Christians of all confessions – notably the executions of both Protestant theologian Dietrich

Bonhoeffer and of Catholic priest St. Maximilian Kolbe, among others – suggest that Hitler was

not quite as passive in his opposition of the Church as Kubizek alleges. In reality, Hitler often in

private discussions with his secretaries would deride the Church as "outdated, hypocritical, and

human-ensnaring" as an institution,[36] and he threatened to reckon with Christianity at the

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*Voices of White Nationalism in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Swain teaches political
science at Vanderbilt University. These sources connect "Christian Identity" to the *Völkisch* racial ideas that evolved
from Liebenfels in particular, and are thus more rooted in Theosophical esotericism than in traditional Judeo-
Christian theology.

[34] August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021): 94-95.

[35] Ibid., 228-229.

[36] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs that Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery
Publishing, 2016): 216.

conclusion of the war.[37]  In light of this, had the Nazis won World War II, it would undoubtedly

bring the Church under Hitler's wrath, and this is evidence that Hitler was surely not Christian

by personal conviction. Yet, paradoxically, he (as did Himmler) sought to mimic the Catholic

Church's pattern of organization, and as Robert Waite notes, Hitler saw himself as a sort of

"political pope" with his own version of Apostolic succession, and he turned the 25 Articles of

the Nazi party as a dogma and foundation of its existence in a similar way that Magisterium is

viewed in the Roman Catholic Church.[38]  In reality, Hitler had a sort of messianic view of

himself as the "Savior of the Aryan Race," and wanted to essentially build up a faith around

himself as such, and he only used the Catholic Church as a model for his own structure. This also

has much to do with his earlier obsession with Wagner's operas too, in that he saw himself as a

"Parsifal" who would cleanse Germany of its "impurities" and thus resurrect his own "Valhalla."

This then provides a backdrop as to Hitler's belief system.

Among Hitler's earliest influences were two prominent German occultists, Guido von

List and George Lanz von Liebenfels, both of whom will be discussed more in detail later. It was

Lanz von Liebenfels however that provided the material for Hitler's views on race and the

inherent antisemitism that accompanied it via a publication called *Ostara.* However, did this

make Hitler personally an occultist? The evidence for that can be found in how he viewed some

of his sycophants in the Third Reich regime who *were* occultists themselves, notably Rosenberg,

Hess, and Himmler. Although appreciative for their devotion, Hitler was noted to deride some of

their views, even by castigating Rosenberg, Himmler and Alfred Darre to put an end to what he

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[37] Ibid., 276.

[38] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler – The Psychopathic God* (New York:  Basic Books, 1977): 32-33.

called their "cultic nonsense."[39]   Hitler also blamed Hess's flight to England in 1941 on his

occultic reliance on astrological forecasts.[40]  This in turn would lead to the immense crackdown

Hitler enacted upon occultists starting on June 9, 1941, with occultic critics of the Nazis such as

Rudolf Steiner's[41] and Aleister Crowley's[42] followers being banned, but also early occultists who

were allies of Hitler, such as Sebottendorf, the founder of the Thule Society from which the

National Socialist Party emerged – Sebottendorf was imprisoned not long after Hitler's ascent to

power.[43]  Therefore, although occultism had a hand in the formation of the Nazi Party, and many

notorious Nazi leaders subscribed to different occultic beliefs, it would appear that Hitler was not

himself (at least not directly) an occultist. However, he did appropriate occultic ideas – notably

ideas he picked up from the literature of List and Liebenfels in his youth regarding race, as well

as his infatuation with Wagnerian imagery - when they suited his agenda and could find

concordance with his own views.[44]  Conclusively, therefore, it would be more accurate to say

Hitler was to a degree *occult-influenced* rather than being an ardent occultist.

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[39] Weikart, 190.

[40] Ibid., 191.

[41] Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was an early disciple of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and founded his own version of it called the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, with a main difference between his and Blavatsky's views on Christ, of which Steiner had a higher view. Hitler had begun to be critical of Steiner as early as 1921, and Hitler's prohibition of occultic groups resulted in many of Steiner's "Waldorf Schools" being raided and closed by the Gestapo and many members of the Anthroposophical Society being sent to concentration camps. George A. Mather and Larry M. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993): 22.  Uwe Werner, "Anthroposophy In the Time of Nazi Germany," *Waldorf Answers,* https://waldorfanswers.org/AnthroposophyDuringNaziTimes.htm (Accessed April 27, 2022).

[42] In the case of Crowley, Hitler more than likely banned Crowley's disciples due to their British connections. For the most part, the views of Crowley and German occultists such as Guido von List differed little, and both were heavily reliant on Blavatsky's Theosophical writings.

[43] Ibid., 192.

[44] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs That Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016): 193-194.

Therefore, the question would remain as to what Hitler identified as religiously. Jimmy Akin notes that Hitler could be classified as both an eclectic who did not follow an established school of thought as well as being a pseudo-scientific evolutionary pantheist.[45] Richard Weikart expands on this by noting that Hitler equated "God" with nature, and thus ascribed an eternal dimension to it which would be characteristic of pantheism, and thus Weikart would classify Hitler personally as a pantheist as well, in concurrence with religious commentator George Schuster as well as German theologian Walter Künneth.[46] These terms would have to be defined in light of Hitler's own musings and speeches though. As an eclectic, it is assumed that Hitler cherry-picked essentially those ideas that appealed to him, in particular regarding his racial ideology and his rabid antisemitism – this means that he borrowed as much even from Christian sources such as Martin Luther as well as from occultists like Helena Blavatsky. It was an opportunistic assimilation of ideas which culminated essentially in his own self-defined faith. "Pseudo-scientific evolutionary pantheism" is similar to what Helena Blavatsky did in her book *The Secret Doctrine,* which will be discussed later on - it attempted to fuse Darwinian evolution with occultic and other religious concepts, and thus this rather bizarre fusion produced a system of thought which equated races with evolution, and had the karmic mindset of Eastern religious traditions (notably the idea of reincarnation) incorporated as a form of evolutionary advancement. This idea will be seen later as it was picked up and expanded upon by early German occultists such as Guido von List. Akin notes also that the key concept of pantheism is that it divorces immanence of God from transcendence, and thus equates Creator and creation –

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[45] Jimmy Akin, "What Was Hitler's Religion?" *Catholic Answers,* May 1, 2019, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/what-was-hitlers-religion.

[46] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs That Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016): 196-197.

as that relates to Hitler, it means that Hitler viewed nature as deity, and that people were to

submit to the law of nature as part of deification.[47]  He therefore wanted to speed up the process

of this evolutionary advancement based on the superiority of the German ("Aryan") race by

acting as the arbiter of this deified nature, hence his appeal constantly to "Providence" that

peppered many of his speeches. He did this, as Waite notes, by likening himself to Jesus with a

providential mission to save Germany from the incarnate evil he labeled "international Jewry[48]."

In a speech on February 15, 1942, he also appeals to Providence in saying he has "permission" to

"lead the battle."[49]  However, upon closer examination of what he means, Hitler is saying that the

"Providence" he is appealing to is the natural order, and that he is the "messiah" essentially of

that order seeking to restore it by cleansing the "unnatural" from *his* order. "Providence" also has

the ability to change gender as well in Hitler's worldview, as he refers to it as "her" by equating

the natural order to the "Motherland" and thus nature becomes synonymous with Germany

itself.[50]  This interchange of divine and natural, male and female, therefore would be essentially a

pantheistic universal idea. Mather and Nichols affirm this by noting that for pantheism, God and

nature are one and the same.[51]  Therefore, by evidence of Hitler's own words, Akin would concur

with this definition and there is some merit to identifying Hitler as a pseudo-scientific

evolutionary pantheist.

In regard to this, Weikart also would conclude the same thing, as he references religious

commentator George Schuster's classification of dominant religious beliefs in Germany in the

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Waite, 29.

[49] Waite, 51.

[50] Ibid., 55.

[51] Mather and Nichols, 219.

1930s, and although Schuster affirms that Hitler was influenced to a degree by the two dominant Christian categories – Catholic and Lutheran – Hitler's honest convictions aligned more with pantheism.[52] Nazism in general, notes Weikart, had the religion of nature as central to its goals – this was rooted in the Nazi revolt against Christianity (in particular its Jewish roots) and its values, and as noted, Nature and Providence become one and the same in Hitler's thought.[53] This would lead to a couple of interesting observations in conclusion based on the data presented.

Again, although Hitler was not technically an occultist, it can be said he was occult-influenced, including the pseudo-scientific evolutionary pantheist worldview he held to. Therefore, Hitler's views would have much in common with leading occultists such as Blavatsky, von List, Steiner, and Crowley. Due to the fact Hitler also saw Nature and God as one and the same, it would not be accurate to say he was atheistic, and although he used a lot of language and imagery in his speeches that the German Christian population would understand, Hitler's own understanding of that same jargon was radically different, and he used it with effect to advance his own objectives, which also would characterize him as somewhat opportunistic. However, in looking at the overall picture, Hitler's ultimate deity was perhaps himself, as he did possess a messianic complex as part of a megalomaniacal tendency. Therefore, while certain occultic ideas and even groups and persons would seem useful at the time, Hitler was quick to discard such things once they outlived their usefulness. This then would explain why he turned on former associates like Sebottendorf and why he took such a hard line against occultic societies in 1941 – a similar parallel would entail his attitudes towards the practice of homosexuality, which is equally paradoxical. It was not necessarily that he totally disagreed with

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[52] Weikart, 197.

[53] Ibid., 213.

such individuals and groups, but rather when they proved to be no longer useful, he would see them as a threat to be eliminated to perhaps consolidate his own power and purge those aspects of his power base that would prove embarrassing later.

## II.     Early Antecedents to Nazism in Occultic Groups and Personalities

### A.  Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society

In the late 19th century, there was an increased interest in both America and in Europe in esotericism, and it was due to several factors. However, the rise of both Enlightenment rationalism a century earlier as well as a trend of theological liberalism in many Christian churches is a possible contributing factor. With the publication of Darwin's evolutionary theories, this rationalist skepticism became normative, causing a void to emerge which would be quickly filled by a combination of pre-Christian paganism and Eastern religious sects that were imported back to the West from India and East Asia. Some individuals who were instrumental in the spread of such religious trends attempted to reconcile them with the new secularism that had begun to take root in Europe and the United States, and one of those individuals was an eccentric German-Russian occultist by the name of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) was born in Ukraine to German parents who had immigrated to Russia some decades before, and she would later go on to found an early prototype of the New Age groups that became prominent in the 1970s and 1980s called the Theosophical Society. Although exposed as a fraud in London in 1875, she nonetheless persisted in the growth of the movement. When she passed away in 1891, William Q. Judge assumed control of the society, and in time there was a split between its American branch and the

international society.[54]  However, Blavatsky's ideas extended far beyond the Theosophical

Society, as her work had a significant influence on other occultists in the early 20th century, such

as Aleister Crowley, Rudolf Steiner, Alice Bailey, and for purposes of this paper, occultic

elements of the *völkisch* movement in Germany and Austria. This was significant to the latter

regarding two ideas that are incorporated into Blavatsky's most noted work, *The Secret Doctrine,*

and they were the introduction of the swastika as well as the racial theories that Blavatsky

elaborated upon in the two volumes of that book. It will be these two areas that will be the focus

of this discussion.

The swastika is a symbol created by the intersection of two bent lines, and prior to the

Nazis converting it into a universal symbol of genocide and hatred, it could be found in the

artwork and architecture of many cultures throughout the world. The word "swastika" is taken

from two Sanskrit terms – *su* (meaning "good") and *asti* (meaning "to prevail").[55]  It is

significantly found on carved rock churches in Lalibela in Ethiopia, and also throughout Tibet

and India, where it was a sign associated with good fortune.[56]  In northern Ontario, there was at

one time a gold-mining town that bore the name "Swastika," which adapted the name and the

symbol as a means of promoting the positive reinforcement of pursuing good fortune in gold

finds.[57]  As can be seen, prior to the Nazi rise to power in 1933 in Germany, the swastika was not

a symbol that was associated with the racism and genocide it later would be, and in this context,

Blavatsky utilized the symbol in its more traditional Tibetan good fortune capacity. Over the

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[54] George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult*, 273.

[55] Kalpana Sunder, "The Ancient Symbol That Was Hijacked by Evil," *BBC Culture,* August 16, 2021,
https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20210816-the-ancient-symbol-that-was-hijacked-by-evil.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ashifa Kassam, "Canadian Town's Effort to Rename 'Swastika Trail' Street Goes to Court," *The Guardian,* April
13, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/12/swastika-trail-canada-ontario-puslinch-name-change.

years, other writers have tended to assert the premise that the Nazis hijacked a traditional symbol

of ancient religions and transforming it into a symbol of hate. One such individual to assert this

position is the Buddhist cleric and academic Dr. T.K. Nakagaki, who traces the usage of the

swastika as a hate symbol to Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels as being the first personage to actively do

so.[58]  He further notes that the original meaning of the swastika – the word originating from the

Sanskrit word "*svatstica*" – was good fortune and auspiciousness, as its original design was

called *manji* and was seen, specifically in that context. Only later did Hitler's variation, called by

the Japanese the *kagi juji* (the "hook cross") evolve as a perceived symbol of evil.[59]  Nakagaki

also notes that Hitler's changing of the direction of the latter to a right-turning symbol changed

its original meaning. Blavatsky discusses the significance of the swastika in occultic worldview

at length on page 433 of the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine:*

> When the Heavenly man (or Logos) first assumed the form of the Crown†
> (Kether) and identified himself with Sephira, he caused seven splendid lights to
> emanate from it (the Crown)," which made in their totality ten ; so, the Brahmâ-
> Prajâpati, once he became separated from, yet identical with Vâch, caused the
> seven Rishis, the seven Manus or Prajâpatis to issue from that crown. In
> Exotericism one will always find 10 and 7, of either Sephiroth or Prajâpati ; in
> Esoteric rendering always 3 and 7, which yield also 10. Only when divided in the
> manifested sphere into 3 and 7, they form (illustration of a circle with a single
> vertical line) the androgyne, and (a symbol of the traditional swastika) or the
> figure X manifested and differentiated.[60]

In this passage, Blavatsky is also reinterpreting the swastika as being a union of human

and divine, and in doing so she ascribes the pantheistic view of Hinduism to human evolution.

Blavatsky's take on this is that the swastika therefore becomes the ultimate symbol of the man-

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[58] T.K. Nakagaki, *The Buddhist Swastika and Hitler's Cross* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2018): 87.

[59] Nakagaki, 43.

[60] Helena Pretrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine, Vol. I - Cosmogenesis* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company LTD, 1888):433.

god, something which German *völkisch* occultists would notice later to advance their own racial

ideologies that would be coopted into Nazism. Blavatsky elaborates more on this on page 43 of

the same text, noting that the swastika was moving in a direction that would make it a symbol of

human evolution, thus the merging of Eastern pantheism and Western Darwinism:

> The Secret Doctrine teaches the progressive development of everything, worlds as well as atoms; and this stupendous development has neither conceivable beginning nor imaginable end. Our " Universe " is only one of an infinite number of Universes, all of them " Sons of Necessity," because links in the great Cosmic chain of Universes, each one standing in the relation of an effect as regards its predecessor, and being a cause as regards its successor.[61]

As will be seen later, these ideas gained a lot of appeal and interest from the more

extreme German radical nationalists and *völkisch* groups that contributed much to Nazism, and at

its core was this image of the sun rolling in a progressive direction that was captured in the form

of a swastika. Therefore, the evolution of humans was connected to the progressive reincarnation

karmic cycle by Blavatsky.

This was also evident in the way she elaborated upon how human evolution happened

through a variety of "root races," and indeed, she was the first to use the term "Aryan" in a way

that the Nazis would do so later. This mention of the term "Aryan" is found in the second

volume of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine:*

> The Aryan race was born and developed in the far north, though after the sinking of the continent of Atlantis its tribes emigrated further south into Asia. Hence Prometheus is son of Asia, and Deukalion, his son, the Greek Noah—he who created men out of the stones of mother the sons of cœlus and terra. 769 earth—is called a northern Scythe, by Lucian, and Prometheus is made the brother of Atlas and is tied down to Mount Caucasus amid the Snows.[62]

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[61] Ibid., 43.

[62] Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine Vol. II -Anthropogenesis* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company LTD, 1888) :768-769

It is this concept that many German nationalists and occultists would develop and would identify themselves as this "Aryan Race" from the far north, and the original homeland of this "Aryan" people would be called by these individuals "Thule," hence the name of an occultic society that would come along in the early 20th century based on these concepts, which as will be seen were refined by Austrian occultists Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels. As Eric Kurlander notes, it is highly possible that the ideas that Blavatsky elaborates in *The Secret Doctrine* were co-opted and given a political dimension by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and Walther Wust, both of whom studied the same material as Blavatsky. Hauer and Wust both advanced a variation of Indo-Aryan neo-pagan religious thinking and were somewhat instrumental in connecting this Eastern mysticism to the blood-and-soil theories that were developed by the *völkisch* movements and later incorporated into Nazi ideology[63]. As for the swastika, it was appropriated as early as the 1910s, and German Social Darwinists such as Ernst Krause in his 1891 book *Twiskoland* called this symbol "uniquely Aryan."[64]   A Thulist and dentist in the early 1920s, Friedrich Krohn, is considered solely responsible for introducing the symbol to the early Nazi Party, and he also developed the earliest version of the Nazi "Blood Flag," which Hitler later refined and modified.[65]  The reversal of the direction of the swastika then was also noted by Krohn, in that the left-facing variation of it was a symbol of good luck, while the right facing variation symbolized annihilation. This therefore intimately connects the symbolism of the

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[63] Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017): 185.

[64] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012): 188.

[65] Ibid.

swastika with Blavatsky's theories on "root races" and the evolution of an "Aryan" race that would encompass the pinnacle of human evolution.

Although Blavatsky was in some ways racist in her thinking, she would not be synonymous with the Nazis by any measure. However, her writings and ideas would be avidly adopted by German occultic nationalists and thus would shape the racial ideology of what would eventually become the Nazi Party. In doing so, these same nationalists would also co-opt the swastika as the symbol of their ideology.

**B. Von List, Liebenfels, and Fritsch – Early Occultic Influences that Shaped German Ethno-Nationalism**

While Blavatsky represented a general trend in occultism in the late 19th century in Europe, she also became the inspiration for a collection of German nationalist occultists who appropriated many of her writings regarding the "root races" and the evolution of a quasi-divine perfect human species called "Aryan."   The first group of these are collectively known as *völkisch* movement, and their influence is often tied into that of other German and Austrian occultists whom they either held up as mentors or were part of the movement themselves.

The *völkisch* ideology takes its name from the Germanic name for "people," and is also cognate with the English word "folk" and is pronounced the same way. While not a unified movement, there were many things that *völkisch* proponents held in common – a pantheistic environmentalism, the "blood and soil" mythos, and a rabid nationalism that eschewed anything that was non-German. These ideas would later be incorporated and absorbed into Nazism, and at their root they were inherently paganistic as far as religious identity or spirituality were concerned. At the root of this, *völkisch* identity could then be codified as being individuals who were bound together by the organic unity of blood, and effectively transformed into a biological

and racial community.[66]  This combination of race-based nationalism and ecological identity led to its embrace by a number of significant German and Austrian occultists, including Guido von List, Jorge Lanz von Liebenfels, and Theodor Fritsch.

Guido von List (1848- 1919) was a prominent Austrian occultist and writer who more or less invented his own religious system called "Ariosophy."  Borrowing heavily from Blavatsky's concepts and then framing those within the *völkisch* ideology with which he is often identified, von  List spent much effort extolling the Germanic race as the most evolved of all humankind, and thus deserved to be "purified" of other "racial contamination" to be truly what it was supposed to be. Borrowing from Blavatsky's "root race" discourse in *The Secret Doctrine,* von List essentially espouses the idea that while the Germanic race evolves, others devolve, as a sort of devolution:

> But between animal and human there exists a chasm that cannot be bridged and over which animals cannot pass, for humans did not evolve out of the animal world, but rather it is often the other way around as unfortunately many species of animals are descended from humans by means of unnatural hybridizations.[67]

It was this sort of thinking which shaped Hitler's views later on, combined with the eugenics movement which gave a scientific veneer to the fact that it was justifiable to exterminate "lesser races" for the good of the "master race," as the former were devolved so much that they would threaten the survival of the latter. Again, to reiterate, von List based this view on the writings of Helena Blavatsky, in adding a racial/nationalist dimension to her ideas.

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[66] Mark Bassin, "The *Volkisch* Movement, the Nazis, and the Legacy of *Geopolitik,"* in *How Green Were the Nazis – Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich,* ed. Franz Josef Bruggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 206.

[67] Guido von List, English translation by Stephen A Flowers, *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk* (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2005), 26

This view also synchronized with the *Völkisch* ideas of "blood and soil," and in eradicating

"lesser races" then one also would preserve the environment.

Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) was a former Catholic monk who sought in his

extensive writings to frame this Theosophic/pagan variation of German nationalism into

terminology that borrowed from his Christian past. To read Liebenfels' works one would get the

impression that he was a Biblical scholar, as Biblical references were peppered throughout many

of his writings, including his publication *Ostara.* In his 1905 book *Theozoology,* Liebenfels

enunciates a rather eccentric theory that borrows from both Blavatsky and from Darwinian

evolution, in that he believes that hermaphrodism (the possession of both male and female

anatomical traits) was a type of evolution that would be endemic to the "ascended race" of

humankind, which he believes is the Germanic people:

> Loki is called the "child- bearing feminine," as generally, as far as I can judge, the pure blond Germanic race has the greatest inclination to hermaphroditism. It is illustrative that the Saxon code of law [Sachsenspiegel], meant for pure-raced northern Germany contains its own legal measure concerning the "Allzuviel"(hermaphrodites). An especially unusual custom surrounding the crib of a manchild speaks further concerning the one-time existence of authentic bilateral hermaphrodites. In some regions upon the birth of a child the father has to lay down and act as if he had borne the child. Additionally it must be noted that there are really lactating men (Klaatsch Entw. d. Menscheng. 62)… The gods slumber in bestialized human bodies, but the day is coming when they will rise up again. We were electric, we will be electric, to be electric and to be divine is the same thing! By means of the electric eye primitive man was omniscient, through inner electrical power they were omnipotent. The omniscient and omnipotent has the right to call itself God![68]

This excerpt from Liebenfels contains a few interesting things. First, the idea of an

"evolved race" that would transcend gender differences is strikingly similar to what homosexual

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[68] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology, or the Study of the Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (English Translation) (New York: Europa House, 2004): 49-50.

activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1865-1925) called his "Third Sex Theory," meaning that those with homosexual tendencies were "evolving" into a "third sex."[69]   Ulrichs would have another influence on the Nazi movement unrelated to the occult, as there was a tendency towards homosexual behavior among many early Nazis, although that would be the subject of a whole different discussion.[70]   Other themes in this excerpt are reminiscent of Blavatsky's "root race" discussions noted earlier, as well as the "electrical power" imagery being a sort of allusion to the *vril* substance in some ways that was discussed earlier – it would be easy, for example, for a Nazi in the 1930s who read Liebenfels and then was exposed to *vril* mythology to conclude that they refer to the same idea. In Liebenfels' writings, a convergence of several eclectic ideas seems to be in a process of solidification. The work of Liebenfels therefore answers a fundamental question. It provided a bridge for the early *völkisch* nationalists to couch principles that were clearly of occultic origin in Christian language, thus making the message more palatable later to the German public as Hitler and the Nazis ascended power. Despite some of the liberal and secularizing trends in Germany in the late 19th century, the Germans by and large as a people still espoused a Judeo-Christian worldview. This meant that outright occultism would have had little appeal to the average German citizen on the street. However, occultism was openly embraced by the more upper-class German intelligentsia who had sympathies with radical nationalism, and it was also readily embraced by the more countercultural elements of the *Wandervögel.* This naturally meant that when the Nazis started to emerge on the political scene, they needed to reach the "common man" on the street due to the fact they originated as the product of upper-

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[69] Hubert C. Kennedy, "The 'Third Sex Theory' of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs," *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, no. 1/2 (1980/81): 103.

[70] For more about this, it is recommended to read Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika* (Springfield, MA: 1995) as well as Samuel Igra's work, *Germany's National Vice* (London, 1945).

class occultists – this is a reason why Drexler originally conceived of his "Political Worker's Circle" with Karl Harrer, the earliest incarnation of what would become the National Socialist Party, in 1918 due to the fact he essentially saw the Thule Society itself as too introspective and thus insufficient to carry out a political agenda[71].  In its early stages, the National Socialist Party was still trying to find ways to create a narrative, and in many cases that is why it resorted to the street brawls of the *Sturmabteilung* because there were still many elements of the ideology that did not resonate with most Germans. However, after the 1923 Putsch in Munich, while Hitler was confined at Landsberg prison, a more subtle pitch would be crafted by Hitler and his future deputy Rudolf Hess which would resonate with the general public, and this led to the publication of *Mein Kampf,* which was Hitler's ultimate manifesto. Much of Hitler's ideology was based on a sanitized occultic worldview he had absorbed from reading Liebenfels's *Ostara* brochures, and it could be argued that Hitler was inspired by Liebenfels to clothe the more radical aspects of Nazi ideology in terms that would seem "Christian" on the outset. This was the first step that Hitler and the Nazis would use to dilute the more overt occultism and also appeal to the basic German convictions of family, tradition, and other proclivities in a language they would understand yet with a concept that they would have opposed had it been more transparent. However, it  would be taken even further later as the Nazi Party leaders who had originally been influenced by Liebenfels' writings would take them to an ultimate extreme.

A third occultic individual worthy of note would be Theodor Fritsch (1852-1933). Fritsch was a German journalist who would add a virulently antisemitic dimension to the legacies of both von List and Liebenfels, although both were also antisemitic. Fritsch would also be a major influence upon Hitler and the Nazis in that his antisemitic worldview would be a catalyst for

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[71] Waite, 132.

justification of the Holocaust and other atrocities later. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke notes that Fritsch was not overtly paganistic, but believed that Christianity was a foreign religion that was alien to "Aryandom," which like List and Liebenfels he defined by Germanic traditions within a pagan context.[72]  Writing under the pseudonym Ferdinand Roderich-Stoltheim, in 1927 Fritsch authored the book *The Riddle of the Jew's Success,* which more or less sought to separate and "Aryanize" Christianity from its Jewish roots for the same reason – citing the writings of historian and economist Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Fritsch more or less strips Jesus of Jewish identity, calling Him instead a "heathen Gallilean,"[73] and he essentially separates the Trinity by declaring God and Jesus to be separate and opposing entities, a Gnostic/pagan dualistic concept called "demiurge theology." This idea was expanded by Fritsch's reading of Werner Sombart's 1913 text *The Jew and Modern Capitalism.*[74] This is also a concept that is noted in Blavatsky's Theosophic writings, as she co-opts the Eastern ideas of karma into a dualistic conflict of forces that play into the evolution of "lesser races" to "ascended masters."  Therefore, although Fritsch is not as overtly occultic or pagan as are von List and Liebenfels, he nonetheless does espouse a similar worldview in which the pre-Christian paganism of the German nation is somehow superior to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the latter must be eradicated so that the former can be resurrected. In doing so, Christian language is co-opted – in the case of Liebenfels due to his Church background – or it is simply reinterpreted, as Fritsch does in *The Riddle of the Jew's Success.* This will be a pattern that Hitler will capitalize on later in his policies also, given that

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[72] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York:  New York University Press, 1992): 124.

[73] F. Roderick-Stoltheim, English translation by Capel Pownell (Theodor Fritsch), *The Riddle of the Jew's Success* (Leipzig: Hammer-Verlag, 1927): 70.

[74] Werner Sombart, and M. Epstein, trans, *The Jew and Modern Capitalism* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1913): 220-221.

Hitler's appeal to "Providence" for instance is his attempt to re-create God into a more Germanic/pagan image.

The early German occultists such as List and Liebenfels were not necessarily either part of nor were they identified with organized occultic movements – rather, they took the nationalistic ideas of the *völkisch* movement, framed them in an occultic worldview borrowed heavily from Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, and created a whole new religious movement of occultic societies, most notably the Thule Society.

## C. Sebottendorf, Eckhart and the Thule Society

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, the followers of von List and Liebenfels began to formally contemplate forming societies that promoted their views. The "religion" founded by followers of these two influential *völkisch* occultists was called "Ariosophy," and the word itself was a portmanteau of the words "Aryan" and "Theosophy."  One of the more prominent groups that was created from the disciples of von List and Liebenfels was called the German Order, or *Germanenorden.* The leader of this occultic society was Hermann Pohl, and although the initial lodge of the *Germanenorden* was established in Berlin, it made an impact in Bavaria and by 1918 had a membership of over 1500 members.[75]  At around the same time, the Munich chapter of the *Germanenorden* assumed another name, the Thule Society. "Thule" was the mythical northern homeland of the German race, which was taken from Blavatsky's ideas and given a *Völkisch* interpretation, and thus inspired the new name. One of the major figures who exerted leadership in the new Thule Society was an eccentric German occultist and mystic named Rudolf von Sebottendorf.

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[75] Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2019): 74.

Rudolf Sebottendorf (1875-1945) was born Adam Alfred Rudolf Glauer in the Prussian province of Silesia (now Saxony) to a locomotive engineer and his wife. Sebottendorf joined the *Germanenorden* in Munich sometime around 1916, the chapter there having been founded in 1914 by Wilhelm Rohmeder.[76] Sebottendorf's involvement came largely through the recruitment of Hermann Pohl, and he eventually became the major figure in what would become the Thule Society later. He would also be one of the benefactors of Anton Drexler, a Munich machinist, who would organize and found what would be the Nazi Party as a political wing of the Thule Society in 1920. Upon the establishment of the Nazi Party, several members of the Thule Society, notably Dietrich Eckhart, Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolf Hess, and Hans Frank, would become prominent Nazis later. Although Sebottendorf was influential in aiding the rise of the Nazis however, in 1933 his attempts to revive the Thule Society in Munich were rebuffed by Hitler's new regime and he was briefly imprisoned in 1934. Upon his release, he emigrated to Turkey and converted to Islam, and remained there until he committed suicide in 1945 by drowning in the Bosporus.[77]

Sebottendorf was significant in Hitler's rise in that he took some credit for bringing Hitler's Nazi Party to power, and in his 1933 book *Before Hitler Came,* he states the following in regard to Hitler's rise to power:

> It was Thule people to whom Hitler first came and it was Thule people who first united themselves with Hitler. The armament of the coming Führer consisted, besides the Thule itself, of the German Workers' Society, founded in the Thule Society by brother Karl Harrer and the German-Socialist Party led by Hans Georg Grassinger, whose organ was the Munchener Beobachter, later the Völkische

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[76] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012): 66.

[77] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1985): 152.

Beobachter. From these three sources Hitler created the National Socialist
German Worker's Party.[78]

This was one of the major claims made by Sebottendorf that more than likely caused

friction with Hitler when the latter came to power in 1933, as by that time Hitler was not very

enthusiastic about giving credit to others for Nazi accomplishments. Nonetheless, Sebottendorf

did have some influence in the creation of the Nazi Party, but the individual who groomed Hitler

for leadership and was the more visible occultic link between German esotericism as embodied

by Thule and the Nazis was Dietrich Eckhart.

Dietrich Eckhart (1868-1923) was a German journalist who had a long involvement with

the *völkisch* movement, including its more occultic aspects as Eckhart was an occultist himself.

He was also one of the prominent Thulists who joined the Nazi Party after its formation in 1920,

and also participated in the failed Beer Hall *Putsch* in 1923, dying a few months later. As the

primary mentor of Hitler in the early years of the Nazi Party, Eckhart was keen to remind his

young protégé of his influence, and he took a religious interest in converting younger men,

particularly recent war veterans like Hitler, into the party. As an occultist, Eckhart also

envisioned himself as a prophet of sorts, and in 1919 he wrote in a quasi-apocalyptic fashion the

following prediction:

> Signs and wonders are seen—from the flood a new world will be born. The
> liberation of humanity from the curse of gold stands before the door! Salvation is
> to befall our Germany, not misery and poverty. No other people on Earth are so
> thoroughly capable of fulfilling the Third Reich than ours! Veni Creator spiritus![79]

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[78] Jackson Spielvogel and David Redles, "Hitler's Racial Ideology: Content and Occult Sources," The Simon
Wiesenthal Center Museum, https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-
resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-3/annual-3-chapter-9.html. (Accessed May 1, 2022).

[79] David Redles, "Winning Armagedden: Dietrich Eckhart and the Religious Origins of the Holocaust," *Library of
Social Science Guest Newsletter,* August 4, 2015,
https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/newsletter/posts/2015/2015-08-04-Redles2.html.

In relation to this quasi-eschatological emphasis, Eckhart viewed himself as a sort of Germanic John the Baptist in search of a "Messiah," and believed Hitler to be the person for that role based upon a quote he made in 1919:

> (Germany needs) a guy who can stand the rattle of a machine gun, who won't fill his pants in fear. I can't use an officer; the people don't respect them any longer. Best of all would be a worker who's got his mouth in the right place.[80]

Eckhart the following year would utter a "prophecy" that he later believed alluded to Hitler in his paper *Auf gut Deutsch,* which is as follows:

> A Cincinnatus was called from his plow to save his Fatherland…whether it will be a soldier, a farmer, or a worker who will come to lead us doesn't matter. All he needs is a soul – a bold, selfless German soul…Do not ask where: believe![81]

These messianic affirmations fed Hitler's own messianic delusion which had been inspired by his early exposure to Wagner's *Parsifal,* and much of that was rooted in the lore and mythology of pre-Christian Teutonic paganism. Eckhart's own occultism, coupled by his penchant for abusing alcohol and narcotics, also contributed to Hitler's fantasies of grandeur. In essence, what Eckhart's contribution consisted of was transforming Hitler from the "messiah" of *völkisch* lore to basically the focal point of a religious/political ideology built around such lore that Hitler capitalized on later. Although Eckhart would die before Hitler achieved power, his influence would shape not only Hitler's self-identification, but also the fate of Germany and indeed the world. As noted however, Hitler was an opportunist, and would only use what he felt was profitable to his own aspirations, and thus once he had consolidated power in  Germany by 1941, occultism had served its usefulness and would be outlawed. This even to an extent

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[80] Luhrssen, 173.

[81] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler – The Psychopathic God* (New York, Basic Books, 1977): 251.

included Eckhart's legacy, although Hitler still warmly acknowledged him as a mentor. Eckart

was also one of the first of an earlier group of German occultists to also become a member of the

Nazi Party, and thus was an important link between early *völkisch* occultism of von List and

Liebenfels and the rise of the Nazis themselves. In the emergence of the Third Reich, several

Nazis would still possess occultic convictions, and some later occultists such as Karl Wiligut and

Savitri Devi would still exert some influence despite the official divorcement of Nazi Party

political structure from occultic societies.

**D. Nazi Occultism During the Third Reich**

Although Hitler would eventually take a strict stand against occultic societies in the Third

Reich, many of his own officials did have open occultic convictions and practiced them openly.

One of the most obvious was Rudolf Hess, who as he aged would engage in trying to cultivate

clairvoyance, and he also consulted astrologers regularly – his ill-fated trip to Scotland at the

beginning of World War II is often attributed to psychic readings he received prior to embarking

on the journey. Another obvious occultist already discussed within Nazi circles was Dietrich

Eckart, but Eckart had died some time before the Nazis came to power in Germany. A third Nazi

leader who was into occultic practices and also a member of the Thule Society prior to the Nazis

was Alfred Rosenberg, the "official party philosopher" of the Nazi regime. Unlike many top

Nazis, Rosenberg elaborated upon his views in a 700-page book he wrote which was entitled *The

Myth of the Twentieth Century,* which proved to be so eclectic in its structure that even Hitler

confessed to not being able to fully comprehend it.[82]  Despite the book being somewhat a

disorganized hodge-podge of racial theory and other miscellaneous observations, Rosenberg

does provide some insight into his own occultic viewpoints by noting that much of the pre-

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[82] William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984): 183.

Christian German paganism he elevates to a virtue was rooted in Eastern religions (echoing

Theosophic ideas via his Thule involvement) and thus Rosenberg views the Judeo-Christian

tradition with some contempt, as this excerpt demonstrates:

> Indian monism was actually born of a sharp dualism: the soul alone was regarded
> as essential: matter, as a delusion which is to be overcome. A creation of matter,
> even from nothing, would have appeared to every Aryan Indian as blasphemous
> materialism. In the Indian myth of creation, a similar mood prevails as in Hellas
> and Germania: chaos orders itself to a will, under a law, but a world never arises
> from nothing, as the Syrian African desert fathers taught and Rome took over with
> its demon Jehovah.[83]

Rosenberg was not alone in this, as many Nazis shared a similar ambivalent attitude

about Christianity, more than likely in part to its roots in Judaic heritage. An anonymous author,

writing in a booklet published by the Theodor Fritsch Society in the 1930s, makes even bolder

statements regarding the anti-Christian sentiment that was encouraged among the SS in

particular, and it exalts paganism as a viable alternative. This is also echoed in the early German

*völkisch* novelist Gustav Frenssen (1863-1945), who rejected a Christian clerical vocation in

order to advance the superiority of the German "race," and in doing so he also advocated for a

pure, German neopagan belief system that was necessary to reunite nature and religion.[84]

Frenssen followed a school of thought called *Heimatkust,* a radically nationalist form of race-

based regionalism that was embraced by many in the *völkisch* movement as well. The same

pamphlet also declares Hitler to be a sort of "messiah," and in rejecting Christianity the author

evokes an event where the pagan Germans overtook the Romans in Teutoburg Forest by making

the Roman corpses a human sacrifice of sorts:

> Hence no reformation helps us. We build no house on soft ground. What we need
> is a new order in head and limbs. We want a faith that burns from German depth

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[83] Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the 20ᵗʰ Century(English Edition)* (Plano: TX: Black Kite Publishing, 2020): 197.

[84] Guy Tourlamaine, *Volkisch Writers and National Socialism: A Study of Right-Wing Political Culture in Germany, 1890-1960* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014):41

of essence, from German heart. A faith that fits the German like the Teutoburg Forest, like the North Sea and the quiet heath.[85]

Another key Nazi leader, Heinrich Himmler, went to another extreme by organizing his SS as a quasi-religious organization. Although Himmler borrowed from some of the more ceremonial aspects of Catholic tradition, the dogma of this new faith he instituted was at its root based in the occultism of the earlier *völkisch*-Theosophical variety, and to implement this new religious aspect of his elite SS organization, Himmler recruited noted German occultist Karl Maria Wiligut. Wiligut is of significance that he bears more examination into his views, which were published.

Karl Maria Wiligut (1866-1946) was an Austrian-born occultist who exerted a significant influence over Himmler's own occultic sentiments. Like many who embraced a more romantic occult view of history, Wiligut claimed descent from the chief of the Teutonic pagan deity pantheon, Wotan – however, he considered Wotan to be a superhuman personage rather than deity himself.[86] Wotanism, along with the more Theosophic-influenced Ariosophy, were two major strains of occultism accepted by both the earlier *völkisch* movement as well as the later Nazis who subscribed to occultic worldviews. Wiligut embraced a form of this, and it was influential as well in the various ceremonies – as well as the construction of Wewelsburg Castle, which was the official SS headquarters during the war – that he composed for Himmler to be utilized at SS events. Wiligut was introduced to Himmler by a mutual friend, Richard Anders, in 1933, and although he was in a mental asylum until 1927, Himmler accepted him into the SS not

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[85] Author Unknown, *God and Folk: A Soldierly Affirmation Translated from the Third Reich Original* (unknown address: Wewelsburg Archives, 2013):13

[86] Stephen E. Flowers and Michael Moynihan, *The Secret King: The Myth and Reality of Nazi Occultism* (Waterbury Center, VT: Dominion Press, 2007):61-62.

long after their introduction.[87]  Wiligut therefore was responsible for many of the quasi-religious trappings of Himmler's SS.

The phenomenon of Wewelsburg Castle needs to be given more examination at this point given Wiligut is a pivotal figure in the "consecration" of the castle as a sort of "SS Vatican." Located in the District of Paderborn in western Germany, Wewelsburg is a 17th-century castle commissioned to be constructed by Dietrich von Furstenberg (1546-1618), the prince/bishop of Paderborn who wanted it as a hunting lodge. In the 19th century, it was under the possession of the Prussian government and served intermittently as both a museum and a youth hostel before falling into disrepair and remained unoccupied until Himmler took an interest in it in 1933.[88] The triangular-shaped structure was overhauled and expanded by Himmler over the course of several years leading up to World War II and under the auspices of the SS's Race and Settlement Office, this was overseen by Manfred von Knobelsdorff, head architect Hermann Bartels, and Walter Franzius. It was also SS archeologist Wilhelm Jordan who did the research to establish the Wewelsburg site as a sort of "holy place" based on the pantheistic *Blut und Boden* ideology which Franzius emphasized.[89]  Two *völkisch* occultists, Wiligut and Otto Rahn, inserted Holy Grail legend and mythologies into Wewelsburg's identity, although conventional scholarship refuted these esoteric notions.[90]  However, due to the occultic nature of some of Wiligut's and Rahn's influences, this has led to much speculation surrounding Wewelsburg and thus the reason a discussion about it is merited at this juncture.

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[87] Ibid., 48.

[88] Kirsten John-Stucke, "Himmler's Plans and Activities in Wewelsburg," in Kirsten John-Stucke and Daniela Siepe, eds., *Myths of Wewelsburg Castle: Facts and Fiction* (Leiden: Brill Group, 2022): 1.

[89] John-Stucke, 4-5.

[90] John-Stucke, 7.

While Himmler himself dabbled in occultic practices and even embraced some things from earlier *völkisch* occultists which gave a backdrop for the mythological worldview that animated National Socialism, in the past several decades this has led to a huge volume of speculative and conspiratorial literature that focuses on Wewelsburg in particular. Occultic symbolism – including runes, and the "Black Sun" motif seen in prominent areas of the castle – was definitely incorporated into Himmler's remodeling of the site. However, for the most part the SS it was to serve as a de facto headquarters for was not in itself overtly occult, although some individual SS personnel did hold to occultic beliefs. The whole "Black Sun" motif in particular has found a resurgence in recent decades among neo-Nazi groups in Europe and the US, particularly serving as a substitute for the outlawed swastika in Germany and other countries. It has therefore become the substance of conspiratorial fiction, such as that of Dan Brown.[91] Most of the current lore about Wewelsburg could actually be attributed to post-war neo-Nazis such as the Landig Group, who are largely responsible for making many of the ideological links between National Socialism and earlier *völkisch* occultists such as Liebenfels and codifying esotericism as part of Nazi thought.[92] While the framework was there from the earliest days of National Socialism, the Landig theorists attempted the first esoteric interpretation of Nazi ideology based on earlier sources, and naturally their writings became the basis for more conspiratorial literature such as that of Peter Levenda and Michael Fitzgerald. This does not in any way negate the fact that a pantheistic mythological worldview foundated Nazi racial policies but it has presented challenges to more orthodox historians who research the topic. At the central

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[91] Frank Huismann, "Of Flying Discs and Secret Societies: Wewelsburg and the "Black Sun" in Esoteric Writings of Conspiracy Theory," in John-Stucke and Siepe, eds., *Myths of Wewelsburg Castle,* 189.

[92] Huismann, 192.

point of Landig's convictions is the phenomenon of Wewelsburg Castle, and thus one reason this has become a topic of discussion in recent decades.

Toward the end of the war, another noted occultist also was impacted by Nazi ideology, and expressed it in the form of racial identity being the criteria for "spiritual ascendance." Savitri Devi (1905-1982; born Maximilia Julia Portas) was a French-born occultist of Greek heritage became a Nazi sympathizer and spy who ironically had never entered Germany until well after the war. An unrepentant Nazi sympathizer for her entire life, Devi wrote many of her reflections, including *Gold in the Furnace,* after the war's end. In examining Devi's occultism, she was essentially a Theosophist who embraced ideas which were largely held by the pre-Nazi *völkisch* movements. She possessed a very anti-Christian position in her writings, deifying Hitler as a god-man and also emphasizing the swastika. Devi's writing about the swastika includes many synonymous terms for it, notably the "Black Sun," a motif that refers to its color as well as its direction in art. In writing about these sentiments, Devi notes the following in her book *Gold In the Furnace:*

> The religion of the reborn Aryans must naturally have much in common with that of the pre-Christian European North, and with that, of similar origin and spirit, kept alive to this day, in India, in the tradition of the Vedas. It must be, before all, the religion of a healthy, proud, and self-reliant people, accustomed to fight, ready to die, but, in the meantime, happy to live, and sure to live forever, in their undying race; a religion centred around the worship of Life and Light—around the cult of heroes, the cult of ancestors, and the cult of the Sun, source of all joy and power on earth. Indeed, it must be a religion of joy and of power—and of love also; not of that morbid love for sickly and sinful "mankind" at the expense of far more admirable Nature, but of love for all living beauty: for the woods and for the beasts; for healthy children; for one's faithful comrades in every field of activity; for one's leaders and one's gods; above all, for the supreme God, the Life force personified in the Sun, the "Heat-and-Light-within-the-Disk," to quote the expressive words of the greatest Sun-worshipper of Antiquity. The religion of the regenerate Aryans must be one in which the Christian idea of "conception in sin" gives way to that of conception in honour and joy within the noble race, the only

"sin" being (along with all forms of cowardice and faithlessness) the sin of shameful breeding—the deadly sin against the race.[93]

Savitri Devi's writings come along long after the *völkisch* ideology of von List, Liebenfels, and other earlier German and Austrian occultists, but she does reflect in a more summary way the views they would have espoused – that there is a noble "master race" which is identified by the term "Aryan" but in reality is the Nordic/German race, the concept of the swastika being symbolic of the life-force the sun brings, and the inherent pantheism that characterized even much of Hitler's own personal convictions.  And, as Devi was more visible after the fall of the Third Reich and the end of World War II, she was not subject to Hitler's ban on occultic societies and activities that ensued in 1941, coincidental with Hess's exit from Germany in his ill-fated "peace mission" that was inspired by astrological forecasts. In summary, Savitri Devi may have had a greater impact on Nazi occultism in the post-Third Reich world than she did during the Third Reich, and some neo-pagan and occultic elements of the "alt-right" today still hold her writings in high esteem.

**Conclusion**

In assessing as to how the occultic societies in Germany and Austria informed the Nazi worldview, it is important to turn back to the central narrative conviction of the Nazi worldview first and examine how this fit into the questions posed. The occultic worldview that was adopted by the Nazi leadership was a means of attempting to establish a narrative for explanation of German-"Aryan" origins, and perhaps the only reason occultism was adapted by both National Socialism and the earlier *völkisch* groups that preceded it was that it provided this narrative. In answering the question "who are we?" the occultic societies essentially did two things. First, it

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[93] Savitri Devi, *Gold in the Furnace* (Calcutta: self-published, 1952): 34.

provided a way to divorce Germany and Austria from Christian faith. For many of these occultists, Christianity was viewed as "foreign" largely due to its root in Judaic tradition, and thus it was not seen as exclusively "German." Ironically, however, *völkisch* occultists traded one "foreign" religious influence for another, as much of the substance of the occultism that was adopted had its roots in the religions of East Asia. Secondly, it provided a more noble and fantastic narrative to German exceptionalism in that it essentially elevated the "pure" German to the status of deity, and it was aided in this by also borrowing from Darwinian evolution, which was seen as the mechanism by which the "superior" race evolved into "godhood." This is crucial in understanding the more racial aspects of Nazi thinking as well as that of its preceding *völkisch* influences. In order to provide the narrative, the question of identity would thus be integral in order to give some underpinning to the whole scheme. It also related to the question *"where are we?"* due to the fact that in many cases, Germany was seen as the center of Europe, and its origins were given mythological status drawing from an odd fusion of Norse mythology and the esoteric ideas of Atlantis which were propagated by many leading 19th century occultists in Europe. *Völkisch* ideology merged these two concepts in such a way as to ascribe a mythical origin to Germanic identity based on a mythical "homeland" in the far north, which was called by various names such as Hyperboria, Thule, Valhalla, etc. The narrative then would address the issues of why Germans were not the "god-race" at present ("what's wrong?") as well as finding ways to reclaim it ("what's the remedy?). In summary then, the occultic/mythological cosmology of individuals such as Blavatsky created a "story" of Germanic origins which lent an air of incommunicability to German identity which drove the more extreme aspects of Nazi ideology later. Therefore, occultism proved a creative vehicle for German nationalism in its more radical aspects.

Within this chapter, two important questions were explored. One, were the Nazis themselves occultic, or did they assimilate ideas from occultic sources? Second, who were the primary individuals and groups that influenced the Nazis in terms of occultic ideas? As these questions were addressed and answered throughout, it is noted that there were stages in which occultic concepts were incorporated into the Nazi political platform and ideology. These ranged from a primary original source of said convictions, notably Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society in the late 19ᵗʰ century. Blavatsky's views then found fertile ground in Germany and Austria among radical nationalists who identified as occultists, notably the *völkisch* movement as well as personalities such as Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels. In time, their disciples became more organized into occultic societies such as the *Germanenorden* and later the Thule Society. The National Socialist Party emerged from these circles due to the fact Anton Drexler, Karl Harrer, and others did not think that esotericism by itself was sufficient to create political change, and the Nazis themselves would eventually distance from these occultic groups and persons. However, they still nonetheless had occultists in their own membership who utilized occultic principles to motivate aspects of their agenda such as a nationalistic racism and the antisemitism that would eventually culminate in the Holocaust. They largely did this by merging occultic mythology with Darwinian science and strains of philosophy which corresponded to their agenda, aspects which will be explored in subsequent chapters. Therefore, the conclusion is that the Nazi Party itself was not *officially* occultic, but it was greatly influenced by some noted occultists in advancing its agenda. In turn, it would intersect with other aspects of the movement – political platforms, philosophical influence, and social policy – and thus would be instrumental in underscoring perhaps one of the most violent and race-based totalitarian political entities in history. The occultic background of many figures

and movements who were antecedents of the Nazis would also impact ethics as well. As far as

the occultic influence would be an underpinning, it would also manifest in the social policies by

incorporating eugenics and other concepts as will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Chapter 3**

**Scientific Answers to Central Narrative Convictions: Eugenics and Racial Politics and their Evolution in Nazi Ideology**

The social agenda of the Nazi Party was driven by two things. One was the race-based worldview that was partially drawn from occultic sources that gave an esoteric/mythological view of "Aryan exceptionalism," as noted in the earlier chapter. The second was the acceptance and application of Darwinian ideology on a social scale, the eugenics movement. A third factor – homosexuality – was tied to both of these in an odd fashion in that it had a complex relationship with National Socialism over the course of its evolution. These three areas will be the focus of this chapter.

In addressing these issues, it is important to understand that despite the aura of German nationalism that drove them, many of them did not originate in Germany, but were in many cases American and British constructs. However, some of the American and British Darwinian/eugenics thought that was adopted in Germany did appeal to a certain element in the German national consciousness. This was particularly true among the more radical nationalist movements in Germany beginning at the end of the 19th century. It somehow meshed well with the Theosophy-based occultism of individuals such as Lanz von Liebenfels and Guido von List, and it became a prominent aspect of the *völkisch* movement. The question to be explored is how these ideas took root in Germany, and how they were integrated into Nazi ideology and eventually would lead to catastrophic public policy as the Third Reich emerged.

In the context of this, what also will be examined is how the National Socialists adopted these scientific justifications to address their own central narrative convictions, in particular asking the questions "who are we?," "what's wrong?," and "what's the remedy?." In doing so, the National

Socialists would build upon earlier ideas by uniquely turning them into a political platform, and even later a national policy once they gained control of the Third Reich.

**Background and Origins**

The concepts of social Darwinism and eugenics actually predated Charles Darwin by a century. The earliest proponent of many of the ideas that would evolve into the eugenics movement was an Anglican clergyman by the name of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834). In the year 1798, Malthus published a volume entitled *An Essay on the Principle of Population,* and it was considered to be a precursor to the eugenics movement later. In a section of this work, Malthus proposes that the relief from misery of the lower classes would most mercifully be accomplished by their demise:

> Notwithstanding then, the institution of the poor laws in England, I think it will be allowed, that considering the state of the lower classes altogether, both in the town and in the country, the distresses which they suffer from the want of proper and sufficient food, from hard labor and unwholesome habitations, must operate as a constant check to incipient populations.[1]

Malthus represents here a type of population control that presaged eugenics by proposing that the less-desirable classes in society should not be helped and just allowed to die off to prevent an economic strain on civilization. The theory Malthus proposed would be one that others would expand upon later and narrow down to determine that certain "inferior races" should be dealt with in this way. It is also the genesis of what would later become justification for Margaret Sanger and other early abortion advocates to target certain populations for extensive propagation of abortion as an alternative to poverty, etc.

A second individual who presaged Darwin and contributed to what would become eugenics later was French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829). Lamarck is associated

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[1] Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principles of Population* (London: T. Johnson, 1798): 99

with the idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which in regard to human behavior

has been discredited by the modern study of epigenetics (the study of heritable traits not

determined by DNA sequencing).[2] In subsequent generations, this would be used by eugenicists

to determine, based also on solutions to the problem Malthus proposed, that certain "races" were

considered irreparably negative and thus would require some remedy to expel them from the

human genetic code in order to "perfect" human genes so that any 'impure" elements could be

extracted and eliminated. This would also play a pivotal role in early Nazi racial policies.

A third individual of note that merits discussion who also was a contemporary of Darwin

would be Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Spencer was a British political theorist who would first

advance the idea of 'social Darwinism" in that he proposed that Darwinian theory could apply to

areas outside of science. In his treatise *The Man Versus the State,* Spencer outlines the idea that

in order to guarantee the stability of the state, certain factors of instability (the disadvantaged)

must be dealt with for stability to be maintained. In Malthusian fashion, he targets the poor and

those he calls "aboriginal" in the following passage:

> No such nature as that which has filled Europe with millions of armed men, here
> eager for conquest and there for revenge; no such nature as that which prompts
> the nations called Christian to vie with one another in filibustering expeditions all
> over the world, regardless of the claims of aborigines, while their tens of
> thousands of priests of the religion of love look on approvingly; no such nature as
> that which, in dealing with weaker races, goes beyond the primitive rule of life for
> life, and for one life. takes many lives; no such nature, I say, can, by any device,
> be framed into a harmonious community. The root of all well-ordered social
> action is a sentiment of justice, which at once insists on personal freedom and is
> solicitous for the like freedom of others; and there at present exists but a very
> inadequate amount of this sentiment.[3]

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[2] Steven J. Gould, *The Study of Evolutionary Theory* (Harvard: Belknap Harvard, 2002): 170-197.

[3] Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State* (London: D. Appleton and Co., 1892): 77-78.

Spencer originated the phrase "survival of the fittest" after reading Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and then coined the phrase in his own 1864 book *Principles of Biology.* Spencer's whole thesis in both of these works, which he derived as much from Malthus as from Darwin, was that the pressure of subsistence must have a beneficial effect upon the human race, and he also incorporated Lamarck's earlier theory that inheritance of acquired characteristics is a means by which a species can originate.[4] Spencer's application and adaptation of Darwinian evolutionary ideas to the socio-political realm culminated in what is termed "Social Darwinism." It looked at the modeling of human society after the observation of animal groups. It therefore synthesized the earlier ideas of Malthus, Lamarck, and Darwin into a political ideology, which for its time was considered "conservative." In later chapters, this will be challenged as actually being more of an idea characteristic of the political Left rather than the Right, as it would be a foundational conviction for the secularism that marked the Age of Enlightenment.

**Darwin and Galton – Turning Scientific Theory into Racial Ideology**

The most radical shift in scientific theory emerged via the writings of naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882), in particular two notorious works he authored – *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). The most relevant aspect of Darwin's first book was that the subtitle was "Or the Preservation of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life." From the outset, there is an overtone of racial identity in Darwin's writings, and this would later be a justification for more radical elements such as the Nazis to enact policies based on "the science." In regard to this, Darwin believed that different races of human beings were essentially different species, and if they were "intercrossed" it could diminish the dominant race. He discusses this more at length in *On the Origin of the Species* when he writes the following:

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[4] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992): 39.

> Moreover, the possibility of making distinct races by crossing has been exaggerated. There can be no doubt that a race may be modified by occasional crosses, if aided by the careful selection of those individual mongrels, which present any desired character; but that a race could be obtained nearly intermediate between two extremely different races or species.[5]

There are three paradigm shifts in thinking that Richard Weikart notes resulted from the views that Darwin espoused in regard to race. First, due to the fact Darwin believed humans evolved from animals, it therefore is necessary to usurp the special position humanity held in creation according to traditional views. Second, the variations within species that Darwin proposed meant that biological inequality was a necessary aspect of evolution, and that the variations would themselves evolve into different species. Third, the whole "natural selection" idea Darwin advanced in *On The Origin of Species* would necessarily conclude that the elimination of "less fit" organisms was a beneficial progressive change[6]. Darwin himself explained this logic in the book:

> Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.[7]

Further, in *The Descent of Man,* Darwin proposes that the actual races of humanity are synonymous with sub-species, and he bases his criteria on the following four things:[8]

1. The amount of difference between two allied forms.

2. Whether or not the differences relate to few or many points of structure.

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[5] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species* (London: John Murray, 1859): 17

[6] Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004): 16-17.

[7] Darwin, 459.

[8] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: John Murray, 1901): 257.

3. Whether or not they are of physiological importance.

4. Whether or not they are constant.

Using these criteria, Darwin devotes a significant amount of the text in *the Descent of Man* to analyzing traits of different ethnicities in lieu of these criteria, and he on several occasions does use the terms "sub-species" and "race" interchangeably. Future students of Darwin's work would later attempt to elaborate this further to establish that certain "races" had more advantage than others, and thus via the process of natural selection, the "superior" races would then prevail over the "inferior" races. This type of ideology was utilized to give justification for slavery, as well as playing a role in later radically nationalist ideologies such as the *völkisch* movement in Germany and Austria that would precede the Nazis. The "advantage" of the "superior races" justified some theorists to advocate for measures to accelerate the process of natural selection, and one of the earliest movements to do this was the eugenics movement. The word "eugenics" is derived from two Greek words that translate together as "good birth," and is a form of selective breeding that seeks to "perfect" the "superior races" while limiting the propagation of "inferior stocks."  Its chief proponent was the British polymath Francis Galton (1822-1911), who was also a relative of Charles Darwin. In his most noted 1892 book *Hereditary Genius,* Galton takes the position that humanity has the power to direct its own evolution in the following passage:

> It follows that the human race has a large control over its future forms of activity,—far more than any individual has over his own, since the freedom of individuals is narrowly restricted by the cost, in energy, of exercising their wills.[9]

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[9] Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius – An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1892):360.

Like others of the time, Galton's ideas did not come from a vacuum, or even from his relative

Darwin (although he acknowledged Darwin's influence on his views). He also expanded upon

Thomas Malthus's earlier theories, as well as incorporating ideas from German physiologist

Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), who argued that intellectual and moral faculties were innate.[10]

Gall also was the originator of the pseudo-scientific discipline of phrenology, which determined

mental traits based on the contour of the skull. In C.W. Hufeland's analysis of Gall's theories

published in 1807, he gives a summary of Gall's ideas on this:

> There are also many phenomena in the history of man which oblige us to have
> recourse to a natural impulse or tendency to certain actions. There are instances in
> which an inclination to steal is found, which neither natural nor social wants could
> have generated. Affluent persons, nobles, and princes have felt this impulse. The
> most abandoned and profligate people have evinced a singular attachment and
> fidelity in their friendships. And in individuals are found the most astonishing
> inconsistencies of character: religious sentiment has been seen in a high degree
> united with gross immoralities, which imply contrary tendencies, in the same
> character.[11]

Galton would expand upon this by concluding that good lineage did not improve tainted

blood,[12] and in so doing, he relied on Gall's ideas regarding the structure of the brain. This would

logically assume that "bad blood" even was evident in good stock, and the next course of action

would be determining how to excise the "bad blood" from the DNA of otherwise noble stock.

Galton subscribed to an earlier theory proposed by German cellular biologist August Weisman,

who saw that a "germ plasm" was present in the DNA which was the cause of abhorrent traits in

individuals of certain classes and ethnicities and expounded upon this in his 1889 book *Natural*

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[10] Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 29.

[11] C. W. Hufeland, *Some Account of Dr. Gall's New Theory of Physiognomy, Founded Upon the Anatomy and Physiology of the Brain, and the Form of the Skull* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807) :61-62.

[12] Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012): 17.

*Inheritance.* Galton is arguing that to prevent "tainted elements" from being introduced into a lineage, the more stable stock must avoid propagating offspring with the less stable.

> The other subject to be alluded to is the fundamental distinction that may exist between two couples whose personal faculties are naturally alike. If one of the couples consists of two gifted members of a poor stock, and the other of two ordinary members of a gifted stock, the difference between them will betray itself in their offspring. The children of the former will tend to regress; those of the latter will not. The value of a good stock to the well-being of future generations is therefore obvious, and it is well to recall attention to an early sign by which we may be assured that a new and gifted variety possesses the necessary stability to easily originate a new stock. It is its refusal to blend freely with other forms.[13]

Galton is establishing that proper eugenic practice is essentially "noble" in that it aids natural selection in preserving the best of the "superior" species of humans by eliminating risk factors that could be introduced by intermarriage with "inferior" species. The copious use of statistics to buttress his theories led Galton to advocate what was called a "law and custom" implementation of eugenics, and in doing so it would lead to an "improvement of the race."[14]  By "race," Galton was referring to White European ethnicities that constituted for him a "superior species of human."  It would be a similar idea that would lead to the Nazis imposing the Nuremburg Codes once they achieved power in the Third Reich in the 1930s.

In summary, the natural selection hypothesis of Charles Darwin as documented in *On the Origin of Species* led others – including his relative Francis Galton – to find ways to implement this in a way to aid in its more effective progression. It was seen as a natural process, and part of the evolutionary cycle, and the ability to aid its implementation was seen by those such as Galton as evidence for evolution. This school of thought would later find enthusiastic support in

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[13] Francis Galton, *Natural Inheritance* (London: publisher unknown, 1889): 197-198

[14] Jerry Bergman, *The Darwin Effect: Its Influence on Nazism, Racism, Communism, Capitalism, and Sexism* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014): 54.

Germany, particularly through the work of Darwin's disciple Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919).

However, as has been demonstrated, the origins of these ideologies were American and British,

but they would be easily incorporated into radical German nationalism in later decades.

**Darwinism and Eugenics in Germany in the Late 19th Century**

The proliferation of Darwin's ideas in Germany could be attributed to several factors.

One was the Enlightenment influence of Immanuel Kant, who like other Enlightenment

philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza attempted to denigrate the role of faith and instead

exalted reason. This would also have an impact on theological and Biblical studies as well, in the

"higher criticism" movements led by Friedrich Schleiermacher and other liberal German

theologians. To an extent, even Martin Luther's influence may have been a contribution to the

ready acceptance of rationalism and evolutionary theory. Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker argue

that an effect of Luther's Reformation was the divorce of the sacred from the secular, and in that

Luther expanded upon a principle that Marsilius of Padua had taught some centuries earlier,

namely that secularism would be encoded as an ideal system based on the primacy of this-

worldly objectives.[15] Marsilius was noted, in his 1324 work *Defensor Pacis,* to advance a sort of

materialistic view of politics – the material needs and desires of the individual were paramount

to supernatural concerns, an idea he borrowed from the 12th-century Muslim thinker Averroes.[16]

Luther's innovation on this was that the state then, in its temporal power, would therefore

supersede the supernatural, in that to obey the state was to obey God – this was a common

interpretation of Luther's ideas by later thinkers, and it had its basis in Augustinian ideas

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[15] Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture, 1300-1700* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2013): 217-219.

[16] Hahn and Wiker, 29.

regarding the "two kingdoms."[17] While Luther cannot be said to have condoned Hitler and his regime had he been alive at the time, many writers such as Robert G.L. Waite note that Luther may have unwittingly helped pave the way for the Nazi rise to power.[18] Luther's religious anti-Judaism would be co-opted by later German nationalists as a premise for ethnic antisemitism.  To this note, Hahn and Wiker note a comparison between Luther and Machiavelli, in that the state had a level of authority over the Church, and thus dividing secular and ecclesiastical power by essentially making state and Church seem as if they were in some contexts competing forces.[19] This is seen as substantiated due to two premises Luther had in his own teachings – one being the obligation of the Christian to give absolute obedience to the state, and the second the evidence of Luther's own antisemitism via a tract he authored entitled *On The Jews and Their Lies.* As Waite notes, despite what Luther's original intentions may have been in authoring this treatise, it did become widely circulated among early *völkisch* occultic circles and was often referenced by individuals in those movements such as Theodor Fritsch, Guido von List, and the composer Richard Wagner.[20] This ideology would also reinforce the militaristic mentality of the Prussian state, and it was reflected in a "civil religion" that would be the basis for a more rational type of theology that would open the doors to theological liberalism. With the scuttling of the supernatural, it was then inevitable for Darwin's ideas to find fertile ground in 19th-century Germany, more so than any other Western society.

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[17] William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London: George G. Harrap and Sons, 1941): 28.

[18] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 288.

[19] Hahn and Wiker, 217.

[20] Waite, 288.

When Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, it was introduced to Germany primarily by two individuals. The first was German geologist and paleontologist Heinrich Georg Bronn (1800-1862). Bronn was the pivotal figure at this point as it was he who translated Darwin's work into German. While Bronn rejected Darwin's transmutation theory (that one species evolves into another via transitional forms), he did pioneer the ideas of adaptation and selective breeding prior to Darwin. In his work *On the Laws of Evolution in the Organic World,* Bronn elaborates upon this idea:

> At first there existed a certain number of orders and suborders entirely foreign to our existing creation; and all the genera, with the exception of from 1 to 3 per cent., were different from those of the present day. By degrees, the number of these foreign types diminished, and the number of genera which have persisted to our days became more and more considerable. In the sequence of ages this number rose gradually from 20 to 40, 60, 80, 90, and, lastly, 100 per cent. By degrees, and this even at the close of the Cretaceous period, some isolated species made their appearance, which have persisted to the present day.[21]

Bronn is proposing that selective breeding was a factor in the evolution of species via adaptation, and thus he provides groundwork later for the proponents of eugenics to engineer the conditions to facilitate selective breeding in controlled conditions. That would be a significant factor in the Nazis' breeding programs they would institute later, and it comes via Bronn's theories. This would be capitalized in particular by Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940), who would mirror Bronn's ideas about adaptation and selective breeding as he advanced his ideas via the *Gesellschaft fur Rassenhygiene* (Racial Hygiene Society) which was founded in Berlin in 1905.[22] While Bronn actually held to the *possibility* of descent over *actuality,* an early disciple of his, August

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[21] Heinrich Georg Bronn, *On the Laws of Evolution in the Organic World During the Formation of the Crust of the Earth* (Stuttgart: E. Schweizerbart'sche Verlagshandlung, 1858): 176.

[22] Bashford and Levine, 315.

Schleicher (1821-1868), focused on linguistic evidence[23] in a manner that echoed the earlier

work of Max Muller as noted in the previous chapter. Muller, though, was more interested in

how language and religious faith interacted, but nonetheless his theories were easily compatible

with Schleicher's.

One of the early proponents of what is called polygenism, Swiss-born American biologist

Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), expanded upon Darwin's thesis in *Descent of Man* by trying to

appeal to Biblical hermeneutics to advance a theory that different races of humans were actually

different species. Therefore, a conclusion reached later by Arthur Gobineau based upon reading

Agassiz's work led to the conclusion that interracial relationships were immoral based on the

religious convictions of the time.[24] This sentiment would later be capitalized by Hitler and the

Nazis to cloak their otherwise mythological worldview into "Christian" language to make it

more palatable to the German public. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was appropriated

via Liebenfels in particular, who used Biblical language to express his own occult-based ideas

that had evolved from Theosophical writings of Blavatsky. It was also the propagation of

cherrypicked ideas from Luther and other German theologians (both Protestant and Catholic) that

the secular state was given authority over religious matters in terms of public policy, and that

included racial ideology. One of Agassiz's publications explicitly defines the concept behind this

idea:

> Do we find in any part of the Scriptures any reference to the inhabitants of the
> arctic zone, of Japan, of China, of New Holland, or of America? Now, as
> philosophers, we ask, Whence did these nations come. And if we should find as
> an answer that they were not related to Adam and Eve, and that they have an
> independent origin, and if this should be substantiated by physical evidence,
> would there be anything to conflict with the statements in Genesis? We have no

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[23] Robert J. Richards, "The Linguistic Creation of Man: Charles Darwin, August Schleicher, Ernst Haeckel, and the Missing Link in Nineteenth Century Evolutionary Theory" (Thesis, University of Chicago, ):11-12.

[24] Bashford and Levine, 496.

narrative of the manner in which these parts of the world were peopled. In speaking of the historical and the non-historical races, we do not mean to say that in nations of the white race only have historical records…! that these records alone are highly valuable, for we know that the history of the Chinese extends far back, and how full their records are. We only intend, in making this distinction, to refer to the history in Genesis, in which the branches of the white race only are alluded to, and nowhere the colored races as such. We say, therefore, that, as far as the investigation will cover that ground, it has nothing to do with Genesis. We meet all objections at once, we dare to look them in the face; for there is no impropriety in considering all the possible meanings of the Scriptures, and nobody can object to such a course except those whose religion consists in a blind adoration of their own construction of the Bible.[25]

The views of Agassiz were promulgated by professed Christian publications of the time, as the cloaking in Biblical language of this ideology opened up doors for its acceptance not only in Germany, but even throughout the West. As will be noted later, this was also a tactic used by Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels to advance occultic worldview via Biblical language, and a pivotal reason otherwise occultic beliefs were easily digested by the German public at the rise of the Third Reich some decades later. It was also seen to a degree even in American Evangelicalism, as in the 19th century similar ideas were used to justify the institution of slavery, and in the early 20th century they were utilized by such individuals as fundamentalist Baptist ministers John R. Rice and Ben Bogard.[26]  Even into the late 20th century, many American Evangelicals used this reasoning to oppose interracial marriage, and it was a similar sentiment found among many Christians in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that led to the eventual acceptance

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[25] Louis Agassiz, "The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races" (*The Christian Examiner,* July 1850): 3-4.

[26] While this lies outside the scope of this current discussion, the views that some American Fundamentalist leaders espoused in regard to the issue of interracial marriage in particular can be found in John R. Rice's 1956 pamphlet "Negro and White," which was published by *Sword of the Lord,* his newspaper he founded. Bogard's views are more articulated in J. Kristan Pratt, *The Father of Modern Landmarkism: The Life of Ben M. Bogard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2013). Another early Evangelical leader from the Holiness tradition, Alma White who founded the Pillar of Fire denomination, also was supportive of the Ku Klux Klan, stating this explicitly in a 1926 tract, *Klansman, Guardians of Liberty* – Kristin E. Kandt, "In the Name of God: An American Story of Feminism, Racism, and Religious Intolerance – The Story of Alma Bridwall White," *Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law* 8, no. 3 (2000):·784.

of Hitler's racial policies by some Christian communities in Germany later. This is noted in the

publication *Nazi Ideology and the Holocaust:*

> Sterilization was not widely opposed in Germany, and only the Roman Catholic Church consistently criticized it. Most German Protestant churches, in contrast, accepted and often cooperated with the policy, allowing the nurses, doctors, and caregivers in their facilities to notify authorities of cases to which the law might apply. In particular, some Lutheran leaders greeted the sterilization law with enthusiasm, seeing in it the hope for improving the morals and ethical standards of future generations.[27]

Eugenics policies were seen as integral to the eventual racial policies of the Nazi Party,

and the two are generally seen as being hand-in-hand with each other. The link between the two,

as noted by Daniel Gassman, was an ideology which blended the statism of Machiavellian ethics

with both Darwinian evolution and a mythological view of race called Haeckelian Monism[28].

One individual who enunciated this was Johannes Unold (1860-1935), a German sociologist and

Vice-President of the Monist League who embraced radical Pan-Germanism to the extent that he

advocated either eugenics measures to rid the population of "non-Germans" from lands

historically German, or by deporting all such populations to Africa or another continent[29]. This

was reflected in Nazi policies later, in particular those of the official platform document of the

early National Socialist Party as drawn up by Hitler, Drexler, and Feder in 1920 – the fourth item

of this platform in particular stated specifically that only a member of the "German Race" could

be a citizen and enjoy the rights and privileges of citizenship[30]. Unold's positions on race and

culture, therefore, would provide a "remedy" to "what's wrong," and this implementation would

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[27] Laura Glassman and Barbara Hart ed., *Nazi Ideology and the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2007):75

[28] Daniel Gassman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007):44.

[29] Author unknown, "Pan-Germanism in America," *Current History* 7, no. 1, part 2 (1918): 150

[30] Programme of the National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (NSDAP) (Munich, 1920): 1.

attempt to be carried out by assumption by the Nazis later in history. Unold's views though were considered a little extreme by some Haeckelian Monists, in particular August Forel(1848-1931), a Swiss psychiatrist and eugenicist who wanted to adapt "Christian" language to the ideas in order to eventually supplant and replace Christian morality with a subtle paradigm shift in tactic and vocabulary[31]. While Forel would later convert to the Bahai faith and abandon many of his earlier eugenics ideas and racial theories,[32] the views he expressed continued to have an impact on later eugenics thought, particularly those policies enacted by the Third Reich after 1934.

Early evolutionists in the vein of Darwin understood that their new radical theories would encounter some opposition, and therefore they sought to utilize language and rhetoric that would resonate better with the public to advance their views. This will be elaborated further in subsequent chapters, but the background of it can be attributed to Agassiz and other early evolutionists utilizing Biblical justification to promote polygenism (different races having different origins) and the idea of different races being different species. In time, some of the more prominent evolutionists would even reject religious and Biblical language to advance their ideas, and one of the most influential in Germany was Ernst Haeckel.

Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was a German biologist and eugenicist. Whereas Heinrich Georg Bronn was the translator of Darwin's work who introduced Darwin to the wider German scientific community, it was Haeckel who became the most prominent German Darwinist. While noted for his embryonic chart which was later largely discredited, Haeckel also played a pivotal role in the evolution of incorporating racial identity into radical German nationalism. One

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[31] Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004): 67-68.

[32] Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahai'i Publishing Trust, 1944): 375.

notable example of this is from his writings, in which he states the following in a 1904 German-language volume he authored:

> The distance between the thinking soul of a cultured human and the thoughtless animal soul of the wild natural human is extremely vast, greater than the distance between the latter and the soul of a dog.[33]

Haeckel also proposed the idea of "recapitulation," meaning that because human embryos go through the chronological stages of evolution as they advance from embryo to adult, that data could be utilized to discover a person's standing on the scale of evolution, and thus determine where evolution would stop for that individual due to faulty genetics, etc.[34]. In practice, Haeckel was expanding upon Lamarck's earlier thesis on inheritance of acquired characteristics and expanded upon that by noting that the relationship between embryonic and phyletic (relating to evolutionary monogenic change in an organism) development also would determine the progress of evolutionary development in an individual, an idea he coined as "biogenetic law[35]."  This would prove integral to the development of later Nazi racial policies, and the chief Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg even featured an article in his publication *Nationalsozialistische Monashefte* in 1935 authored by botanist Heinz Brucher that praised Haeckel for paving the way for the Third Reich, in particular by noting that Haeckel's work would provide the scientific underpinning for keeping the "Aryan" German-Nordic race "intact" and thus free of

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[33] Ernst Haeckel, *Die Lebenswunder: Gemeindverstandliche Studien uber Biologische Philosophie* (Stuttgart; Alfred Kroner, 1904): 450.

[34] Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 3.

[35] Elizabeth Watts, Georgy S. Levit, and Uwe Hossfeld, "Ernst Haeckel's Contribution to Evo-Devo Scientific Debate: A Re-evaluation of Haeckel's Controversial Illustrations in US Textbooks In Response to Creationist Accusations," *Theory in Bioscience* 138:9-29 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s12064-019-00277-3 (Accessed 10/6/2023): 11.

"impurities[36]." In this view it was concluded that evolutionary theory was integral then to racial ideology, in particular the *völkisch*-derived racial ideology of Nazism itself. As Richard Weikart notes, this would also have implications for ethics as well, in that Haeckel's conclusions consisted of the following aspects.

1. Darwinism undermined free will in favor of strict determinism ("survival of the fittest).

2. As morality, in Haeckel's view, developed from evolutionary processes, it was subject to historical change.

3. Therefore, morality is not eternal nor is it immutable, but constantly in flux.[37]

Based on this logic, many radical *völkisch* nationalists – notably Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels – would take this to extremes, as will be noted later. Haeckel's conclusions would also be compatible with a more polygenic view of human origins, in that if different races were in reality different species, then they would not be afforded the same level of dignity because they have different levels of evolutionary development and in time the "natural selection" process would "weed them out" anyway. The methods of eugenics advanced by Galton and others would therefore be seen as a natural way to accelerate the process. This is one reason many top SS officers in the Third Reich had no real reservations about exterminating Jews, Gypsies, and other "undesirables," in that they saw this process as a natural adaptation of evolutionary status – the "fittest" survive by eliminating elements that would threaten their existence, and thus "natural selection" is given a political dimension. To identify Haeckel's role

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[36] Richard Weikart, *Darwinian Racism: How Darwin Influenced Hitler, Nazism, and White Nationalism* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2022): 13.

[37] Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004): 25.

more closely in the evolution of this ideology, it is now essential to look at his own writings to determine his contributions to the race-based "natural selection" mentality of the future Nazis. The first example from Haeckel's writings notes that he subscribed to a form of polygenism that even Darwin rejected, and in his 1899 text *The Last Link,* Haeckel clearly outlines his own thesis on this:

> They have shown that among the lower races of man the primitive Veddas of Ceylon approach the apes most /nearly, and that among the latter the chimpanzee stands nearest to man.[38]

In a later paragraph in the same work, Haeckel acknowledges influence from Lamarck, Herbert Spencer, and others mentioned earlier in this chapter for his ideas, in particular the concepts of polygeny of human origins and the Lamarckian theory of inheritance of acquired traits. The allusion to Spencer would suggest that Haeckel was amenable to instituting Darwinian principles in areas of social policies. This would be compatible with the whole "survival of the fittest" scheme that would advance the "superior" over the "inferior," and thus the changing evolutionary status of morality in Haeckel's view would allow for an aggressive implementation of such policies, including eugenics.

> The immense significance of this positive knowledge of the origin of man from some Primate does not require to be enforced. Its bearing upon the highest questions of philosophy cannot be exaggerated. Among modern I philosophers no one has perceived this more deeply than Herbert Spencer. He is one of those older thinkers who before Darwin were convinced that the theory of development is the only way to solve the ' enigma of the world.' • Spencer is also the champion of those evolutionists who lay the greatest weight! upon progressive heredity, or the much combatted heredity of acquired characters.[39]

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[38] Ernst Haeckel, *The Last Link: Our Present Knowledge of the Descent of Man* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899): 74.

[39] Haeckel, 75.

In another work of Haeckel's, *The History of Creation,* he also gives credence to Thomas Malthus in noting that imposed natural selection could be applied to all nature based on the principles of propagating the strongest while eliminating the weakest. While the following passage is in the context of a discussion Haeckel is creating regarding selective breeding, there is little doubt that he also endorsed the idea for humans too based on the writings of Malthus as well as also being an advocate for eugenics. The entire process is detailed in the following paragraph from Haeckel's previously mentioned work:

> Darwin's theory on the struggle of life is, to a certain extent, a general application of Malthus's theory of population to the whole of organic nature. It starts from the consideration that the number of *possible* organic individuals which might arise from the germs produced, is far greater than the number of *actual* individuals which, in fact, do simultaneously live on the earth's surface. The number of *possible or potential* individuals is given to us by the number of eggs and organic germs produced by the organism. The number of these germs, from each of which, under favorable circumstances, an individual might arise, is very much larger than the number of real or actual *individuals* – that is, of those that really arise from these germs, come into life, and propagate themselves. By far the greater number of germs perish in the earliest stage of life, and it is only some favored organisms that manage to develop and actually survive the first period of early youth, and finally succeed in propagating themselves.[40]

In a couple of pages, he then applies this specifically to human populations as he notes that the "struggle for survival" favors the stronger over the weaker, and he explains this in more detail:

> The position of the different individuals in this struggle for life is very unequal. Starting from the inequality of individuals, which is a recognized fact, we must in all cases necessarily suppose that all the individuals of one and the same species have not equally favorable prospects. Even in the beginning they are placed differently in this competition by their different strengths and abilities, independently of the fact that the conditions of existence are different, and act differently at every point of the earth's surface. We have an infinite combination of influences, which, together with the original inequality of the individuals during the competition for the conditions of existence, favour some individuals and prejudice others. The favored individuals will gain the victory over the others, and while the latter perish more or less early, without leaving any descendants, the former alone will be able to survive and finally to propagate the species. As,

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[40] Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation Vol. I* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1914): 164.

therefore, it is clear that in the struggle for life the favored individuals succeed in propagating themselves, we shall (even as the result of this relation) perceive in the next generation differences from the preceding one. Some individuals of this second generation, though perhaps not all of them, will, by inheritance, receive the individual advantage by which their parents gained the victory over their rivals.[41]

A cursory reading of this passage suggests that Haeckel is calling for an engineered struggle to eliminate the "weaker" so that the stronger will be more apt to survive and thrive. This winnowing of defects, as he notes later in the paragraph, must continue in subsequent generations of even the prevailing group to assure its survival. A similar idea would also be proposed in the Nuremburg Laws of 1938 to determine how "Jewish" an individual was to be considered a "Jew," and the process of that would be "selective breeding" to weed out and diminish "defects."  Although this will be elaborated more later, Haeckel and others did give a (pseudo)scientific underpinning to the future policies of the Third Reich.

The ideas that Haeckel proposed would also readily be accepted and incorporated into the worldviews of notable *völkisch* occultists, due in part to the latter's deriving many ideas from Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. This bridge created between the occultic societies, and the Haeckel/Darwinian ideas of evolutionary biology will be part of the focus of the next part of the discussion, but suffice to say Haeckel embraced the concept of monism, as noted by a biographer of his in the following passage:

The solution is found in complete Monism. Living and dead are not antithetic. Nature is one, though we see it in different stages of development.[42]

The concept of Monism is a philosophical ideology that views everything in the universe as being an extension of one reality, and any deviation from this would be illusion that is absorbed

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[41] Haeckel, 167.

[42] Wilhelm Bolsche, *Haeckel; His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1906): 203.

into the one source of all existence.[43]  It is compatible with the theory of evolution – in particular, Darwin's original conception – in that it proposes a monogenic origin of all life in the universe. Although an essential component of Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, monism also found some acceptance during the late 19th century as occult spirituality came into vogue, and it forms a principal foundation to the works of Helena Blavatsky and other noted occultists from this period. Given the purely naturalist and rationalist background of evolutionary theory, this would raise two important questions. First, why would a strictly scientific and naturalistic theory like evolution find commonality with a philosophical system such as monism? Secondly, given that Haeckel tended to be more polygenic than monogenic in regard to human origins (on which he also differed with Darwin), why would he in particular be attracted to monistic philosophy? Those questions will be further explored now. They will also provide a bridge between the ideas of Haeckel and the radical German nationalism that arose contemporaneous with him.

Haeckel's embrace of monism is of interest as it entails the framing of science in a particular worldview. He even wrote a whole treatise on the topic in 1892 entitled *Monism as Connecting Religion and Science.* In this lecture, Haeckel first defines monism as "Our conception of Monism, or the unity-philosophy, on the contrary, is clear and unambiguous; for it, an immaterial living spirit is just as unthinkable as a dead, spiritless material; the two are inseparably combined in every atom. The opposed conception of dualism (or even pluralism in other anti-monistic systems) regards spirit and material, energy and matter, as two different substances; but not a single empirical proof can be adduced to show that either of these can exist

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[43] George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993): 186.

or become perceptible to us by itself alone."[44]  The monistic position taken by Haeckel proved compatible for his adaptation of Darwinian evolutionary theory, and it stems back to the basic monistic concept that all matter is one. Therefore, as all matter is one, then everything that exists evolved from that one source and thus is part of it. This would prove integral to *völkisch* nationalism later, the idea of *Blut und Boden* that would also be adopted as part of the Nazi platform as well. This also dispels the belief that evolution is atheistic as far as religious underpinnings, as monistic worldview is a view of origins, and thus is by its nature religious. It is also of note that monism itself was a result of the growing secularization of European society in the late 19th century, and is in reality connected with the increase in interest of occultism during the same period. Haeckel is credited as being the pivotal figure who transformed German materialism into something more idealistic in contrast to its origins[45]. Niles Holt suggests this happened in three stages for Haeckel:

1. 1860-1877: Haeckel's focus was primarily on Darwinian evolution and Monism was casually mentioned by him.

2. 1878-1890: Through Haeckel's introduction of hylozoism (all matter has life), the pantheistic aspect of Monism was expanded by Haeckel in his writings.

3. 1890-1904: Haeckel begins identifying Monism as a link between science and religion.[46]

Although obviously well-read in several disciplines including Eastern religions, evidence seems to suppose that Haeckel drew his monistic conclusions on his own, as they evolved over a period of approximately 40 years in his writing and thinking. However, it does answer the

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[44] Ernst Haeckel, and J. Gilchrist, trans. *Monism as Connecting Religion and Science* (unpublished text from October 31, 1892, posted online September 15, 2003, at Monism As Connecting Religion and Science, by Ernst Haeckel (gutenberg.org) (Accessed October 9. 2023).

[45] Niles R. Holt, "Ernst Haeckel's Monistic Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 2 (1971): 267.

[46] Holt, 267-268.

questions as to how a religious concept like monism did become compatible with Darwinian evolution via a non-religious intent in Haeckel, and it also addresses Haeckel's attraction to monism – if all matter derived from one source, it would provide justification for the evolutionary process in nature. However, it would be German and Austrian occultists and nationalists – in particular, those who subscribed to the radical *völkisch* ideologies – who would complete the merge of the two strains of thought.

**German Occultists, Racial Nationalism, and the Complete Merging of Religion and Science in Their Thought**

Haeckel's theories reconciling the religious dimension of Monism with the evolutionary theories of Darwin were concurrent, as noted in the previous chapter, with the rise in interest in occultism. As both ideas caught on in the West at around the same time, there inevitably would be those who would try to merge them together. One of the first to do this was the Russian mystic and occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society and also cast a broad shadow over the development of Western occultism from the late 19th century onward. In the first volume of her work *The Secret Doctrine,* Blavatsky utilizes the Hindu concepts and understanding of both pantheism and monism to justify the evolutionary process as she notes the following:

> One of the symbolical figures for the Dual creative power in Nature (matter and force on the material plane) is Padma, the water-lily of India. The Lotus is the product of heat (fire) and water (vapour or Ether) ; fire standing in every philosophical and religious system as a representation of the Spirit of Deity,† the active, male, generative principle ; and Ether, or the Soul of matter, the light of the fire, for the passive female principle from which everything in this Universe emanated. Hence, Ether or Water is the Mother, and Fire is the Father.[47]

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[47] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine Vol. 1* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1888):57

Further, she explains the process as she elaborates on this "cosmic origin" of all life as she notes that, in the imagery of the lotus (a popular symbol in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology), that man and the "Kosmos" are one and the same, and therefore essentially their evolution was intertwined[48]. Deity and Nature, therefore, are ever-evolving and comprise three stages in Blavatsky's scheme – privation (meaning in this context prototypes), form, and matter itself, and then all life proceeds from the latter.[49] This is monism laid out in a theoretical fashion that Haeckel did not pursue, but the same conclusion for both Blavatsky and Haeckel is a type of hylozoism that assumes all life came from the same matter, but Blavatsky deifies the matter and thus takes it one cosmological step further. In dealing with the evolution of man and how that related, Blavatsky elaborates in her second volume. She notes that the "god spirit" of matter evolves itself, and that man is the "third Logos" of this evolution,[50] and man then continued to evolve into a series of five "root races," and at this point each race developed differently as it evolved. The final of these races, which Blavatsky identifies as the "Aryan," had existed for about one million years, but was the pinnacle of human evolution. Due to its "perfection," this "Aryan race" branched off as a separate species from the rest of mankind, and according to Blavatsky, each "root race" has seven sub-races, and thus the final "Aryan sub-race" would be godlike, the pinnacle of human evolution.[51] While there is no direct link between the theories of Darwin and Haeckel with the esotericism of Blavatsky, they each proposed a worldview that was based on evolutionary theory. The synthesis of their ideas would be particularly apparent in

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[48] Blavatsky, 58.

[49] Blavatsky, 59.

[50] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine Vol. II* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1888): 24.

[51] Blavatsky, 434-435.

Germany and Austria, where noted occultists such as Guido von List, Theodore Fritsch, and Jorg

Lanz von Liebenfels, would actually enact the synthesis of the ideas which would form a

significant aspect of both *völkisch* and later National Socialist ideology that would evolve from

those views. That will be explored further in this chapter.

At this point, the major question arises as to how a civilization like that of Germany (and

to a lesser degree, Austria) would receive these ideas, in particular within a Judeo-Christian

context? As noted in the previous chapter, interest in occultism increased in the West during the

latter 19th century, especially among the more affluent classes. Also, Darwinian evolution was

gaining ground as well, and did find fertile soil in Germany. Yet Germany was still identifiably

Christian, and both views were antithetical to Christian thought. Yet, they would propagate with

some measure of success up to and during the Third Reich. This meant that opposing ideologies

had to somehow be packaged in a way that would resonate with the more Christian sentiments of

most Germans. A cursory reading of Blavatsky's work suggests that she used a lot of Christian

imagery and Biblical reference points to buttress her conclusions, and this would stem back to

the ideas of Max Muller as discussed in the previous chapter in that religious faith and language

development were connected, and thus shared a common source. Muller and others pointed to all

religious expression being aspects of the same thing, thus a sort of universalist ideology arose

that was easily seized upon by Western occultists. Concerning evolution, many more liberal

theologians in the vein of Schleiermacher began to interpret Genesis with more of an allegorical

or even moral lens, and as they did so, it also meant a decline in accepting the literal Creationist

idea which had been embraced by many of the Christian faith for two millennia. This new fusion

of evolution and Christian theology became known as "Theistic Evolution," and it was espoused

early on by Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1788). While Linnaeus himself could not

specifically be classified as a theistic evolutionist, his views on plant development contributed to

a broader application of principles that would be applied later by Darwin. In Chapter 11 of his

*Philosophica Botanica,* for instance, the summary given by his biographer Richard Pulteney,

Linnaeus determined that plants arose from "kinds," or phylums, which was an adaptation from

the Genesis account. These "kinds," it would be determined later, were part of an evolutionary

process.[52]  In another work from 1774, *Systema Vegetabilium,* Linnaeus himself lays out an early

example of theistic evolution that presaged Darwin by decades:

> Let us suppose that the Divine Being in the beginning progressed from the
> simpler to the complex; from few to many; similarly that He in the beginning of
> the plant kingdom created as many plants as there were natural orders. These
> plant orders He Himself, there from producing, mixed among themselves until
> from them originated those plants which today exist as genera. Nature then mixed
> up these plant genera among themselves through generations -of double origin
> (hybrids) and multiplied them into existing species, as many as possible (whereby
> the flower structures were not changed) excluding from the number of species the
> almost sterile hybrids, which are produced by the same mode of origin.[53]

Linnaeus is insinuating here that God himself initiated evolution as part of the creative

process. This view was later expanded upon by German/Bohemian Augustinian friar and

biologist Gregor Mendel (1822-1884). Mendel is credited with being the originator of genetics,

and his background as a cleric as well as an expansion upon earlier Lamarckian ideas of inherited

traits was due in part to Mendel's adaptation of a form of theistic evolution. The theory he

developed, called "Mendelian inheritance," theorized that there are two manifestations of genetic

natural selection, and these are noted by biologist Lluis Quintana-Murci as being *positive* and

*negative* in the following description:

> Purifying selection, or negative selection, refers to the process by which
> deleterious mutations are culled from the population, and is the most pervasive

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[52] Richard Pulteney, *A General View of the Writings of Linnaeus* (London: T. Payne, 1781): 48.

[53] Alistair Cameron Crombee and Michael A. Hoskin, *History of Science* (New York: Science History Publications, 1988): 43

form of selection. At the population level, the reduced number of nonsynonymous SNPs observed, as compared with the nonsynonymous mutation rate, reflects the elimination of many non-synonymous mutations through purifying selection. Selection also occurs when a novel mutation is favorable, as is referred to as positive selection, which is thought to be one of the ways in which adaptive evolution occurs.[54]

Although Mendel may not have intended his original theories (which were the results of botanical experiments) to go a radical direction, these ideas were easily incorporated by eugenics proponents to enact their own controlled version of culling "defective" mutations from a population via the means of forced sterilization, abortion, euthanasia, and in its fullest manifestation, the racial laws of the National Socialists enacted in the Third Reich later. Later proponents of theistic evolution such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French Jesuit priest and paleontologist, would actually take Mendelian Inheritance further by actually advocating for an early form of transhumanism, and he did so by stating in his 1964 work *The Future of Mankind* that advocating for the "remodeling" of the human being by means of hormones, control of heredity and determining sex/gender by the manipulation of genes and chromosomes.[55]  These examples by noted theologians and clerics provide an underpinning for the acceptance of evolution, eugenics, and even overt racial ideology in the name of Christian conviction, and it was not only true in Germany but also throughout the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was also evident in the writings of some Protestant theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). Although Bultmann opposed Nazism and was technically part of the "Confessing Church" along with his contemporaries Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bultmann was also theologically liberal and did support "demythologizing" Scripture of its more

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[54] Lluis Quintana-Murci, "Genetic and Epigenetic Variation of Human Populations: An Adaptive Tale," *Comptes Rendus Biologies* 339, no 7/8 (2016) :279.

[55] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *the Future of Mankind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964): 149.

supernatural dimension and instead also embraced theistic evolution. Despite some Protestant "Confessing Church" theologians being actively opposed to the Nazis, their more liberal positions on theology and Biblical hermeneutics did aid the Nazis in being able to dress their rhetoric in Christian terms to make it more palatable to the German public. While many "Confessing Church" theologians opposed the Nazi intrusion into ecclesiastical affairs, many also did embrace a more liberal theological interpretation which aided in the decline of religious influence in German society in the post-Enlightenment era. This in turn led to the vacuum in which many 19th-century people in Germany as well as elsewhere in Europe embraced esotericism as an alternative, and thus also contributed in many aspects to the rise of the same occultism which was so influential on *völkisch* ideology that ultimately led to the rise of National Socialism. Bultmann's demythization of Christ and the New Testament, for one, by default would negate the idea of Biblical creation in favor of more naturalistic origins, which Bultman made the entire thesis of his 1941 text *The New Testament and Mythology.* Bultmann outright denies the Easter event as being historical, saying the "mythos" of it is to better the human condition.[56]  By reducing the more supernatural aspects of the Christian faith to merely moral truths, the liberal theologians in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions in Germany made Christianity more of a moral code rather than an actual faith, and this is where Germany was at the beginning of the 20th century. The Nazis themselves would utilize this phenomenon from their *völkisch* roots via another former Cistercian cleric who adopted occultism to Biblical language, Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels.

As noted, with the *völkisch* nationalist movement that arose in Germany and Austria in the late 19th century, a fusion of Darwinian evolution and esoteric occultism, was given a very

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[56] Rudolf Bultmann, *The New Testament and Mythology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1941): 39-40.

distinctly German dimension when it was incorporated into the worldview of radical nationalists.

Also as noted earlier, the whole idea of *Blut und Boden* ("Blood and Soil") found fertile ground

in the adaptation of these ideas. One of the earliest proponents of this concept was the German

composer Ernst Rudorff (1840-1916) who was instrumental in the founding of the Homeland

Protection Association in Germany. This movement was one of the first to link nationalist/racial

identity to the natural environment and was adapted by the *völkisch* proponents via the

*Wandervögel* youth movement of the late 19th century. It embodied the ideas of *Heimatschutz*

(nature protection) and *Naturschutz* (nature protection), and utilized language of protection of

homeland and preserving the German landscape as being synonymous.[57]  This found easy

compatibility with the monist dimension of Haeckel's more German-flavored adaptation of

Darwinian evolution, and it also was easily accepting of the more esoteric occultism of

Blavatsky and her German disciples, many of whom were deeply involved with *völkisch*

nationalism. Many of these same ideas would later be incorporated by Richard Walther Darre

(1895-1953), who was the Reichsminister of Agriculture and the main proponent of the whole

*Blut und Boden* emphasis in Third Reich political policies. Darre published his views in 1936 in

a work entitled *Blut und Boden: ein Grundgendanke des Nationalsozialismus (Blood and Soil: A

Basic Tenet of National Socialism),* in which he argues for the preservation of agriculture being

integral to the preservation of the "Aryan" race. While the scope of Darre's influence will be

examined more in the actual policy of the Third Reich, he nonetheless represents a distillation

and regurgitation of earlier ideas that were incorporated not only into later National Socialist

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[57] Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, Marc Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005): 5-6.

thought, but also were integral to the earlier *völkisch* movement. It is now some of those earlier ideas that merit discussion as they relate to the acceptance of Darwinian evolution.

The first individual to examine relative to how Darwinism was merged with occultism would be Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels. A defrocked Cistercian monk, Liebenfels adopted an occultic worldview he derived from reading Theosophical writings, and he dubbed this new "religion" Theozoology and wrote an entire discourse on it in 1905. Given his background as a former Catholic priest, Liebenfels expanded upon Blavatsky's adaptations on Biblical and Christian terminology in such a way that on first glance, the book looks like a Bible study. However, in reading the book in more detail, it espouses an occultic worldview. However, there is also a significant amount of Darwinian evolution reconciled with the Biblical terminology, and it was designed by Liebenfels intentionally that way to appeal to a wider audience, which in his native Austria was Roman Catholic. One significant detail he notes is that he equates the idea of Darwinian evolution with the idea of reincarnation, which he calls "transmigration" and reasons that this was how ancient people viewed evolution, in terms like this he claims were adapted from Greek writers.[58] Basing a lot of his reasoning on a more esoteric reading of Genesis 6, he also argues that the "sons of God" were pure "Aryan" beings, but they became corrupted by interbreeding with animals and producing inferior races that evolved from their offspring. In his esoteric reading of Genesis 2, he also does assert that Adam was a real person, but says that the verse in 2:20 where Adam "names" the animals was in reality a mistranslation of a term meaning that Adam "sodomized" or corrupted the animals by breeding with them and creating the chimeras that evolved into "lesser" races.[59] He further says that the creation of Adam in Genesis

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[58] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology: Or the Study of Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (Vienna: self-published, 1905) :6

[59] Liebenfels, 14.

2:7 was not an actual "creation," but that God "formed" or "transformed" Adam by the process of evolving him from a lesser life form.[60]  Similar mentalities can also be seen in other contemporary works by racial identity writers before and after Liebenfels. For instance, Elijah Mohammed, the founder of the Nation of Islam, wrote in his 1965 book *Message to the Blackman in America* that Whites evolved in a similar way proposed by Liebenfels decades earlier, except they were not a creation of God but rather of a wicked demiurge named Yaqub who created the ancestor of White people in a lab and it evolved into apes and pigs first, and then White races.[61]  Further, Wesley Swift (1913-1970), a Methodist minister who also advocated the British-Israel "Two Seed" teaching and also was instrumental in creating the racist "Christian Identity" movement in the US, taught a similar theory saying that every other race was the "seed of Satan" and pre-existed before the creation of Adam and evolved from mud pits.[62]  Although American and more Calvinistic in influence, Swift's ideology mirrors Liebenfels in many ways by using a corrupted interpretation of Genesis to justify the evolution of "inferior" races while upholding the "special creation" of the White race (or in Liebenfels, the "Aryans"). In language like this, what would be considered otherwise heretical views were easily incorporated into Christian language and thus made more palatable to a wider audience. Further, both Swift and Mohammed demonstrate that the *völkisch* ideology of race was not necessarily confined to Germany, but rather could be identified in some sectors of all Western nations under more colloquial expressions and terminology.

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Elijah Mohammed, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Chicago: Mohammed's Temple #2, 1965) :103-104, 133.

[62] Anna Bocchichio, "Justification By Race: Wesley Swift's White Supremacy and Anti-Semitic Theological Views in His Christian Identity Sermons," *Journal of Hate Studies* 17, no. 1 (2021): 41 (Accessed October 10, 2023).

While much of this was based on an eccentric fusion of selective Biblical hermeneutics and Darwinian evolution, other *völkisch* figures maintained an ambivalence against Christianity because they saw both Christianity and Judaism as being "foreign" to the German identity. While they still adopted Darwinian evolution, they also were more explicit in their occultism and this reflected in their writings. One of these, German journalist and *völkisch* proponent Theodore Fritsch (1852-1933), still attempts to utilize Biblical language, but he couches it in an evolutionary context as he explains that the Jews have evolved from a "mongrel race" and that mixing with them would be tantamount to committing genocide against the pure German:

> The pure races have certainly completely disappeared, and only mongrel descendants surround us. In spite of this, one must not straightway deny that the racial entity has ceased to operate. The frivolous doctrine, that all men are equal, has caused unspeakable disaster and has actually introduced degeneration into the human race. We Germans of today certainly have no reason to boast of our race, for its worth is seriously depreciated, both blood and intellect having been dulled. But this should not restrain us from appreciating to the utmost the importance of the racial entity, and from endeavoring, by means of racial culture, to restore what has been sacrificed by an irresponsible racial lottery.[63]

Fritsch states a problem and the need for a solution, and naturally that need would be for the "racial cleansing" of the German race via eugenics, which his successors (in particular those who would become notable leaders in the Nazi Party) would implement into policy. The Austrian occultist Guido von List adopted Blavatsky's views and redefined them in a German context, and in his book *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk,* List attributes the origins of "lesser races" to evolution from worms with no souls and only later evolving bodies and intelligence.[64]  In doing so, he incorporates Blavatsky's "root races" and redefines them in

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[63] Theodore Fritsch (under the pseudonym F. Roderich-Stotheim), *The Riddle of the Jew's Success* (Leipzig: Hammer-Verlag, 1927): 203.

[64] Guido von List, and Stephen Flowers, trans., *The Religion of the Aryo-German Folk* (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2005):9.

terms of Nordic paganism. The strange dichotomy in such works is that in many cases, the "superior" race always has some sort of semi-divine origins, but the "lesser" races are all a result of evolution from primitive forms. This is an appropriation of occultic mythology to Darwinian evolution.

Liebenfels, Fritsch, and List were all considered pivotal figures in *völkisch* occultism, and their incorporation of Darwinian evolution into Nordic mythology would be the foundational worldview of the later Nazis who emerged from those *völkisch* groups. By adapting Liebenfels to more Christian terminology, it would make Nazi views on evolution and eugenics more palatable to the wider German public later. However, as history substantiates, the real rise of the Nazis had little to do with their views on human origins, but they capitalized on the failures of the Weimar Republic after World War I and the economic chaos that ensued as a direct result, as will be seen in the next chapter. However, in naming potential causes for this chaos, an enemy needed identification, and somehow dehumanizing the enemy would aid in advancing the overall agenda. The concepts of Nordic paganism and Darwinian evolution (and the resulting eugenics movement) gave the Nazi Party the underpinning it needed to advance its agenda. The next section will specifically address actual Nazi platforms that evolved from these earlier ideas.

**Transforming Evolutionary and Eugenic Ideas Into a Political Platform – Nazi Racial Policies Formed Between 1923-1936**

After decades of absorbing both an occultic worldview and Darwinian biology, the once fringe movement called the National Socialist Party gained an enormous amount of influence and support in Germany beginning at the end of the 1920s. The National Socialist Party began in 1919 as a political outgrowth of an occultic secret society, Thule, and it was the culmination of several decades of *völkisch* nationalism combined with a growing discontent with the political

fallout in Germany following the Versailles Treaty at the end of World War I. The advent of the

National Socialist Party (originally the DAP until given its more notorious name) in 1919, which

had arisen from an earlier group of Thulists called the "Political Workers Circle" in 1918, was

what would transform these ideas from philosophical reflection to political platform items. One

of the ideas that Anton Drexler was particularly expressive about was the issue of supposed

"alien Jews" compromising "German success." He saw the Jewish community in Germany as

the source of "what's wrong," and thus it became a central narrative conviction of his personally

and later part of his party platform as well. He articulates this in his reflections in *My Political

Awakening:*

> Even the racial Jew born and educated in Germany –
>  not even the mixed-breed - could not do otherwise than only act Jewish.
> He is inwardly totally alien to the German nature that he often
> imitates to us very well, he is first and foremost international Jew.[65]

Although Drexler enunciated the rationale for racial policies that made up the early

National Socialist platform, his more prolific cohort, Gottfried Feder, elaborated more on the

idea. Utilizing the Nietzschean concept of "will to power," Feder makes the case for the removal

of the Jews from German society on a political dimension, but he also uses the language of

"parasite," "contagion," and other eugenics-associated terms further in his discourse to propose a

"remedy" to "what's wrong" in regard to German national success, and this would leave a door

open for later eugenics measures not only against Jews, but also others. He enunciates this by

basically claiming that because the Jews do not make a tangible presence in industries he views

as essential (agriculture, manufacturing, etc.) their removal would be possible – he advocates

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[65] Anton Drexler, *Mein Politisches  Erwachen* (Munich, 1923): 29

expulsion, stripping Jews of citizenship, and other political measures.[66] However, although Feder

writes from a political perspective of how to fix the "Jewish problem," it must be understood that

Feder, as an adjunct of the Thule Society, was also very familiar with the works of Liebenfels,

who did recommend a more eugenics-based solution as noted in his *Theozoology* in the previous

chapter, and thus while it cannot be inferred in Feder's writings, it must be inherently understood

that the early National Socialists were open to scientific remedies to what they felt was wrong

with German society.  National Socialism at its core did see Darwinian evolution as an integral

part of their worldview, and thus the idea of preserving the "superior" German race at any cost

was integral to their policy platforms. At this point in time, early Nazi leaders such as Drexler

and Feder (and to an extent Hitler) did not focus as much on more "sophisticated" scientific

solutions, as they were looking to establish a political foothold first. However, the racial

occultic/mythological view of race that many of these early Nazis held was also informed by the

Darwinian ideas of biology as well as by Nietzschean concepts of "will to power" and the

proposed *Übermensch* which will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. The ideas behind

eugenics-based solutions to racial problems would later be more elaborated during Hitler's

incarceration in Landsberg and his writing of *Mein Kampf.* It would be part of a more refined

political strategy that would be more realized during the actual existence of the Third Reich

itself.

Although capitalizing on political discontent and economic crisis to gain its political

influence, the radical party and its leader, Adolf Hitler, also had a deeper agenda they were

cloaking in the political and economic situation. The agenda was blaming certain groups of

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[66] Gottfried Feder and Alexander Jacob, trans., *The German State on a National and Socialist Foundation* (London: Historical Review Press, 1993): 58-59.

people – most prominently the Jews – for Germany's decline, and the solution they proposed was to eliminate those elements from society which they believed contributed to its decline. In the Darwinian model of evolution and eugenics, as well as in the *Blut and Boden* ideal of the earlier *Wandervögel* and *völkisch* elements that preceded them, the Nazis found a plan they wished to implement. Given some sensitivities of the German public regarding ethnic and racial discrimination, the Nazis had to craft a plan carefully to conduct, and it would be implemented over time. Two individuals who would make this form of ethnocentric racism into public policy were Alfred Rosenberg and Walther Darre, and they are integral to understanding Nazi racial policies in the Third Reich. These individuals congealed their policies to this area in the Third Reich proper, but they integrated the ideas into their own narratives long before the National Socialist Party became the political force it would be. Darre was exposed to *völkisch* ideas on race from an early point, including his involvement with the *Wandervögel* movement, and Rosenberg was a member of the Thule Society before the advent of National Socialism. As pioneer members of National Socialism, their inclusion here is integral.

Richard Walther Darre (1895-1953) was the Reichsminister of Agriculture in the Third Reich from 1933-1942, and he was the most notable proponent of the *Blut and Boden* campaign in the Third Reich which was borrowed directly from earlier *völkisch* ideology. Although not a German ethnically (he was of mixed French Huguenot and Swedish heritage), nor being born in Germany (he was born in Argentina), he eventually became one of the most significant influences on Nazi racial policies. Like many young German youth, the younger Darre became involved with the *Wandervögel* as early as 1905, and particularly participated in nudism.[67] After

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[67] Anna Bramwell, Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darre and Hitler's "Green Party" (The Kensal Press, 1985) :20-21

working for a number of years in various aspects of agriculture, Darre would begin to display a

set of eclectic attributes, including a resistance to the authority of his superiors along with a

calculated, insightful mind that could often package even radical concepts as something desirable

to his listeners. He also possessed a strong suspicion of mediocrity among his cohort.[68]  These

qualities made him a prime candidate for recruitment into the burgeoning National Socialist

Party, which he officially joined in 1930. The first technically-slanted book on German racial

superiority was then published in 1922, this being Hans Gunther's *Racial Handbook of the

German People.* In another 1927 book authored by Gunther, *The Racial Elements of European

History,* he enunciates what is a form of scientific racism based on eugenics, and he proposes that

the "Nordic race" had been "tainted" by other genes and thus a purging of the foreign elements

would be essential to preserve the Germans and other "Nordics." In this work, Gunther gives the

blueprint for a future "revival" of "Nordic" blood, and it would be something that Darre would

capitalize upon later:

> The question is not so much whether we men now living are more or less Nordic;
> but the question put to us is whether we have courage enough to make ready for
> future generations a world cleansing itself racially and eugenically. When any
> people of Indo-European speech has been denordicized, the process has always
> gone on for centuries; the will of Nordic-minded men must boldly span the
> centuries. Where selection is in question, it is many generations that must be
> taken into the reckoning, and the Nordic-minded men of the present can only
> expect one reward in their lifetime for their striving: the consciousness of their
> courage. Race theory and investigations on heredity call forth and give strength to
> a New Nobility: the youth, that is, with lofty aims in all ranks which, urged on
> like Faust, seeks to set its will towards a goal which calls to it from far beyond the
> individual life.[69]

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[68] Bramwell, 30-31.

[69] Hans Gunther, *The Racial Elements of European History* (London: Methuen and Co., LTD., 1927):202-203

Throughout his text, Gunther appeals to the aforementioned writers such as Malthus, Galton, and Gobineau to underpin his thesis, and in doing so he also adopts the language of eugenics as a means of purifying the German race of "racial impurities." Darre would eventually take these ideas further in his capacity as the chief agriculture authority in the Third Reich by applying the principles of the selective breeding of farm animals to human beings. This would impact Hitler as well, who had at least six of Gunther's books in his own personal library[70]. In Darre's own speeches, he elaborated the ideas he culled from Gunther and others as he explained his rationale for the racial policies of the Third Reich.

> Because this is clear: If all characteristics are so much determined by the ancestors, Then we can ponder what divine grace our ancestors will one day have once, in the distant past, had these qualities to thank. But we can't. It is doubtful that it is not in our hands that hereditary characteristics are different than through the life-law process of conception and birth multiply. It can no longer be doubted and no longer deny that every artificial creation of human beings Hereditary characteristics that could complement the talent balance of our blood Heard fabulous stories of unrealistic fools. What we are and what else we as a people can be determined by our blood.[71]

In another publication of Darre's, he gives further elaboration on his policies:

> This brings me back to the starting point. The connection of our people with its soil is not to be grasped only economically, nor is it a mere question of the Distribution of power in the state. The connection of our people with their soil is rooted in the peasant character of our people and in the indissoluble unity of life of Peasantry in the Germanic-German sense with its arable land. The field can grow steadily and enables the sex that cultivates it, as far as we can see, to have a eternal duration. The generation that cultivates the field can attain such permanence, if it is carried out in a form of law and law corresponding to agriculture, has nothing else to do than this. The law of life of the peasantry of our people under the present conditions of our people. to assert the national economy and to secure it in the form necessary today. This is what the National Socialist land law and the down-to-earth economy are based on organization of the market.

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[70] Timothy Ryback, Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped His Life (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008): 110.

[71] Walther Darre, *Neuordnung unseres Denkens* (undated manuscript) https://archive.org/details/NeuordnungunseresDenkens (Accessed October 11, 2023).

This is the basis of the demographic and food security of the state. In this sense, the law of unity of blood and soil is a basic idea of the National Socialist idea of the state. And this idea of blood and soil differs fundamentally from that of the state. To all the merely nationalistic conceptions of the state, that he makes blood, i.e., race, the axis of his life. worldview and all political considerations, , while the purely nationalist the idea of the state is also possible without the idea of blood; I would like to remind you in this connection with the anti-peasant and race-denying, but thoroughly nationalist concept of the state of the Soviets, and in the affirmation of the rural population, but the fascist concept of the state, which denies the blood question.[72]

In this passage from his booklet, Darre connects the racial integrity of the German people to the "soil," and thus agriculture is seen by him as the means of preserving racial integrity. This goes back to some of the monistic ideology of the earlier *völkisch* occultists as well as of evolutionists such as Haeckel in that this would be a principle utilized by the Nazis to institute racial policies, using Darwinian biology to give substantiation. Although Darre would eventually wane in influence in the Nazi Party in the latter stages of World War II, his contribution to Nazi racial policy is significant. With Darre's views, Himmler was able to institute the policy of *Lebensborn*, an early attempt in the Third Reich at deliberate racial selection. The two main objectives of *Lebensborn* were to produce racial quality and numerical quantity via a series of centers that were established. The result of these efforts included the birth of 12,000 children (many illegitimate) in 15 centers over a period of 9 years.[73]  This was also a cooperative effort with the so-called "Strength Through Joy" movement in which young teenage German girls were required to do a year's service on the farms (the *Land Jahr* of the German girls' movement, the BDM). The proliferation of pure "Aryan" offspring was encouraged as well, leading to premarital and extramarital encounters. Journalist William Shirer notes this in a sort of satirical

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[72] Walther Darre, *Blut und Boden: ein Grundgedanke des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Gedruckt in der Reichsdruckerei, 1936): 8-9.  Self-translated from original German.

[73] Jerry Bergman, *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Myth* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2012): 253-254.

song that circulated among the BDM girls at the time: "In the fields and in the heath, I lose Strength Through Joy."[74]  This also would be the same ideology that Liebenfels promoted in *Theozoology,* where he radically redefined sexual ethics as being *any* sexual relationship between two "Aryan" people (even if same-sex) would be acceptable, and only copulation with a "lesser" race would be abominable.[75]  Given the lesser status in Nazi policy given to women, the role of the woman in Nazi society was to produce as many pure "Aryan" children as possible – marriage and other constraints were secondary to this objective. This also would be a contribution of Darre, which entailed the application of agricultural breeding techniques to human populations.

The eventual negative side of *Lebensborn,* however, would be the euthanization of the "less fit," forced sterilizations, racial segregation of Jews and others, and it would culminate in the events that surrounded the Holocaust. In all fairness though, these policies were not exclusive to Nazi Germany, as even the United States instituted similar policies during the early 20th century in many states. The abortion and birth control movements initiated by Margaret Sanger and others had a similar objective to Himmler's *Lebensborn* program – for Sanger, birth control was the best eugenic solution to certain "social problems," and she also framed the context of this sentiment in Darwinian terms.[76]  Therefore, the Nazis were seizing upon sentiments already circulating in Western culture in the early 20th century, but they were also the first to turn those sentiments into public policy on a wider scale. In large part, this was due in the Third Reich to Darre's cooperation with Himmler as part of the SS. However, the contributions of another Nazi ideologue cannot be underestimated either, as Alfred Rosenberg was appointed by Hitler as the

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[74] William Shirer, *The Nightmare Years: 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984): 188.

[75] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology,* 14.

[76] Donald De Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004): 297.

Nazi Party's "chief philosopher" and thus advanced many theories that shaped Nazi racial policies as well.

Alfred Rosenberg (1892-1946) was an ethnic Baltic German from the area approximate to Estonia, and architect by training and had been an early member of the Nazi Party even before Hitler later joined – he was introduced to Hitler by Dietrich Eckhart. Many impressions of Rosenberg by notable writers suggested he was pretentious personality-wise and had an inflated sense of his own self-importance – William Shirer, upon meeting him, described him as "a crackbrained doughy-faced dolt,"[77] who "was the most stupid Nazi leader he had ever met."[78] Shirer's assessment of Rosenberg was established during the early days of the Third Reich, when Rosenberg would often host his own version of the "Salon" called the *Bierabend,* in which journalists and others could have informal meet-and-greet opportunities with the top Nazi officials, and Shirer was invited to attend. Like many early Nazis, Rosenberg was an open occultist, and he based many of his racial theories on previous readings of Liebenfels, Gobineau, and other ideologues who contributed not only to specific Nazi ideas, but to the earlier *Völkisch* movement as well. Rosenberg published a massive tome enunciating his theories entitled *The Myth of the 20th Century,* and in that volume, he explicitly blueprints racial ideology that would become the basis of Nazi policies later. Rosenberg, after a lengthy survey of world history through an occultic/Theosophic lens, reinforces the monistic ideas of *Blut and Boden* coined by Darre when he explains the "renaissance" of the "Aryan" man in the following excerpt:

> With the recognition that all that is creative in Europe has been the product of character, we have uncovered the essence of European religion, of Germanic science, and of Nordic art. To become fully conscious of this, to experience it with all the passion of a heroic heart, is to create the basis for every rebirth. It is the

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[77] Shirer, 180.

[78] Shirer, 157.

foundation of a new world view, of a new yet old idea of the state, of the Myth of a new comprehension of life, which alone will give us the strength to throw off the arrogant dominion of the subhuman, and to construct a culture in conformity with our own racial character, permeating all facets of existence.[79]

While Rosenberg does not come out directly in this passage and advocate for the extermination of "lesser races" through eugenics, this mentality does undergird later actions taken by the Third Reich in both its early euthanasia and sterilization programs, as well as the activities of the Holocaust. A further indication of this is found further in Rosenberg's book when he notes that a conflict is necessary to achieve the stated objective. What he is referring to here he interprets as an existential conflict of civilizations, and he is basing this on a Darwinian premise of "survival of the fittest:"

All life, however, arises from the continuous antithesis of Yes and No. Everything creative—even the dogmatic monist, whether materialistic or spiritualistic—exists only by reason of the persistence of eternal conflict. Only in the mirror of the body does the spiritualist perceive the spirit; only with the presupposition of differing qualities can the materialist deal with variations in form and changes in substance.[80]

The premise that Rosenberg makes these assertions is essentially that the "barbarians" (non-German people) were degenerative human beings who are aiding the decline of Aryan civilization, and in doing so the extinction of the German nation would be guaranteed unless radical steps were taken.[81]  Rosenberg himself would not suggest what those steps were, as that task would be left to his colleagues (Himmler, Speer, etc.) who would craft and enact policies to circumvent this perceived "decline." In an earlier book, authored by Rosenberg in 1927 and entitled *The Future Course of German Foreign Policy,* he proposed a crude method for

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[79] Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the 20th Century* (Munich, 1930):113

[80] Rosenberg, 119-120.

[81] John Cornwell, *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (New York: Viking, 2003): 144.

guaranteeing not only racial purity in Germany, but to advance such measures worldwide via the confiscation of cultural artifacts of "lesser" people in order to build a case for their elimination.[82] This would later be undertaken by Himmler's special SS division that dealt in archaeological research.

While Darre and Rosenberg are by no means the only leading Nazis who shaped the racial policies of the Third Reich, they nonetheless formed an ideological foundation for it based on earlier views propagated by Darwinians, *völkisch* nationalists, and occultic societies. These ideas would also give sanction to the "Final Solution," as well as to the Nuremburg Codes leading up to that as a climactic event of Nazi racial policies.

Although racial identity and eugenics were part of the Nazi adaptation of Darwinian evolution, it also facilitated another aspect that has proven controversial due to the Nazis' complex relationship to it, and that was the subject of homosexuality and evolution.

**The Complex Relationship of Early National Socialism with Homosexual Activity**

Given the misogynist tendencies that are often associated with the National Socialist movement, the topic of homosexuality's relationship to the Nazi Party has been an increasingly debated topic.[83] Also, the narrative that homosexuals were somehow targeted by the Nazis during

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[82] Jerry Bergman, *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Worldview* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2012): 231.

[83] The major source that generated interest in this topic is not an academic source but is rather a non-academic volume by Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams entitled *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality and the Nazi Party* (Keiser, OR: Founders Publishing Corporation, 1995). Lively and Abrams contribute to this study not so much by their own text, but rather the abundance of primary source material they cite which provided insight into Nazi attitudes regarding homosexuality. Also of note is Douglas Olgilvie Pretsall's *The Correspondence of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs 1846-1894* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020). Pretsall's work highlights one of the earliest proponents of the "Third Sex Theory," an idea based on Darwinian evolution that asserted humanity was evolving a "third gender," and thus homosexuality was the evidence of this evolution. The opposing source documenting how homosexuality was tied to Pan-German nationalism is Samuel Igra, *Germany's National Vice* (London: Quality Press LTD., 1945). Igra was a German-Jewish sociologist who refuted many of both Ulrichs's and Magnus Hirschfeld's claims that homosexuality was a natural consequence of evolution. Other sources regarding the question of the level of persecution against homosexuals in the Third Reich will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

the Holocaust has also been an issue of debate in recent years. While more on that particular aspect will be discussed in Chapter 6, the issue of homosexuality as it relates to the Nazis is one that definitely merits further investigation. To frame this topic in context though, it will be discussed as being a subtopic of the whole Darwinian/eugenics debate, as a significant theory has been advanced regarding how homosexual behavior is an evolutionary development. Two individuals emerge, one being Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and the other being Magnus Hirschfeld. The discussion will therefore start with these figures.

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) was a German lawyer who is often credited with being a pioneer in the field of sexology. Up to his emergence on the scene, homosexuality was defined as an environmental condition, but Ulrichs began to hold a position that it was hereditary, and in doing so developed what was known as the "Third Sex Theory."[84]   Based on Darwinian evolution, this theory suggests that male and female homosexuals were the way they were due to genetic evolution, and thus they were deemed "natural creations."  He expresses this more fully in an 1862 personal correspondence, when he uses a theistic evolutionary argument to justify the existence of what he called "*Urnings und Diolings"* (male and female homosexuals):

> That Uranism is innate, not just inherent in nature such as 'sinful inclinations,' which our sister Ulrike has so far championed, or 'pyromania,' which, Wilhelm championed [I cannot deny it in a little loveless way]: but by the measure that the Uranier nature, innate in its roots, is present in the mother's womb, that is, he is different from and should not be called a man. It cost me much inner struggle to rise to this conviction, and I can no longer keep silent. The Uranier is a species of man-woman. Uranism is an anomaly of nature, a game of nature, of which there are thousands in creation: I recall the primitive forms of female nipples seen on the breasts of men and all male mammals, and the dual nature of whales and dolphins, which are mammals in the body of a fish. Uranism is a species of hermaphroditism, or even a lesser version of the same. Uranism and hermaphroditism are in no way symptomatic of disease. Just like you, Uraniers and hermaphrodites bloom like roses and are as healthy as fish in water. Ludewig

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[84] Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Keiser, OR: Founders Publishing, 1997): 11.

denies my proposition that God has also created intermediate sexual natures in addition to man and woman because in the Bible it states: 'And God created them, man and woman.' If he persists in this, he will also have to deny that it was God who created hermaphrodites: and these must have come about through the fact that they themselves have abandoned their true nature [see Romans 1]: as Ludewig and Gr. claimed that Uraniers have abandoned the nature that God gave them.[85]

This example also illustrates that Ulrichs believed homosexuals to be a sort of transitional hermaphroditic sex that was evolving, and in doing so they will display the behavior of one sex while biologically having the facilities of another. This idea was echoed in the work of German psychiatrist Ronald von Krafft-Ebing, who gave a platform to Ulrichs' views later:

In so-called contrary sexual instinct there are degrees of the phenomenon which quite correspond with the degrees of predisposition of the individuals. Thus, in the milder cases, there is simple hermaphroditism ; in more pronounced cases, only homo-sexual feeling and instinct, but limited to the vita sexualis; in still more complete cases, the whole psychical personality, and even the bodily sensations, are transformed to correspond with the sexual perversion ; and, in the complete cases, the physical form is correspondingly altered.[86]

Based on these conclusions, Ulrichs called for the decriminalization of homosexuality based on the fact it was both a hereditary trait and an evolutionary transitional anomaly of the human species. This is also the view which has been adopted in recent years as the LGBT movement (in particular its transgender expression) appeals to Ulrichs and other studies to justify its positions as well.[87]

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[85]Douglas Olgilvie Pretsall, ed., *The Correspondence of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs 1846-1894* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2020) :127.

[86] R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: Contrary Sexual Instinct – A Medico-Legal Study* (Philadelphia: the F.A. Davis Company, 1894): 187.

[87] A non-academic source that makes this connection is Matt Walsh, *What is a Woman?* (Nashville: DW Books, 2022). Walsh, a political commentator with the Daily Wire media organization, produced a documentary film of the same title as well On pages 20-25 of his book, Walsh notes that the modern emphasis on gender theory (including transgenderism) is largely rooted in the research of Magnus Hirschfeld, whom he notes was the one who coined the term "transvestitism" as being distinct from homosexuality. Hirschfeld built upon Ulrichs' work, as will be explored later, and as Walsh notes on page 26, Hirschfeld did consider transgenderism in Darwinian evolutionary terms as part of his "evolving third sex" theory. Another source that explores the historical evolution of this ideology is

Ulrichs was succeeded by Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), who like Ulrichs was openly homosexual who also held the same views. However, Hirschfeld was of Jewish origin and in time his work would be banned for that reason in the Third Reich. Hirschfeld was a physician and sexologist who directly attributed his conclusions to Darwin by asserting that Darwin had rediscovered the role of homosexual and bisexual tendencies in ancient civilizations, and thus attributed them to the evolutionary process. The means of doing so was by asserting that an evolution-based hermaphrodization of human sexuality was an inevitable evolutionary conclusion, and thus the sexual intermediary stages that characterized homosexual behavior were a natural process.[88] This expands upon and correlates with Ulrichs' "Third Sex Theory." This Darwinian view of human sexuality would also be seized upon by German and Austrian *völkisch* writers later, and this would be how it would eventually become an issue for the Nazis. One of the first German occultists to address the issue was Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, who talked specifically about it in his *Theozoology.* In it, Liebenfels redefines Biblical views of "sodomy" based on racial theory:

> The lewdness of apes, especially of the baboon, exceeds all imagination. They are Sodomites, pederasts and onanists; they also act in a disgraceful manner toward men and boys. It is universally agreed upon that baboons will attack and mistreat little girls, and that in zoos, women are inconvenienced by their vile forwardness and shamelessness. North of Lake Kiwu (Africa) the natives tell of giant apes (gorillas) which abduct women and rip up their sexual parts during intercourse. It is now incumbent upon us to investigate as to why sexual activity with animals is also called Sodomy. The more usual designation is "bestiality." The Sodomites were guilty of this most terrible crime. According to Gen. XIX they surrounded

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Donald De Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). De Marco and Wiker note how later figures such as Simone de Beauvoir and Alfred Kinsey expanded upon these ideas evolved from Ulrichs and expanded upon by Hirschfeld to differentiate "sex" from "gender" and thus would give rationale for espousing a gender theory based on Darwinian biology.

[88] J.E. Bauer, "On Behalf of Hermaphrodites and Mongrels: Refocusing the Reception of Magnus Hirschfeld's Critical Thought on Sexuality and Race," *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 5 (2019): 6

the house of Lot and wanted to violate the two angels, similar to the way in which the people of Belial in Gabon actually violated a woman (Jud. XIX).[89]

Further, he states that extramarital sexual activity between "two human beings" was not necessarily wrong, because "Sodomy" only applied to interspecies copulation.[90] This ambiguous language could be interpreted as allowing for same-sex/same-species relationships, but not of different species (or, in *völkisch* understanding, people of different races). Given that many of the *völkisch* movement, particularly among the more nationalist elements of the *Wandervögel* and the *Freikorps,* were avid readers of Liebenfels, the casual reading of this would give sanction for some to indulge in homosexual activities. This was seen as an "enlightened" and "evolved" perspective by many *völkisch* proponents, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in particular there are noted examples of this.

The *völkisch* proponents who arose out of the *Wandervögel* movement already had a more libertine attitude regarding human sexuality, and this was due in large part to the activities of one of its members, Hans Bluher (1888-1955). Bluher was a German writer and philosopher who was part of a *Wandervögel* group called the Gymnasium Steglitz, and in his own history of this movement he chronicled some of the unusual activity among its members:

> Even the first old Wandervögel, who came together in that Berlin suburb, were known as 'misogynists.' This means that they were never seen on the main street in the evening, engaged in amorous conflicts with girls. The Wandervögel did not engage in flirtation. They also did not attend dance classes; but if one did so under pressure from relatives, they could be certain of the most exquisite ridicule. A Wandervögel seen with a girl would have been considered a decline in style,

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[89] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, Theozoology: Or the Study of Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron (Vienna: self-published, 1905): 10.

[90] Liebenfels, 12.

which would have spoiled the entire vagabond spirit in one fell swoop. It was as if the female sex did not exist for this youth; it was not even mentioned.[91]

Walter Laqueur, in his book on the German Youth Movement of the late 19th century, notes that homosexual activity was not uncommon in *Wandervögel* groups of the time, and those like Bluher even saw it as a unifying thing and even integral to national identity.[92] This also was evident in the Prussian military culture that preceded the youth movement, as Samuel Igra notes that the martial character of the German military culture was exemplified by the *Bund* (male community), and an aspect of this entailed an integral amount of homoerotic practice to reinforce bonds and thus make a stronger military, an attitude he notes that Hans Bluher also affirmed in his writings.[93] The militaristic dimension of this phenomenon would logically also be manifest then in the *Freikorps* militias of disaffected war veterans after World War I. There are some notable documentations of this as well.

In the *Freikorps,* the concept of *Bund* was sustained by the military nature of the various groups. One significant figure identified with the *Freikorps,* Gerhard Rossbach (1893-1967), was openly homosexual and was also an early partner and mentor of future Nazi SA chief Ernst Rohm. Rossbach was the one also credited with inspiring the creation of the SA uniform.[94] Allegations of rampant homosexuality among the *Freikorps* was attributed as well by some writers as a consequence of the influence they had on German youth, many of whom were open

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[91] Hans Bluher, *Die Deutsch Wandervogelbewegung aus Erotisches Phanomen* (Berlin-Tempelhof: Zweite-Auflage, 1912): 27.

[92] Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984): 51.

[93] Samuel Igra, *Germany's National Vice* (London: Quality Press LTD., 1945): 95.

[94] Nigel Jones, The Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler (London: Robinson, 1987): 135.

to homosexual activities due to earlier involvement in *Wandervögel* clubs.[95]  While some homosexuals in Nazi ranks became common knowledge (such as the case of Ernst Rohm), as will be seen in Chapter 6 the Nazi leadership attempted to downplay these facts due to the fact it would cost them support. Yet, as journalist William Shirer pointed out when he was in both Weimar Germany and the Third Reich during the early 1930s, the early Nazis were abundant with homosexuals.[96]  This could be concluded to understand that Rohm was not necessarily an exception to the norm among Nazi ranks.

In summary, homosexuality was commonplace among many National Socialists and their predecessor movements, and it was even encouraged due to a combination of long-held Prussian militarism, Darwinian evolutionary theory (in particular, the "Third Sex" ideas advanced by Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, and others), and the occultic mythologies of the *völkisch* movements that attempted to justify such behavior by redefining what "sodomy" and other terminology for homosexuality consisted of. This would lead to a complex and contradictory status of homosexuality within Nazi policy – on one hand being the *official* positions to garner support, but internally its justification based on racial identity and evolutionary theory. This is a reason this section was necessary in that it relates to the ideas of social Darwinism and eugenics in an adjacent way.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The theory of Darwinian evolution found fertile ground in Germany, particularly in the late 19th century when it formed a synthesis with radical German nationalism and was a justification for advancing views on racial superiority and German imperialism. Add to this the

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[95] Robert G.L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918-1923 (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952): 18, 209.

[96] William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959): 39.

occultist worldview adopted by many in the *völkisch* and similar movements, and it created the conditions for the future National Socialist movement to emerge.

The merger of Darwinian evolution and eugenics with radical German nationalism was part of the whole central narrative conviction of National Socialism. Nationalism sought to provide a question as to *what* being a German was, and *where* Germany (and by extension, German-speaking Austria) belonged in both historical and geographical contexts. However, the same nationalists also had embraced a narrative that somehow the identity of Germany was compromised, and thus they wanted to identify what they felt was wrong and caused the compromise, and then seek a remedy to fix it. Darwinian evolution – and the eugenics movement – provided the substance of the narrative that radical nationalists wanted to create, and through the mythological worldview of occultism, an anagogic vision was created. This mythology-based vision sought to identify those things hindering German supremacy in the world, and then find ways to eliminate those hindrances. The radical *völkisch* element began to believe that racial and biological impurities were hampering German progress, and thus the need to eliminate them. Groups such as Jews and Romanis were particularly targeted in this regard, but the Slavs also were loathed by the radical *völkisch* proponents. The way for Germany to embrace its destiny, therefore, was to purge those "impure" elements in German society, and the growing influence of Darwinian science and eugenics provided a means to do just that. Further, such things as poverty, disease, and other things perceived as weaknesses were to be eradicated from German genetic biology, and therefore it was imperative to not only purge non-German elements, but also what was perceived as "defective" genetics within the German population. Eugenics gave an underpinning to such ideology, and thus it became a driving factor of radical German nationalism which would evolve into Hitler's vision of Germany later.

While the earlier *völkisch* and other radical nationalists did not have the means to make their racial vision reality, they did write and propose things which were later integrated by the National Socialists into official policies. These policies during the Third Reich era began to be implemented through the *Lebensborn* program, as well as forced sterilization and euthanization of "inferior" stocks as proposed by the Nuremberg legislation of 1938. Ultimately, this line of thinking led to the atrocities of the Holocaust in particular, and much of the foundation of such brutal policies had their genesis in the eugenics and evolutionary models that were proposed as far back as Malthus and his proposals for population control.

One question addressed throughout which is a sort of subtext to the discussion is how and why such views were accepted by the wider German masses, particularly the Christian communities? An Enlightenment separation of faith from reason is the catalyst for the eventual acceptance of the ideology of both evolution and the eugenics movement, and with an increasing liberalism in both Protestant and Catholic circles, this also opened up the opportunity for younger people to explore alternative spiritualities such as occultism. As these two factors converged, they would be synthesized by occultists such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Guido von List, and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, and the monist undercurrent of evolutionists such as Haeckel also made the fusion of evolutionary biology and occultic practices possible. This in turn provided a framework to develop *völkisch* ideas such as the *Blut und Boden* concept, which also had its roots in youth culture associated with the *Wandervögel.* A general rejection of Judeo-Christian norms also expressed itself in other areas, which is also a reason alternative sexual practices began to be noticed in such groups. This naturally would make many of these former *Wandervögel* participants amenable to the Nazi platform in the early 1930s.

It must be understood, however, that when Hitler began to gain popularity in the late 1920s, it was not necessarily due to his racial ideology or the occultic-derived worldview of many National Socialists. A combination of other factors – economic, political, and many reactions to some of the more extreme conditions of the Versailles agreement – were the areas that Hitler emphasized, and he cloaked much of this in quasi-religious language (such as his use of the word "Providence" frequently) and also appealed to German nationalism. The more social Darwinian aspects of Nazi policies would surface later once Hitler was in sufficient control and the Third Reich was established, and these were often constructed upon the foundations of German patriotism and the specific address of economic and social issues. Using Darwinian and eugenics programs, Hitler offered Germans a solution to their problems by pointing to scapegoats, and then using the rationale of "science" (specifically, the Darwinian/Haeckel variety of evolutionary biology) to offer a "solution" to "purge" Germany of those "degenerative" elements that he claimed were causing Germany's woes. By co-opting the language of the predominant faith (Christianity), Hitler would utilize language and concepts he gleaned from Liebenfels to make his vision of National Socialism look "godly." This contributed to the reasons why Hitler's message would resonate with a wider German audience.

The evolutionary contribution that helped to construct Nazi views on racial superiority had roots that extended back to the population theories of Malthus, to the inherited-traits hypotheses of Lamarck and Mendel, and to Darwinian-based social engineering proposals presented by Herbert Spencer. Darwin provided a synthesis of those ideas, clothed in the concept of natural selection, which was then taken further by his relative Galton to evolve into the eugenics movement. Haeckel then introduced these ideas to Germany via Bronn's translation of Darwin's work, and the German nationalist sentiment seized upon these ideas to give some

scientific credence to many of the racial ideologies that would emerge from the *völkisch*

movement that preceded the Nazis by decades. The ideas of biological evolution and eugenics

were also incorporated into the worldview of prominent occultists such as Blavatsky – the monist

undercurrent particularly in Haeckel made the two divergent areas compatible – and a bizarre

amalgamation of evolution and reincarnation found its way into the writings of occultic

nationalists such as Guido von List. With groups forming from the disciples of List and

Liebenfels such as the Thule Society, the racial ideology of occultic *völkisch* nationalism found

political ground, and this would lead to the birth of many political movements, of which the

National Socialists emerged as most prominent.

Another aspect of these developments was that they were not uniquely German. Many of

these social trends were also evident in wider Western society in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries, and despite the "pure German" claims of the Nazis and many of their predecessors,

many ideas within *völkisch* ideology were based upon British and American sources that

presaged them. However, given that Hitler's ideal "Aryan" race would encompass every White

European nation, this was seen as an afterthought and the Nazis attributed the same origin to

these non-German sources which contributed to the ideology they developed.

The complexities of homosexuality may also seem a bit unusual in the context of Nazi racial

ideology, but Darwinian evolution and German militarism also were impacted in part by it.

Darwinian evolution, when applied to the rising field of sexology at the time, allowed for Ulrichs

and Hirschfeld to construct their "Third Sex theory" based on the idea that individuals with

homosexual tendencies were an evolving third gender. These ideas have found recent acceptance

as well in many 21st-century LGBT circles. This, coupled with Lamarckian and Mendelian views

on inherited traits, led to the idea that divergent sexual orientations were somehow a natural

development of the evolutionary process. The acceptance of this by German occultists such as Liebenfels even would lead to a radically different interpretation of Biblical passages regarding sodomy, and especially among early Nazis, this led to a significant number of open homosexuals (notably Ernst Rohm) in their ranks. As will be discussed in Chapter 6 however, the Nazis would attempt to publicly backtrack this once they achieved gaining control of Germany, and this was in large part due to Hitler and the Nazi leadership wanting to secure the popular support of the German public rather than eschewing homosexual behavior in their ranks.

In summary, Nazism could not have succeeded in many of its policies without Darwinian evolutionary biology and the eugenics movement's influence. This is particularly true regarding the Nuremburg Laws of 1938 and also the codification of such policies in the writings of Darre and Rosenberg in particular – while it could be argued that Himmler should be credited as well, in reality Himmler was just enacting and executing policies already in place and contributed little ideologically to them. A lot of this is also found in *Mein Kampf* as well, which was not extensively referenced as ample discussion has been presented in regard to Hitler's individual views in other books and research published. The Third Reich represented a synthesis and implementation of a biological view that to this day is still widely accepted but also extremely controversial. While many proponents of evolutionary biology – including Darwin himself – would not be considered directly racist (although many did hold ideas that would be considered such today), evolutionary biology nonetheless does provide justification for many aspects of genocides based on race, class, or ethnicity. Its adaptation and synthesis to other aspects of worldview (nationalist politics, occultic spirituality, etc.) can be a potent combination. The political ramifications of this will now be analyzed in the next chapter.

**Chapter 4**

**Political Background of National Socialism**

While occultism and Darwinian biology may have formed some ideological precedent for the National Socialist movement to form, fundamentally National Socialism was a political movement by definition. As such, there were a variety of political influences that contributed to the formation of the National Socialist agenda. This chapter will deal specifically with three of the major forces that shaped the political evolution of what would become one of the most notorious totalitarian regimes in history. The three major political influences that will be discussed in detail will be the geopolitical theories of Karl Haushofer, and how they contributed to Hitler's expansionist policies as he sought *Lebensraum* and engaged in war and conquest to gain it. The second influence of note would be the youth movements previously mentioned that comprised the *Wandervögel.* The third influence would be the militias of disaffected war veterans that existed in Germany after World War I and were collectively called the *Freikorps.* In a lot of ways, the National Socialist movement was the culmination of all three of these combined, and the policies that would later be enacted by the Third Reich were in part contributions of these earlier groups. In addition to major influential factors such as these, there are two other issues that will be discussed at length relating to the political motivations of the Third Reich and of the National Socialist Party that led it.

The first question to note would be whether the National Socialist Party was right or left in political orientation. Secondly, to a degree Hitler and the Nazis were influenced by earlier political thinkers such as Niccolo Machiavelli, and the question is to what degree did these earlier figures influence the Nazis? What will not be detailed in this discussion is the degree that

Mussolini and his Fascists in Italy impacted the Nazis, for although Hitler was enamored with Mussolini and did model the 1923 Munich Putsch on earlier successes of Mussolini in Italy, this is a discussion which has been addressed elsewhere and thus not the focus of attention here. These two questions will be addressed first, and then the influences noted will be discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

The result of the implementation of these ideas will finally be discussed in regard to actual official policies in the Third Reich. While that discussion will be brief overall, it will set the precedent that National Socialism had antecedents and they carried significant influence. This then will provide the third "rung" on the ladder of how National Socialism evolved – occultic worldview, Darwinian biology, and radical German Nationalism.

**Brief History and Overview of the Founding of the National Socialist Party**

The movement that would evolve into the Nazi Party came into being via the occultic organization Thule. Thule was seeking to influence the labor class in Munich and enlisted one of its members, journalist Karl Harrer, to initiate such a movement among working-class Munich laborers. For this, Harrer recruited a Bavarian locksmith, Anton Drexler, in early 1918 to spearhead efforts to create a political discussion group among his fellow laborers. Drexler was not physically able to participate in the war, so instead he channeled his efforts into a political movement in 1917 called the Fatherland Party. In March 1918, Drexler then founded a separate group called the "Worker's Committee for A Good Peace," which later garnered Harrer's attention and he would persuade Drexler to organize a smaller group of a dozen or so members called the "Political Workers' Circle." This first group Drexler organized had approximately 27 members, mostly consisting of Drexler's own co-workers. This number would increase to 40 by

October 1918, primarily due to Drexler's articles in the local newspaper.[1]  In Drexler's own account, Harrer came into perspective when the realization hit that his own small group was not sufficiently influential, and he recounted that he decided to merge his movement, the "Workers' Committee," with the new discussion group Harrer had started, the "Political Workers' Circle," at the end of 1918.[2]  Although Harrer was an active member of Thule and this political discussion group was considered one of the "rings of Thule" proposed by Sebottendorf, Drexler was considered an "associate" of the Thule Society and not a full member after the two less-formal political discussion groups were merged.[3]  However, whereas Harrer wanted just a simple discussion group of few members, Drexler wanted to politicize the movement to draw a larger membership and thus was formed in January 1919 the "German Workers' Party," of which Drexler was elected chairman and Harrer given an honorary title of "Reich Chairman."[4]

While the membership of the "Circle" was integrated into the new party, it remained an ideological discussion group within Thule and was limited to only seven members by Harrer himself – this particular number had occultic significance to the Thulists that was derived from their influence of List and Liebenfels as well as the earlier Theosophical influences that inspired many *völkisch* occultists.[5]  This would make Harrer essentially a "spiritual leader" of the early DAP, while Drexler was essentially its political expression.[6]

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[1] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012): 153.

[2] Heinz A. Heinz, *Germany's Hitler* (London: Hurst and Blackett LTD., 1934): 104.

[3] Luhrssen, 154.

[4] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998): 139.

[5] Luhrssen, 155.

[6] Ibid.

As far as the political aspects of the early National Socialist Party, it had characteristics of both what were considered "right-wing" traits (such as radical nationalism) as well as left-wing traits (a socialist economic vision). Drexler and other early Nazis did embrace a type of anti-capitalism which they largely derived from the reformist Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919), who ironically had an earlier organization with a similar name, the National-Social Association, which had itself dissolved by 1903. Asad Kedar notes that both Naumann's movement and the later DAP shared some similar features. First, there is what Kedar terms national existentialism – a conviction that Germany is facing a struggle for its very existence as a nation. Second, this existentialism was intensified by a biologistic imagination of nation as a living organism in itself. Third, domestic society must be restructured along a more productivist model that would provide the resources for overcoming the "existential" struggles of nationhood.[7] These ideas were echoed in early National Socialist literature of the time (primarily Feder's material), and reflected many *völkisch* ideas which correlated with the Nazi platform. Added to this was the post-war pessimism about German nationhood, which was embodied in a growing antagonism against the new Weimar republican government which upheld the Versailles treaty, and it was noted that the war was not brought to a successful conclusion in the eyes of the disaffected Germans who were drawn to radical political groups like the emerging DAP due to the fact that the war took on a more internalized dimension on the streets of German cities.[8]  Drexler used this as a means of attempting to motivate the working classes to facilitate the remedy of "what's wrong" with German society by proposing the remedy of rooting out those elements he believed were

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[7] Asaf Kedar, "National Socialism Before Nazism: From Friedrich Naumann to the 'Ideas of 1914,'" *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 2 (2013): 327.

[8] Heinz, *Germany's Hitler*, 144.

subverting German nationhood (Jews, Communists, and capitalism).[9] These sentiments would be more articulated however by the more published early Nazi leadership, notably found in Gottfried Feder's 1919 manifesto *Breaking the Bondage of Interest,* as well as his essay "The Social State" as published in Dietrich Eckart's *Auf Gut Deutsch* publication in the same year.[10] As far as antisemitic sentiments were entailed, while some such as Alfred Rosenberg (as well as Julius Streicher later) settled upon a more biological antisemitism drawn largely from the writings of Liebenfels and based on Darwinian/Haeckelian evolutionary theories, Eckart saw it more as a spiritual struggle that echoed Naumann's national existentialism and it had a more religious antisemitic dimension than an ethnic/racial one.[11] Nonetheless, the antisemitic element was still a defining factor of the early DAP as well as the later evolution of that into the NSDAP, or Nazis.  Jews were seen by these individuals as a reason for the crisis in Germany, and thus they needed to be removed from Germany as a factor in order to revive a German sense of national identity – this going back to the whole *völkisch* monist/pantheistic view of race and identity as well as the Kantian concept of "antagonism" and the Nietzschean "will to power" to achieve this objective. In time, there would be a division among the early Nazis as to what means would be implemented to achieve this objective, and it resulted in a faction called the "Black Front" which was led by Otto Strasser as a similar movement to Ernst Röhm's *Frontbahn* he attempted to restructure the SA into after Hitler's incarceration in 1923. This will be discussed more in detail later as an ongoing debate as to whether the Nazis were "left" or "right."

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[9] Gina Dimuro, "Why Anton Drexler Was More Responsible for the Nazi Party Than Adolf Hitler," allthatsinteresting.com (February 20, 2018), at https://allthatsinteresting.com/anton-drexler.

[10] Barbara Miller Lane, "Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business," *Central European History* 7, no. 1 (1974):9

[11] Barbara Miller Lane, 12

**The Influence of Earlier Political Thought on the Nazis**

National Socialism, like much else in history, did not appear from an ideological vacuum. Rather, it had a lot of antecedents that contributed to its evolution, and some of those extended back centuries. It could be argued in many ways, oddly, that National Socialism was the culmination of Enlightenment rationalism, and being such, it provided an implementation of many earlier ideas. One of the earliest critics of Hitler, German Conservative politician Hermann Rauschning (1887-1982), connects direct inspiration from Machiavelli for instance to Hitler himself, noting that Hitler often boasted of being Machiavelli's "greatest disciple."[12] Rauschning also noted that Hitler himself recommended *The Prince* as indispensable for any politician, and was reported to have kept a German-language translation of it by his bedside.[13] In a casual conversation with Hitler when he asked specifically about how deception played into politics, he notes that Hitler replied with this comment:

> "Maybe," replied Hitler, "but anyhow I got there first. My great political opportunity lies in my deliberate use of power at a time when there are still illusions abroad as to the forces that mold history."
>
> A renascence, said I, of Machiavellianism.
>
> "If you like," assented Hitler. "I have no objection to describing myself as a disciple of Machiavelli. But I consider that only we who realize the biological foundations of policy are in a position to act accordingly."[14]

In reading Machiavelli's own writings, the quality that Hitler is appealing to is found in *The Prince* itself, and in two passages in particular. The first comes from Chapter 19 regarding the avoidance of contempt and hatred, and in citing the example of the emperors Marcus and

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[12] Hemann Rauschning, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1940): 273.

[13] Rauschning, 273-274.

[14] Rauschning, 278.

Severus, Machiavelli notes that conserving what is useful but not imitating history in full is a key

to establishing a new regime:

> A new prince in a new principality cannot imitate the exploits of Marcus, but
> neither should he imitate those of Severus. He must take from Severus the
> necessary attributes to found a new state, and from Marcus the glorious attributes
> suitable for conserving a state that is already established and stable.[15]

A second passage illuminates Hitler's reference to opportunity being in the deliberate use

of power, and this is found in Chapter 21 of *The Prince,* where Machiavelli explains the

necessity of a prince to take a more aggressive stance regarding taking advantage of historical

events to exercise said power:

> The irresolute prince will most often follow the path of neutrality in order to avoid
> immediate danger, and will most often come to ruin. But when a prince boldly
> declares himself for one of the two sides, even if that side wins and is powerful
> and he remains in principle at its mercy, that side will be obliged to him and
> bound by contract of allegiance…[16]

This latter passage provided perhaps some insight into Hitler's alliance with Mussolini,

as well as the fact that Hitler and Mussolini both supported Franco's Nationalists in Spain on this

same assumption. The latter proved to be unsuccessful for both though, as Franco remained

neutral during World War II and had some fundamental ideological differences with both Hitler

and to a lesser extent Mussolini. Franco was a nationalist and was more grounded in Catholic

teaching in regard to governing Spain, and thus was not necessarily a Fascist, although some

writers have categorized him as such (in reality, Franco's ideology was associated with a

movement in Spain called Falangism, which had some superficial similarities to Fascism but also

notable differences). Much of the ideology that Franco was identified with is articulated in the

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[15] Nicolo Machiavelli, and Peter Constantine, ed. and trans., *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli* (New York: The Modern Library, 2007): 79.

[16] Machiavelli and Constantine, 8.

writings of Spanish political theorists such as Ramiro de Maeztu (1875-1936), who wrote in

1916 that the elements which would define the Third Reich later (militarism, the Kantian

emphasis of individual free will being subjugated to the will of the state, etc.) constituted a

disconnect between divinely-endowed goodness and national aspiration, and thus a system

devoid of ethics.[17] Maeztu based much of his ideology upon Catholic ethical teachings, and he

was an influential figure in Franco's own political development. Also, contrary to National

Socialism in Germany, Falangism in Spain drew upon Catholic identity as the key to its political

order, as expressed particularly in the writings of Ernesto Gimenez Caballero, a literary scholar

in Spain who proposed that a Latin Catholic model for political order would be the main hope for

cultural renewal for the realms of what he termed "Latin Christendom."[18] Caballero's work was

considered compulsory reading in the social studies curriculum of Spanish schools during

Franco's rule. This was markedly different from the National Socialist agenda, which was largely

informed by a mythological worldview rooted in *völkisch* occultism as articulated by List and

Liebenfels, which at best was an esoteric reinterpretation of German Christianity but ultimately a

rejection of Christianity based on its Jewish origins. Hitler's backing of Mussolini's invasion of

Ethiopia, however, would be realized as an actualization of Machiavelli's statement, as indeed

throughout the course of the war Mussolini became increasingly dependent upon allegiance to

Hitler rather than being an equal partner in the Axis. Given that Hitler's National Socialism was

also seen as a form of modernism by many historians, the Machiavellian approach to political

order also emphasized the need for the state to be dependent upon securing and maintaining

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[17] Ramiro de Maeztu, *Authority, Liberty, and Function: or the Crisis of Humanism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, LTD., 1916): 72.

[18] Ernesto Gimenez Caballero, *España Nuestra, El Libro de la Juventudes Españolas* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Vicesecretaria de Educación Popular, 1943), 5.

political order, and thus a new "reason of state" would be necessary to quell dissent and thus ultimately preserve its own power.[19]  The Machiavellian undercurrent to the eventual Third Reich then was established explicitly in Hitler's own reading and application of Machiavelli's ideas.

Another aspect of this relates to a 1943 article published by Charles McCoy on Machiavellianism, and here he makes a significant point when he notes that in Machiavelli's political outlook, the "republic" in essence becomes a "despotate":

> The evil in Machiavelli is not, as was long commonly thought, that he favored the rule of a despot, but it is that the rule of a republic which he favored was no different from the rule of a despot. The aura of virtue which surrounds his discussion of republics is merely the reflection of the antique past, a past whose intellectual and moral tradition had no real meaning for Machiavelli.[20]

McCoy makes a correlation in a footnote on the same page of this article between Machiavelli's theories and the national policies of the Third Reich at the time. Citing directly from *Mein Kampf,* McCoy notes that Hitler equated the state with "homogenous nature and feeling," an allusion to Hitler's rationale that his racial policies were essentially for Germany's common good.[21]  Given the earlier observations of Rauschning concerning Hitler's own reading of Machiavelli, it could be concluded that Hitler used Machiavelli's theories to buttress his own policies. This then would provide a Machiavellian underpinning to Hitler's future policies.

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[19] Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013): 128.

[20] Charles N.R. McCoy, "The Place of Machiavelli in the History of Political Thought," *The American Political Science Review* 37, no. 4 (1943): 640.

[21] McCoy, 640n

While Machiavelli was not the only early influence on Hitler, it was certainly a significant influence, nonetheless. Another aspect of this however would be Hitler considering himself to be in line with earlier German militarism, particularly that of Prussia.

Much of the reason for the effective control of the German nation by the Nazis in 1933 stems back to the nature of the German political order going back to the Imperial period of the mid-19th century. Bismarck, beginning in 1871, sought to minimize internal issues by focusing on externals, a similar tactic Hitler would utilize later in the period leading up to World War II. Bismarck's model consisted of a combination of absolutist-style military policy coupled with state interventionism.[22] This was a Prussian concept that focused on militarism as a social order, and while not overtly totalitarian, it would shape German attitudes leading up to World War I and in the years after. Although Austrian by birth, Hitler himself adapted this to a degree due to the emphasis in his own writings (*Mein Kampf* in particular) that either victory or total destruction would be the fate of German society, and he also considered both Jews and Communists to be instruments of destruction in Germany and therefore, to ensure complete victory, those elements had to be completely destroyed.[23] The infusion of like-minded *Freikorps* members into the early Nazi Party reinforced the convictions Hitler already had in this regard, and therefore by drawing on past German militarism, he refocused energy upon utilizing the absolutist-style militarism of Bismarck to enact his own interventionism upon perceived "enemies" of the German nation, which by Nazi rationale were "external" and not an integral part of the German nation. The Nazis took it a step further however by employing both Darwinian biology and neopagan occultic Norse mythology to frame their objectives. Therefore, while the Nazis generally

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[22] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (New York: Berg, 1985): 59.

[23] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1935: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998):243,247.

eschewed Prussian values (in particular, those which were based on Christian morality), they co-opted what attributes they thought would serve their interests and then radically transformed them.

Given this background, the major question to address next would be if the National Socialists would be considered a right-wing or left-wing party?

### Nazi Totalitarianism – Right or Left?

The common assumption of many historians is that the Nazis were essentially a right-wing political movement. However, there are some questions concerning this based on Nazi origins and policies, as well as what was identified as "Conservative" in Germany during the Weimar era and the first years of the Third Reich. Allen Gindler, in his article on this subject, for instance notes that the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises identified Italian Fascism in particular as "a rebaptized edition of guild socialism."[24]  Gindler also notes that both the Italian Fascists and the National Socialists in Germany self-identified as left-leaning and represented a trend at the time toward socialist economics in the socioeconomic structure of both Germany and Italy[25]. Gindler also notes the difference between Italian Fascism and National Socialism is being the latter's emphasis on biological determinism.[26]  This also set National Socialism apart from rival ideologies, particularly Marxism. Ranier Zitelmann also notes that the German-British publicist Sebastian Haffner stated in an essay that the only true opposition Hitler and the Nazis had in their earliest years was from the political right, and he clearly identified Hitler as a leftist

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[24] Allen Gindler, "How and Why Fascism and Nazism Became 'The Right.'" *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2021): 273.

[25] Gindler, 274.

[26] Gidler, 287.

and that his most ardent critics even into the Third Reich era came from pro-monarchist figures such as Ludwig Beck (who was also an ally of Col. Klaus von Stauffenberg of the *Operation Valkyrie* assassination attempt on Hitler in 1944) and Franz Halder.[27] The economist F.A. Hayek also notes in his seminal book *The Road to Serfdom* that many Fascists and Nazis were originally self-identified socialists, and that there was a relative ease in the conversion of a communist to a Nazi and vice versa.[28]  Hayek further notes that Hitler despised what was considered classical liberalism, and he cites Professor Eduard Heimann as stating that Hitler in particular claimed that National Socialism was in fact true socialism, and Hayek explains in the note that in 1941 Hitler had declared in one of his own public speeches that National Socialism and Marxism were one and the same.[29]  While much of this is accounting for the Third Reich period when Hitler was essentially the dominant voice in National Socialism, in reality it also merits attention to look at earlier National Socialism as well, particularly after its early formation and its incarnations up to becoming the official party it evolved into in 1919. This was explored by Leonard Peikoff, who noted that the "Twenty Five Points" document drafted by Drexler, Feder, and Hitler called for the implementation of economic statism and foreign policy nationalism through the enforcement of thought control.[30] In examining the "Twenty Five Points" document itself, this is evident both in #14 as well as in #10 – the former asserts that the state should have authority to divide profits based on #13, which called for nationalization of all industries. The latter promoted the interests of the state over the individual.[31] Peikoff elaborates on this by noting a conversation Hitler had

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[27] Ranier Zitelmann, "The Role of Anti-Capitalism in Hitler's Worldview," *Economic Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2022): 515.

[28] F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944): 80-81.

[29] Hayek, 81.

[30] Leonard Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: The Meridian Group, 1982): 185.

[31] *Program of the NSDAP* (Munich, 1920): 2.

with Hermann Rauschning in which he noted that he learned from Marxism, and in essence

"perfected" it by divorcing the socialist economic aspects of it from the democratic order[32]  All

of these sources would therefore affirm that there were marked similarities between National

Socialism and Marxism, with the only distinction being the radical nationalism of the former as

opposed to the more global vision of the latter.

The one theory that does lend some merit to the idea of National Socialism as a leftist

political ideology is what is known as the "horseshoe theory."  This theory is often attributed to

the French philosopher Jean-Pierre Faye (b. 1925), who expounded upon it in his 2002 book *Le

Siecle de ideologies (The Century of Ideologies).* It also was subscribed to as well by American

sociologists Seymour Martin Lipset (1922-2006) and Daniel Bell and was known by other names

such as the centrist/extremist theory or the Pluralist School. Another individual who advocated

this position to a degree was the economist Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973). Von Mises noted

that Fascism in general (including National Socialism by this definition) shared with Marxism

two things – the use of violence to suppress opposition, and the opposition both have to what

would be termed in modern syntax classical liberalism.[33] Lipset, in particular, noted that National

Socialism was essentially revolutionary in scope but reactionary in some of its positions in order

to garner support from the Establishment at the time of its rise to power, and in doing so it did

not really gain any support among traditional conservative elements in Germany.[34] Writer and

political activist Max Eastman (1883-1969) also noted that the marked similarities between

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[32] Peikoff, 186.

[33] Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism – The Classical Tradition* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1996): 50.

[34] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,1963): 140

Stalin and Hitler suggested that both adhered to competing forms of socialism and shared many

attributes in common in their respective regimes, such as using violent gangs to enforce their

respective ideas of "enlightenment."[35] Likewise, historian Timothy Snyder notes that although

there were obvious differences between Marxism and National Socialism, they did share

similarities in regard to an economics-driven ideology that particularly related to the peasantry –

Stalin wanted to do away with the peasant class completely, while Hitler wished to eradicate

"inferior" peasant stocks based on race and ethnicity, but it was still the same economic

motivation that drove both agendas.[36] The way this related to the "horseshoe theory" is

articulated by Islamic reformist Maajid Nawaz, as he references Faye's horseshoe model to note

that the further political extremes move, the closer they are to each other.[37] Journalist Kyrylo

Tkachenko makes a similar assessment when he notes that the commonality between political

extremes that makes them more similar than different would be a shared resentment that

manifests itself in similar ways, although both extremes do have obvious differences as well.[38] If

one looks at National Socialism in this light, what it highlights is that National Socialism was far

less monolithic a movement than generally has been understood. Indeed, in the earlier years of

the movement there were two notable factions within National Socialism which manifested later

and had consequences for the unity of it as a movement. The more "right" faction (represented

by Göring. Ludendorf, and the early Thulist organizers such as Harrer and Eckart) tended to be

more nationalistic and reactionary. However, a growing "left" faction of the movement

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[35] Max Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism* (Auburn, AL: The Mises Institute, 1955):112.

[36] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010):394.

[37] Maajid Nawaz, "The Left's Witchhunt Against Muslims." http://maajidnawaz.com/the-lefts-witch-hunt-against-muslims (December 14, 2015)

[38] Kyrylo Tkachenko, "How Right is the Left?" *Eurozine* https://www.eurozine.com/how-right-is-the-left/ May 15, 2018.

(represented primarily by Ernst Röhm and Otto Strasser) was more socialist economically and far more revolutionary in its tactics. In time, the "left" faction under the leadership of Otto Strasser would splinter into a new movement called the "Black Front" that would pit him against Hitler and led to his assassination during the Night of the Long Knives. Strasser openly attacked Hitler for abandoning the more socialistic aspects of National Socialism in a tract he authored in 1930 entitled *Ministersessel oder Revolution (Cabinet Seat or Revolution?).[39]* This would presuppose that National Socialism had less exclusivity as a "right-wing" movement and thus would be comparable to Peronism in Argentina, which had both right-wing and left-wing factions. As it relates to the "horseshoe theory" proposed by Faye and others, there is also some disagreement regarding that model as well.

The major contentions against the "horseshoe theory" are mainly based on the lack of peer-reviewed research to buttress it as well as limited support among both political and historical scholarship. One of the main objections to this theory is noted by Simon Choat, the senior lecturer on political theory at Kingston University. Choat notes that the weaknesses in the "horseshoe theory" are the over-simplication of similarities at the extremes, a different emphasis on the political polemics of both groups (such as defining who the "elitists" are), and differences on issues such as globalization.[40] Still others would agree in principle with the theory, but have a different model, such as Kathleen Belew, who views it more as circular than horseshoe in

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[39] Karl Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship: The Origin, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism (New York: Holt, Rinhart, and Winston, 1970):180-181.

[40] Simon Choat, "'Horseshoe Theory' Is Nonsense – the Far Right and Far Left Have Little in Common," *The Conversation* website, https://theconversation.com/horseshoe-theory-is-nonsense-the-far-right-and-far-left-have-little-in-common-77588 (May 12, 2017).

concept.[41]  As noted, the similarities between the two extremes still provoke discussion, not only about National Socialism but also with even modern groups on the political spectrum. Therefore, while no conclusive evidence can be found that would categorize National Socialism as an exclusively left-leaning movement, the commonalities it shares in many areas with groups that existed during the same period with left-leaning groups continues to generate discussion and debate with proposals such as the "horseshoe theory."

One of the earliest writers to deal with this question was Hannah Arendt (1906-1975). Arendt was a Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, and although she was originally the paramour of Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger, she differed with him in many fundamental respects. One part of the thesis in her 1968 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was that both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes shared many commonalities as totalitarian dictatorships. One thing she notes as a commonality of both regimes was that the propaganda mechanisms that preceded them were both frank and mendacious, and that the potential dictators boast of both their past evil-doing as well as what they have plans to do.[42] Obviously, to expand upon this, their objectives are often not stated as explicitly evil, but rather they are language that resonates with the wider audience. A financial or political crisis, therefore, would provide ample opportunity for a potential totalitarian leader to capitalize and what resonates – this is an effective political tactic in general, but in the case of the Nazis it meant the advancement of a worldview packaged in such a way as to attract support. However, as Arendt notes, many of the platitudes and promises that the potential despot makes will not materialize

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[41] Kathleen Belew, "What's the Path from Crunchy Counter-Culture to Alt-Right?" HNN News Network, https://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/whats-the-path-from-crunchy-counterculture-to-alt- (December 14, 2022).

[42] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1968): 307.

once the leader is in power – she notes that this was the case with both the Bolsheviks under Stalin as well as Hitler's Third Reich.[43] This then would establish both the regimes of Stalin and Hitler as totalitarian in nature, but it still does not address whether there is a distinction between "right-wing" and "left-wing" totalitarianism, or are they just two competing versions of the same thing?

Historian Frank McDonough notes that there are some defining traits of Fascism in general, of which Nazism is considered a distinct variety. In general, Fascism is totalitarian, generally a one-party state with no free trade unions or democratic elections, and somewhat corporatist in economic policies. Fascist regimes also control the media and run extensive propaganda apparatus operations that exalted the leader. Mussolini in particular argued that his form of Fascism was opposed to democratic and liberal ideology, and Hitler mirrored this.[44] Historian Michael Lynch notes two major attributes of both the Communist and Fascist systems:

1. They are led by a dominant individual who became identified with the cause they represented.

2. Further, they became the personification of the ideology they espoused.[45]

As to the question as to whether the Nazis were considered "Left-Wing" or "Right-Wing," Lynch notes that there are certain limits on imposing those labels on either the Soviets or the Nazis. He notes that overlapping features such as socialism and nationalism are evidence that the "Left/Right" labels are a dated concept for most political historians, and that there is a faulty

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[43] Arendt, 308-309.

[44] Frank McDonough, *Conflict, Communism, and Fascism: Europe 1890-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 66-67.

[45] Michael Lynch, *Authoritarian States* (London: Hodder Education, 2013): 169.

assumption that traits of what are considered the "right" and "left" neatly falls into certain categories.[46]  That being said, there are some arguments that a different classification such as "Totalitarian" vs. "Republican" would be a better designation of regimes. The issue here is that consequently monarchies and other government systems would be excluded. Also, the terms "liberal" and "conservative" have been proposed, but these too are not necessarily easily categorized given that some "liberal" traits of politics today could become "conservative" later. This concludes necessarily that the issue is still a subject of debate.

Allen Gindler notes that earlier Nazis (notably Ernst Rohm)  and Italian Fascists (Mussolini was originally a socialist before subscribing to Italian nationalism during World War I) both could be identified as "left-wing" in their core convictions.[47]  He further notes that the National Socialists were essentially a non-Marxist variety of socialism, and thus its place is at the Left end of the political spectrum.[48] While the National Socialists did embrace a peculiar variety of socialism, it was not typical of others who adapted socialist agendas, such as the Marxists. One of the most notable proponents of this position is Peter Hitchens, who writes on it frequently and emphatically describes the Nazis as a left-wing political ideology based on some commonalities they shared with the Communists and other left-wing countercultural movements in history.[49]  In another account, Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont visited the Third Reich and attempted to dissect the political positions there, and while he originally came under the

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[46] Lynch, 8-9.

[47] Allen Gindler, "How and Why Fascism and Nazism Became 'The Right,'" *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2021):274

[48] Gindler, 301.

[49] Peter Hitchens, "End This Cruel Smear Against Conservatives – Hitler's Nazis Were in Fact Left-Wing Racists…" *DailyMail.com*, March 11, 2023, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-11848611/PETER-HITCHENS-End-crude-smear-against-conservatives.html (Accessed October 17, 2023).

presumption that the Nazis were a "right-wing" party, the more he interacted with people he

began to conclude that there was little distinction between Nazism and Bolshevism, a conclusion

shared by others including Kay Smith and university student Joan Wakefield.[50]  These

observations instilled in many that the Nazis were in fact more akin to Communists than many

authorities would acknowledge.  This comparison was also accepted by the economist F.A.

Hayek, who also noted in his 1944 book *The Road to Serfdom* that there was little fundamental

difference between Marxist and Nazi versions of socialism save a couple of minor attributes:

> The doctrines which had guided the ruling elements in Germany for the past generation were opposed not to the socialism in Marxism but to the liberal elements contained in it, its internationalism and its democracy. And as it became increasingly clear that it was just these elements which formed obstacles to the realization of socialism, the socialists of the Left approached more and more those of the Right. It was the union of the anti-capitalist forces of the Right and of the Left, the fusion of radical and conservative socialism, which drove out from Germany everything that was liberal.[51]

However, while it still does not definitively answer the question as to whether the Nazis

were classified as "right" or "left," it does continue to generate discussion and debate.

The conclusion that can be established here however is that the Nazis were clearly

totalitarian and did also embrace some socialist economic policies. Additionally, the National

Socialist movement had both right-leaning and left-leaning factions and was thus not monolithic

until Hitler consolidated power later. The actual "Conservatives" of the time accepted by most

historians would be the Monarchists who still wanted to restore both the Hohenzollern and

Hapsburg monarchies in Germany and Austria, respectively. Therefore, the Nazis would also

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[50] Julia Boyd, Travelers in the Third Reich: the Rise of Fascism Through the Eyes of Everyday People (London: Elliott and Thompson LTD., 2017): 216-217.

[51] F.A. Hayek, and Bruce Caldwell, ed., *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007):182

aptly be classified – like their Bolshevik counterparts – as a revolutionary movement against both the "old order" as well as against the perceived weaknesses of the more democratic government of the Weimar Republic.

### The Influence of Karl Haushofer's *Geopolitik* On the Nazis

One of the defining traits of the political dimension of Hitler and the Nazis in general was the geopolitical aspects of their concept of *Lebensraum* ("living space"). This was treated as a necessary accommodation of the earlier eugenics-based *Lebensborn* program instituted by the Third Reich in the mid-1930s and would also be an impetus for the start of World War II. However, the ideas behind it extend back further, and the one figure who was instrumental in aiding Hitler to develop these ideas was the German professor Karl Haushofer (1869-1946).

Hitler was introduced to the ideas of Haushofer during his incarceration at Landsberg Prison after the failed 1923 Munich Putsch. One of Haushofer's notable students, Rudolf Hess, was also a close friend to Hitler and was imprisoned at the same time for involvement in the putsch. Although no evidence exists that would link Haushofer to either the Nazis or any earlier groups (on the contrary, Haushofer's wife was Jewish), he had met Hess in 1919 and was later a supporter of the failed 1923 putsch, and this was attributed to his friendship with Hess.[52]  He had previously been Hess's instructor at the University of Munich where he became professor in 1921, after serving during World War I in the German Army as a brigadier general.[53]  In the later years of the Third Reich, Haushofer would fall out of favor with the Nazis and would be interned

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[52] Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 173.

[53] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 139.

in a concentration camp, but his influence on future Nazi policies leading up to World War II are

significant. The major influence of Haushofer on National Socialism would be his own brand of

geopolitical theory, as will be elaborated further.

Like many other aspects of the origins of National Socialism, the formation of

Haushofer's geopolitical ideas was not constructed out of a vacuum but evolved from a long

process of absorbing ideas from earlier proponents of similar theories. One of the first of these

was Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947), who was regarded as one of the pioneering

theorists of geopolitics. In an address he gave in 1889, Mackinder defines his version of political

geography as follows:

> The chief distinction in political geography seems to be founded on the facts that
> man travels and man settles, relations to travelling and to settling man, of least
> resistance over the opposing world, productivity and security of tenure. A chain of
> oases in a desert, a fertile valley in a mountain system, may be able to support
> very few settlers, and yet be a great highway along which emigrants, armies, and
> merchants have thronged since prehistoric ages.[54]

Mackinder bases his observations on normal migration patterns of human populations to

different areas, which are affected by external factors such as geography, agricultural potential,

water sources, ease of movement, etc. This fundamental aspect could therefore be politicized by

competing populations to acquire the most desirable terrain which would furnish the conditions

for optimum productivity of a society. This idea is expanded upon by the second theorist, the

American naval officer and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914). In his book *The*

*Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783,* Mahan makes a significant observation that

would be a defining aspect of geopolitical theory for decades, and he notes that essentially the

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[54] H.J. Mackinder, "The Physical Basis of Political Geography," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 6, no. 2 (1890): 78.

superior military power would be the one who would gain the advantage in the acquisition of

coveted territory. He notes this in the following passage from the book:

> All men seek gain and, more or less, love money; but the way in which gain is
> sought will have a marked effect upon the commercial fortunes and the history of
> the people inhabiting a country.[55]

In another passage, Mahan notes that the form of government will determine trade and

the acquisition of colonial assets and other commodities based upon the type of government and

its leadership. This can be by peaceful means, or through military conquest. While Mahan is

primarily focusing on maritime power, the type of governance will give a political dimension to

the economic and military aspects of a given state. The determining factors Mahan notes are seen

in this passage from his book:

> Nevertheless, it must be noted that particular forms of government with their
> accompanying institutions, and the character of rulers at one time or another, have
> exercised a very marked influence upon the development of sea power. The
> various traits of a country and its people which have so far been considered
> constitute the natural characteristics with which a nation, like a man, begins its
> career ; the con- duct of the government in turn corresponds to the exercise of the
> intelligent will-power, which, according as it is wise, energetic and persevering,
> or the reverse, causes success or failure in a man's life or a nation's history.[56]

In summary, by combining Mackinder's ideas of settlement with Mahan's concept of

expansion, the fundamentals of geopolitical theory were established. In and of themselves, these

are valid and commonly accepted views in conventional discourse, but the radically nationalistic

flavor that National Socialists would give this in relation to their objective of *Lebensraum* would

evolve from this later.

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[55] Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1890):50

[56] Mahan, 58.

As geopolitical theory was accepted and adapted into German political discourse, it undertook an evolution of its own. One of the first individuals to expand upon this was the German geographer and ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). Ratzel, according to one biographical source, was an avid disciple of Ernst Haeckel, and from him accepted and incorporated Darwinian evolution into his own views, and although there is debate as to how social Darwinism shaped his geopolitical theories, it nonetheless has been a point of discussion.[57] Being mentored by naturalist Moritz Wagner during his sojourn in Munich, Ratzel developed an idea that expanded the earlier observations of those like Mackinder and Mahan by adding a Darwinian dimension of the migration of species to the political/geographical theory, and it is out of this that he became the first to use a term later popularized by the Nazis – *Lebensraum.*[58] His 1899 publication *Anthropogeography* basically laid out a thematic view of human geography based on four attributes:[59]

1. *Rahmen* (a human society developing in a frame)
2. *Stelle* (exploitation of a settled place)
3. *Raum* (the need for expansion)
4. *Grenzen* (establishing limits to said expansion)

This was the genesis of what was to be known as *Geopolitik,* which another German thinker, Johannes Mattern, would expand upon later. Mattern expands upon this in a passage from his 1942 book:

> Geopolitik of the German type proposes the accomplishment of national self-sufficiency, if necessary by the redistribution of the natural resources of the world. It sanctions this redistribution by whatever means it can be achieved, including

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[57] Harriett Wanklyn, *Friedrich Ratzel: A Biographical Memoir and Bibliography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961):7-8

[58] Wanklyn, 11-12.

[59] Wanklyn, 23.

that of forceful seizure by the states or nations lacking from those enjoying an abundance of them, particularly of those who are, or are alleged to be, improvident and incompetent in the use of their resources.[60]

Again, this would be a natural expansion of Ratzel's ideology, which also was one of the first to propose a rough-draft version of the *Blut und Boden* concept of later *völkisch* ideology when he expresses similar convictions in his work such as the idea that the state was an "indigenous organism" on a piece of ground, and that it was in reality the land itself that called forth the state – this essentially would make the state an organic product of the land, but its people also had a responsibility to construct, maintain, and defend it.[61] The responsibility to expand the physical limits of this state then to acquire new land (*Raum)* would necessitate the possibility of political tension with other states, and in Darwinian terms the stronger would prevail over the weaker, and thus the stronger would incorporate new "living space" for its expanding needs into its own organic structure, the basic idea behind *Lebensraum.* This is where then geopolitical concerns became connected to radical nationalism, and it was fundamentally Darwinian at the core. While Karl Haushofer would later tone down the more radical aspects of this, his protégé Hess would pass on this more radical understanding to Hitler.

Ratzel's geopolitical hypothesis was often interpreted as being aggressive in tone, and this is often substantiated by passages in his own writings, such as one which stated that "the practical consequence of the organic theory is the condemnation of the mechanical distributions of territory. Such a procedure treats a territory like the corpse of a slaughtered animal, from

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[60]Johannes Mattern, *Geopolitik: Doctrine of National Self-Sufficiency and Empire* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1942): 12.

[61] David T. Murphy, The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany 1918-1933 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997):9

which pieces are sliced off, regardless of place and size, because it is no longer alive."[62]  The

idea of space (*Raum*) for Ratzel was to be mastered and brought under the control of the

civilization that mastered it – *Raum* thus becomes synonymous with expansion: bodiless,

limitless growth.[63]  This means therefore that a state or political entity sets its own limits and

objectives for expansion. This would also become integral to later Nazi concepts of *Lebensraum*

as the principle from Ratzel would be introduced to Hitler from Haushofer via Hess.

The above-noted concept from Ratzel was called by Haushofer the "large-space concept,"

and what Haushofer meant was that large-space concepts were what made small nations great.

Space would be elaborated by Haushofer and made the central focus of *Geopolitik,* and this

would necessitate the redefinition of *Raum* (space) into *Lebensraum* (living space).[64]  In an

extant writing noted in Dorpalan's text, Haushofer then expands upon this by saying that a small

state should not exist, but rather be subjected to the larger state.

> Survival of small states is a clear sign of world-political stagnation. Absorption,
> on the other hand, indicates life and development. The far-reaching co-ordination
> of all German member states within, and the growing adaptation of Austria to, the
> Reich, the various Balkan federations, the unification of Yugoslavia and Turkey
> are all symptoms of world-political evolution. So are France's attempts to absorb
> Andorra and to establish closer ties with Switzerland. The dismemberment of
> Spain, on the other hand, which gave autonomy to Catalonia and the Basque
> country, is a clear indication of regression.[65]

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[62] Andreas Dorpalan, *The World of General Haushofer: Geopolitics in Action* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1942): 51

[63] Dorpalan, 56.

[64] Dorpalan, 58.

[65] Karl Haushofer, "Small Countries Have No Right to Exist (Die Einheit der Monsunlander)," *Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik,* 1, no. 1 (1924): 20 ff.  Excerpted in Dorpalan, 208.

In reading this within a context, Haushofer is referring to the Hapsburg imperial model, in which a diverse population was best served by a dominant power, and thus he is not necessarily advocating for the racial homogeny that the Nazis utilized these ideas for later. The "absorption" Haushofer notes in the above passage refers more to political rather than cultural absorption, and the examples he cites would substantiate this hypothesis. Therefore, concept of *Lebensraum* that Haushofer notes is in essence a multi-ethnic benefit, but it also does profit the dominant state. This would not be adopted by Hitler and the Nazis later, as they redefined Haushofer's concept of *Lebensraum* based solely on the radical German nationalism of the *völkisch* ideology that preceded it. This can be seen particularly in Drexler's reflections when he notes the following:

> The state in which materialism, economic and political
> parasitism, crime and immorality are ruthlessly beaten down—
> whether under the leadership of a president emerging from the
> working classes, or a real prince, is a superfluous debate — will
> one day also be an example to other culture folks. And that can
> only be Germany.[66]

Further, Gottfried Feder, another early Nazi leader, elaborated further the more Monistic ideas of the connection of the individual to the state when he stated that German identity is integral to pledging to German culture and community, and in doing so it also would entail Germany's superiority to other nations, and any loyalty or appreciation to another nation would be tantamount to essentially a form of "blood treason," which could be implied to the Nazi

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[66] Anton Drexler, *Mein Politisches Erwachen* (Munich, 1923):68.

antipathy against Jews in particular[67].   Feder also would focus further in his work on the idea of

German tribalism yearning for a unity of the *Völk,* which would add a *völkisch* dimension to the

geopolitical strategy which Hitler would later borrow from Haushofer's writings. However, as

will be noted, Haushofer did not concur with this added racial/ethnic superiority which was

superimposed upon his geopolitical theories by the early Nazis. In fact, Haushofer would argue

that imperial expansion was not a legitimate interpretation of his own *Geopolitik,* as is seen in

the following excerpt.

In another writing entitled "Defense of German Geopolitics," Haushofer clearly refutes

the Nazi interpretation of *Geopolitik* when he notes the following.

> Imperialistic plans of conquest were never favored, neither by me in my writings
> nor in my lectures. As in my book on Frontiers I also protested against the
> crippling of Germany through the border decisions of the Versailles Treaty, so in
> my public letter activities I stood up for the Germans in South Tyrol. I welcomed
> the incorporation of Sudeten German territories, but I never approved of
> annexation of territories alien to our people and which had no German
> settlements.[68]

This may be also attributed to the falling-out that happened between Haushofer and the

Nazis which resulted in his internment in a concentration camp toward the end of World War II.

Nonetheless, Haushofer's influence on Nazi political policies still warrants consideration, as it

was influential in the formation of Hitler's own ideas later.

In Hitler's views, the ideas developed by Ratzel and Haushofer earlier were given a

radically new racial/ethnic dimension. Hitler believed that *Lebensraum* was to be focused on the

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[67] Gottfried Feder, and Alexander Jacob trans.,  *The German State on a Nationalist and Socialist Foundation* (London: Historical Review Press, 2003): 61

[68] Karl Haushofer, "Defense of German Geopolitics," (1948) in Gearoid O'Tuathail, Simon Dalby, and Paul Routledge, eds., *The Geopolitics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998): 41.

eastern frontiers, mainly because he felt that the Slavs were racially inferior to the "Aryan"

Germans and that the threat of Bolshevism would destroy Germany if it were not destroyed first.

He elaborates on some of this mentality in *Mein Kampf:*

> The foreign policy of the folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied in the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation's population and growth on the one hand and the quantity and quality of its soil on the other hand.[69]

Contrasting this with Haushofer's views, Hitler clearly was seeking expansion of

*Lebensraum* into what were historically non-German territories, whereas Haushofer limited the

expansion of the German state to only historically German regions. While Hitler used

Haushofer's ideas initially as diplomatic strategy to begin his own agenda – reoccupying, for

instance, the Rhineland back from French occupation and annexing the Sudeten German areas

from Czechoslovakia as well as the *Anschluss* with neighboring Austria – he used that strategy as

a means unto an end. Hitler's vision of *Geopolitik* was much more racial/ethnic than even Ratzel

proposed, and thus it radicalized the concept. This is also reflected in the second most notably

Nazi piece of literature, *The Myth of the 20th Century* by Alfred Rosenberg:

> If an external pressure does not need to break a strong personality it will at least destroy it mechanically. Such an attitude and pressure can poison a people. This was perpetrated against the German people when our leaders failed to provide adequate living space. In the 19th century our arable area became smaller and smaller. This was a crime against the still earth linked farmers. The number of landless, propertyless Germans grew. Closely pressed, millions pushed into the world cities, and the human flood ever increased. Our directionless leaders called for industrialization, for export and world trade.[70]

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[69] Adolf Hitler, and Ralph Manheim, trans. *Mein Kampf* (London: Free Thought Books, 1924): 376.

[70] Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the 20th Century* (Munich, 1930):366.

Both Hitler and Rosenberg equate *Geopolitik* with the race-based *Blut and Boden* concept they adapted from earlier *völkisch* writings. The soul of the German people, they reasoned, was linked to the physical geography of their nation, and thus expanding it would in some essence *"purify"* the conquered territory which was also seen as being originally "Aryan" land. To accomplish this, therefore, the eugenics-based *Lebensborn* must precede the acquisition of *Lebensraum* in order to provide population growth and settlement for the latter by successful implementation of the former. Therefore, purification of the "blood" was essential to reclamation of the "soil."  This again is seen in *völkisch* occult mythologies such as that of Liebenfels, who also saw that to necessitate the *Lebensraum* of the "superior" race, it means the subjugation and enslavement of "lesser" races to serve the "superior" race:

> The brain-value the noble race of man -- above all the Germanics -- gave to humanity must now be repaid as brain-interest by those of lesser value in the form of manual labor. Here I am not thinking so much of a subjugation of the colored races or Germanic people, but rather much more of a breeding of a new race of slaves with dull nerves and strong arms to this new race mental abilities will only be apportioned, as necessary. These beings will have to do all the tasks for which machines cannot be invented.[71]

This version of *Geopolitik* as adapted by the Nazis would also provide the impetus for the establishment of concentration camps specifically in areas that were conquered in the East to provide *Lebensraum* for racial Germans. In the case of Liebenfels, it meant that the "inferior" were to serve the "superior" as slave labor, and this was an idea that Hitler co-opted from reading Liebenfels' *Ostara* pamphlets in his younger years. While rooted in the theories of Ratzel and Haushofer, *Geopolitik* would take on a whole new dimension when it was combined with *völkisch* occultic mythological worldview and Darwinian-based eugenics.

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[71] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology: Or the Study of Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (Vienna: self-published, 1905): 63-64.

In summary, geopolitical studies are a valid field in and of themselves, but they were also utilized and radicalized by the Nazis and even other regimes to advance their own agendas. Many of the earlier proponents who contributed to the discipline of geopolitical theory – Mackinder, Mahan, and Haushofer – would (or in the case of Haushofer, did) actually disagree with the radical application of their ideas in Nazi policies. However, the fact that the Nazis essentially developed their own variety of geopolitical theory demonstrates that this is fundamental to understanding the overall worldview that motivated them.

**The German Youth Movement – *Wandervögel* and *Völkisch* Political Activism**

As with many political movements, the National Socialists relied heavily on youth participation to be effective in gaining influence in society. In Germany during the late 19th century, such a movement existed that gained a mass following among German youth, and it was known collectively as the *Wandervögel* ("wandering birds").

Emerging prominently around the year 1896, the *Wandervögel* initially started out as a youth countercultural reaction against urbanization and industrialization. Its early activities included unsupervised hiking excursions in which the participants -between ages 10 and 18 – would sleep in barns, transport the supplies they needed, and cooked their own meals.[72]  Due to its anti-urban and anti-industrialization sentiments, the *Wandervögel* emerged as the most visible expression of these sentiments, which were categorized under the wider term *Kulturkritik.*[73] These youth largely rejected the more moderate Social Democratic movement that was gaining

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[72] Charlotte Alt, "'Steeling Their Bodies and Minds'- How the *Wandervögel* Reconciled Nature with Modernity," Doing History in Public, https://doinghistoryinpublic.org/2022/03/29/steel-their-bodies-and-minds-how-the-wandervogel-reconciled-nature-with-modernity/#_ftn2 (March 29, 2022 (Accessed October 20, 2023)

[73] Peter Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1981): 14.

some momentum among the German middle class, as they were seeking radical transformation in human relations, but had little faith in the political system to change that. Therefore, many participants in the *Wandervögel* embraced a form of romanticism that eschewed materialism and sought instead to get back to nature as well as to what the essence of being German was all about.[74] This led to adaptation of a number of alternative lifestyle practices which would also be indicative of other countercultural youth movements, such as the beatniks and hippies of the 1950s and 1960s or the "goth" subculture of the late 1990s, and indeed many parallels could be drawn between these movements. There was also an inherent environmentalism connected to the *Wondervögel* that reflected a larger movement in German society at the time called *Naturschutz* This too was a product of the influence of the same romanticism that inspired the *Wandervögel* at its origins. People who subscribed to the *Naturschutz* program viewed nature as a soothing antidote to the rapid industrialization and urbanization of German society, and it was seen as a reaction against those factors.[75] The earliest objectives of the *Wandervögel* were strictly humanitarian, in that they sought to bring the younger generations back to a purer (and specifically agrarian) foundation of society that would restore bonds between individuals and circumvent the more impersonal aspects of industrialization.[76] This however did open up some doors to a more nationalist orientation of some sectors of this movement, and one of those would significantly contribute to the rise of the National Socialists as well as radically nationalist movements that preceded them.

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[74] Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984): 6.

[75] Charles E. Closmann, "Legalizing a *Volksgemeinschaft* – Nazi Germany's Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935," in Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005): 23.

[76] Stachura, 16.

The *Wandervögel* was a peculiarly German phenomenon within the wider context of a political reactionary movement called the Conservative Revolution. While not "conservative" in the context most Westerners would understand the term today, it was "conservative" in that it opposed the more drastic aspects of industrialization and urbanization, and thus it represented a desire for a return to a more medieval German society where the *Volk* could be purged of impurities resulting from outside influence and thus restoring relationships to a more honest and uncomplicated level within a mythical national community they identified as *Völksgemeindschaft.*[77]  However, the paradox was that many of the youth involved in the *Wandervögel* were in reality members of the upper middle class, with parents who were merchants, low-level bureaucrats, and other professionals.  There were no noted attempts to reach out to lower-class German youth, nor did many in the aristocracy participate in it either. They were described primarily as a mostly homogenous group which did not readily welcome outsiders.[78]  Further, with increasing emphasis upon the *Völksgemeindschaft,* there was an increasing interest in a radical form of nationalism that began to emerge among some *Wandervögel* members, and this would be the *völkisch* movement.

At this juncture it merits clarification regarding how the *Wandervögel* and the *völkisch* movements related to each other. Some writers, including non-academic sources such as R. Mark Musser, suggest that the two groups are synonymous with each other. Musser identifies the entire *Wondervögel* movement as *völkisch,*[79] but evidence suggests that for the most part it was a

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[77] Stachura, 17.

[78] Laqueur, 13.

[79] R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust* (Middletown, DE: Trust House Publishers, 2017): 210.

broader movement that preceded the emergence of *völkisch* ideology by at least a decade. However, there are evidences that there were commonalities between the two movements, including the emphasis on reviving romantic Teutonic idealism through adaptation of nationalism and anti-Semitism in particular.[80]  It was also noted by Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams that the characteristic "Heil" salute of the later Nazis was first utilized by *Wandervögel* groups, as well as certain appropriated vocabulary.[81] However, this salute even predated the *Wandervögel* by centuries, as it was similar to a Roman salute that was utilized in ancient times.[82] However, like many other earlier influences upon the Nazis, the *Wandervögel* cannot be substantially claimed to be either proto-Nazis or all *völkisch* proponents, although a significant percentage of *Wandervögeln* did adapt *völkisch* ideas later.

There were some characteristic attributes of the *Wandervögel* that merit consideration as well. Their emphasis on "back-to-nature" environmentalism was the primary characteristic of *Wandervögel* groups, in addition to an affinity for primitive Teutonic romanticism. This often took the form of interest in pre-Christian Teutonic paganism, which mirrored the wider acceptance of occultism in late 19th-century Europe and the United States. The monistic emphasis of Ernst Haeckel's uniquely German brand of Darwinian biology also contributed to *Wandervögel* sentiments, in that many of the participants in the movement rejected the largely Protestant religious background of their families. This monistic/naturalist sentiment fostered in many of the *Wandervögel* a bond between national identity and physical geography, which is also

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[80] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 371.

[81] Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Keiser, OR: Founders Publishing Company, 1995): 33.

[82] Martin Winkler, *The Roman Salute: Cinema, History, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009):20.

a reason many rejected industrialization and urbanization. This would be a significant precursor to the entire *Blut und Boden* emphasis of the *völkisch* movement as well as the future Nazi Party. This anti-establishment sentiment was echoed by an early proponent of the movement, Gustav Wyneken, who argued that the only way for these ideas to flourish would be to reject and eschew the academy, the home, and the Church, which would then cut any binding ties the youth had to society and allow for the replacement of those with the *Jugendgeistes* (Youth Spirit).[83]  Many of the *Wandervögel* proponents also practiced nudism, veganism, and were sexually experimental as well. Again, this does warrant some parallels to many degrees with later countercultural movements. The "free-thinking" aspect of the *Wandervögel,* however, would open the door for more radical elements to influence segments of the movement. This is where *völkisch* ideology emerged among many youth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

When German unification occurred in 1871, a new sense of nationalism emerged which sought to define what a "German nation" was. It led to a rise in populism among the general population – in particular among the more bourgeois classes – and this was the genesis of what would become known as *völkisch* ideology. The movement was diverse and somewhat unorganized, consisting of a number of groups and individuals throughout Germany and even in neighboring Austria, where the German-speaking population began to explore nationalistic aspirations of their own. One characteristic of this ideology was that between the years 1870 and 1914, it developed as a result of drastic societal changes in Germany, many of which also facilitated the rise of groups like the *Wandervögel* – rapid industrialization and urbanization, resulting in a class struggle between the bourgeois and aristocratic elements of society due to the

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[83] Robert G.L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918-1923 (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952):19.

growth of industry and capital which diminished the role of agriculture.[84]  It is also argued that

the *völkisch* movement was more of an ideological position based an understanding of society on

racial identity, and thus it tied race and nation together, and in terms of geopolitical context, to

the physical realm of the race itself.[85]  If seen from this context, the combination of the

*Wandervögel* as a cultural phenomenon with *völkisch* ideology as an undercurrent would

nonetheless have political consequences as the youth movement came of age and would begin

serving in the military and elsewhere, and many former *Wandervögel* would eventually be

absorbed into *Freikorps* militias following World War I, and many would also import the more

radical aspects of *völkisch* ideology with them.  From that amalgamation of factors would arise

movements such as the Nazis later.

The *völkisch* movement was essentially a reactionary movement against changes in

German society that were occurring between the years 1890-1918. Germany's involvement in

World War I, despite the fact it was not one of the nations who initiated it, led to more drastic

changes after the Versailles Treaty was enacted and Germany received punitive measures from

the Allied powers for its involvement. The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the establishment

of the Weimar Republic in 1920 led to more social instability and this in turn led to the rise in

political radicalism. Although the Nazi Party was formed in 1919, many of the ideas it embraced

were due in part to the earlier *völkisch* sentiments that were later adopted by the Nazis as part of

their wider political platform. This is particularly true regarding attitudes toward Jews in

Germany. Prior to World War I, most negative attitudes about Jews were based more on religion

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[84]Guy Tourlamain, *Volkisch Writers and National Socialism: A Study of Right-Wing Political Culture in Germany 1890-1960* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014) :23

[85] Tourlamain, 25.

than on ethnicity, but the *Völkisch* movement radically transformed that by asserting that the perceived lack of assimilation by Jews into German society was evidence that the Jews were racially different, and thus they were considered a liability to German progress according to racial anti-Semites such as those involved in the *völkisch* movement[86]. Added to that, the whole *Blut und Boden* ideology that had taken root especially among the *Wandervögel* gave a biological as well as a mythological element to these attitudes. As impurities from industrialization were polluting the environment, some *völkisch* writers concluded, the Jewish population was polluting the *Völksgemeinschaft,* and therefore was to blame for the social and economic problems of the German nation. Based on Humboldt's ideas concerning *Blut und Boden,* the idea that environment shaped the character of the *Volk* was extended to biological "species" of man, and when this was combined with the idea of *Lebensraum* as defined by Ratzel, the conclusion was that Germany had an obligation to cleanse and preserve *all* aspects of Germanic culture.[87] This was linked to Humboldt's Romanticism, which took a more political dimension in the late 19th century.

The political dimension of antisemitism was tied to the rise in German Romanticism, which also contributed to the emergence of both the *Wandervögel* and the *völkisch* ideology. It has been proposed by some writers, for instance, that the Romantic reaction against Western rationalism provided fertile ground for antisemitism to take root in Germany[88]. This new race-based antisemitism was characterized by several things – the superiority of the "Aryan" race in

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[86] Tourlamain, 25-26.

[87] Musser, 117.

[88] Peter J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964):33-34.

morals, the simple and pious "Aryan" in contrast to the sensuous scoundrel "Semite," the honest

laboring "Aryan" in contrast to the exploitive "Semite," and the original aesthetic mind of the

"Aryan" versus the imitative "Semite."[89]  These ideas were easily co-opted by the more *völkisch*

racial purists, and they used Haeckel's theories of Darwinian natural selection based on racial

difference and expanding upon Lamarck's and Mendel's ideas of inherited traits to propose a

clearly Malthusian solution to the problem – eliminating the Jews from society to "restore" the

*Volk.*  George Mosse describes this as the *völkisch* idea of "mystery of race," and what this

entails is an adaptation of Gobineau's concept of racial context being the fundamental setting for

human history[90]  Therefore, the implication that Gobineau was making was that purity of race

was integral to strength for survival, and also it meant that "inferior" races were to be subjugated

and intermingling of races forbidden.[91]

Being Gobineau was French however, this meant that a more German interpretation of

the same idea would need to be implemented, and the individual to propose that was Karl

Ludwig Schemann (1852-1938).[92]  Schemann blamed Jews as the problem because in his

thinking the Jews were at fault for imposing a modernity on Germany that diminished German

identity, and therefore to get rid of the Jews in particular would provide the liberation needed for

a German renaissance of sorts, something he articulated in his 1925 book *Lebensfarten eines*

*Deutschen.*[93] Mosse also connects these ideas to the *Wandervögel* as a whole, given that their

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[89] Pulzer, 50.

[90] George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021):91.

[91] Mosse, 91

[92] Mosse, 92.

[93] Mosse, 92

generally-accepted founder, Karl Fischer, drew inspiration from similar writings such as those of Lagarde and Langbehn, and connected this to the more agrarian and nature-centric emphasis of the movement.[94]  Drawing upon the fiction of Karl May, Fischer added a dimension to *völkisch* ideology that encouraged the forging of an identity based on geography, and thus a sort of fusion of esotericism and geopolitical ideas would serve as a precursor to the later *Blut und Boden* sentiments that were made integral to the National Socialist platform by Walther Darre.[95] The implementation of this pantheistic view of the intertwining of race and nature (the soil) was advanced by Hans Blüher and other early *Wandervögel* leadership, including Carl Bloesch, through the idea of the *Bund,* a male social order that also was often alleged to be encouraging of homosexuality although its major objective was the implementation of a hierarchical order as an alternative to both capitalism and the more Marxist-influenced variety of socialism.[96]

The problem that was addressed by this model was how to conform the larger German society to it, and this would later be a sentiment that the National Socialists and others would refine as they developed their party platforms. The way to implement this would be by political means, and this is something the Nazis would particularly notice during Hitler's incarceration at Landsberg in 1923. This was particularly true in movements such as the *Wandervögel,* for although not all members of this movement were antisemitic, it is worthy of note that by 1914 their chapters consisted of about 92% with no Jewish members. Given that the *Wandervögel* by and large also embraced a monistic and mystical view of blood infused with soil, and therefore it was the responsibility of the "ideal German" to till the soil and be productive, it could be only a

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[94] Mosse, 174-175.

[95] Mosse, 176-177.

[96] Mosse, 178-179.

logical conclusion that ideas such as that of the *völkisch* ideology would find fertile ground in such circles[97]. This being said, while anti-Semitism did not totally define *völkisch* ideology, it was the consequence of a general racist ideology endemic to more extreme forms of German nationalism of the time.[98]

In summary, Romanticism rooted in a mystical occult-based idea of the race being connected to the land, buttressed in turn by the Darwinian model given a German context by Haeckel and the political *Geopolitik* of Friedrich Ratzel, are the components that created a political movement among the youth. In this excerpt from a *völkisch* tract later published by the Nazis during the Third Reich period, the anonymous writer defines what he terms "Romanticism" in strident terms:

> In this hour we became idealists. Not dreamers and soft romantics. Or romanticism has been very bitter and hard. And our idealism was not fantasy for goals that lie in the stars. The time was too cold and too rough for that. No, a right real idealism entered into our hearts. An idealism of the deed.[99]

This in turn would impact the future formation of the National Socialists, as many former *Wandervögel* participants (Himmler, Darre, von Sirach, etc.) would later become future leaders of the Nazi Party.

### The *Freikorps* – Military Dimension to Nazi Emergence

The third most influential political element to play a role in the formation of the National Socialist movement consisted of paramilitary groups of disaffected war veterans called the *Freikorps*. The *Freikorps* derived their name from an early volunteer military unit formed by a

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[97] Pulzer, 300-301.

[98] Tourlamain, 34.

[99] Karl Schmidt, *Gott und Volk: Soldatisches Bekenntis* (Berlin: Theodor Fritsch Verlag, 1934):6

Major Lutzow in 1813 that sought liberation from Napoleon. This new manifestation was organized after World War I in 1919 by Captain Kurt von Schleicher (1882-1934) from an assortment of former military officers, demobilized soldiers, military adventurers, fanatical nationalists, and unemployed youth (many of which were also active in the *Wandervögel* groups prior).[100]  Due to the military restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty, the German Army was cut to a maximum of 100,000 troops with the military strength of 15,000. However, due to more clandestine arrangements made by former military officers with the German High Command, von Schleicher and other former officers created a paramilitary reserve force called the *Freikorps,* and in time it consisted of approximately 120 units with 400,000 members.[101]  In the rather tumultuous political and economic environment of the early Weimar Republic, membership in the *Freikorps* was not necessarily voluntary, as it did provide a way for displaced military veterans to earn a living – a combination of tacit German High Command support, as well as some wealthy corporate benefactors, did provide certain benefits to *Freikorps* members, including 30-50 Deutschmarks in payment, 200 grams of meat, 75 grams of butter, as well as credit toward pension and family benefits and having uniforms provided for them.[102] While most *Freikorps* units were somewhat independent of each other, they shared common objectives, one of which was aiding in the destruction of the Weimar Republic, which many viewed as a puppet state of the Allies.  This sentiment was also shared by many top officers in the German military as well, which lent to the tacit support they received from ranking military leaders despite the fact they were technically an illegal operation. Much disillusionment with the

[100] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976):98.

[101] Alexander B. Bitter, "Kurt von Schleicher – The Soldier and Politics in the Runup to National Socialism: A Case Study of Civil/Military Relations" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School of Monterey, CA, 2013): 41.

[102] Christian Bue Holm Jensen, "The Radicalization of German Freikorps" (Thesis, Institution not noted, 2013): 13.

German defeat in the war fueled much of the discontent that fomented divisions and tensions in post-war Weimar German society, and it was a shared experience among many former soldiers.[103]

At around the same time in Munich, others expressed discontent by joining the Communists, and they formed their own paramilitary "Red Armies" in various cities. They and their *Freikorps* rivals often engaged in violent conflict, which proved a destabilizing factor particularly in regional governments such as Bavaria where both movements had significant memberships. Both movements were subject to government crackdown, and in 1919 a violent clash between the two rival factions actually resulted in the murder of two Communists, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg – speculation has been offered that Luxemburg, who was a Polish-born Jew, was murdered more for being Jewish than for being a Marxist, a view that is articulated by Nigel Jones.[104]   After many years of these conflicts and confrontations particularly in the streets of Munich, the *Freikorps* as a movement would begin to fade away after the failed 1923 Putsch,  With the economic and political situation in Germany starting to improve in the mid-1920s, much of the momentum that drove radicals who were part of the *Freikorps* dissipated, in particular since many of those who were also part of the Nazis (including Hitler himself) were also imprisoned. At the slow demise of the *Freikorps,* many of their former leaders and members (notably Goring, Rohm, Hess, and others) would later become leaders in the Nazi Party itself, thus making the original *Freikorps* a redundant anomaly after the Nazis established their own paramilitary wing, the SA. However, the *Freikorps* did contribute to the evolution of the Nazis in significant ways, as the earlier *Wandervögel* movement had contributed many

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[103] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998): 98.

[104] Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds: The Story of the Freikorps, 1918-1923* (London: John Murray, 1987): 76.

members to the *Freikorps* (many war veterans, in particular those who held radically nationalist sentiments, were in their younger years part of the various *Wandervögel* groups, which would suggest that the two movements were interconnected).

One of the earliest precursors who inspired the formation of the *Freikorps* groups was novelist Ernst Junger(1895-1998). The paradox with Junger, however, was that he did not totally agree with the Nazi platform in that he also opposed dialectic/mythological interpretations of history that were common among *völkisch* proponents who also integrated into National Socialism later. Rather, he embraced a more hybrid form of Marxist-infused fascism called National Bolshevism, and his involvement with the revolutionary *Landvolk* peasant movement in the state of Schleiswig. Another contradiction of Junger however was that he saw such revolts as being led by small elite nationalist paramilitary cells, hence his influence upon many *Freikorps* participants.[105]  Robert G.L Waite notes that Junger's particular contribution to the *Freikorps* was the close bonds he thought necessary between officers and their men who served with them – it was a concept that Himmler would seize upon later as he began to formulate SS rituals.[106] Despite this, however, Junger himself had increasing disagreement with the Nazis in general, and expressed this by rejecting a seat on the Reichstag offered to him twice during the Third Reich, as well as denouncing Nazi atrocities after World War II.[107]  Although his novel *On The Marble Cliffs* was allowed to be published by the Third Reich in 1939, it is viewed by many as a cryptic

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[105] Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 200-201.

[106] Robert G.L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918-1923 (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952): 26.

[107] Hillary Barr, "An Exchange on Ernst Junger," *The New York Review of Books* 11, no. 21 (1993), online at https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1993/12/16/an-exchange-on-ernst-junger/?pagination=false (Accessed October 25, 2023).

condemnation of the Nazi regime and contributed to Junger's recovery of his credibility after

World War II.  One passage from this novel was taken as an allusion to Hitler as the "Chief

Ranger," who in Machiavellian fashion seizes opportunity to assume power in a time of

weakness:

> At first we heard little of the Chief Ranger; but it was noteworthy how as
> lassitude set in and reality dissolved he drew ever nearer. At first one heard only
> rumours like the first obscure heralds of a pest raging in distant harbours. Then
> reports spread from mouth to mouth of infringements of the law and of acts of
> violence in the neighbourhood, and finally such incidents occurred publicly and
> with no attempt at concealment. A cloud of fear preceded the Chief Ranger like
> the mountain mist that presages the storm. Fear enveloped him, and I am
> convinced that therein far more than in his own person lay his power. Only when
> things had begun to totter from their inherent weakness could he exercise his
> might; but when that moment came his forests were well placed for assault
> against the land.[108]

This appears to be an allegory in reference to Hitler ascending to Chancellorship in

Germany in 1933. The "cloud of fear" that preceded the Ranger of Junger's story could be

emblematic of the Great Depression and increasing political unrest that preceded Hitler's ascent

to power. Despite this, Junger's novel *Storm of Steel* contributed much to the defiant militarism

that found enthusiastic support among *Freikorps* members, and the wartime experiences many of

the disaffected veterans had also resonated with Junger's reflections.[109]  Therefore, Junger is to

be considered an influential precursor of the *Freikorps* movement itself, although he greatly

differed in perspective from many future Nazi leaders who participated in the *Freikorps*.

Junger, much like Haushofer, was an unwitting mentor for the Nazis although both were

in different contexts. This would prove evident for many influences of Nazi ideology as have

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[108] Ernst Junger, and Stuart Hood, trans. *On the Marble Cliffs* (London: New Directions, 1947): 29.

[109] Nigel Jones, *The Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* (London: Robinson, 1987): 120.

been explored thus far. In the case of the *Freikorps,* such developments would be integrated into official Nazi political structure, as the SA and later the SS were largely modeled upon the same ideas which led to the formation of the *Freikorps,* and many *Freikorps* members would also become leaders in the future Third Reich over a decade later. As the military arm of the Nazi Party, the SA was a political mechanism, and much of its tactics and rhetoric were directly incorporated from earlier *Freikorps* militias. While the discussion continues as to whether or not the SA was in reality a *Freikorps* unit itself, the *Freikorps* nonetheless were integral to its evolution.

### Summary of the Political Background of the National Socialist Movement

In analyzing the political dimension of any movement, there are three essential elements to consider. First, the ideological element, which in the case of the National Socialist movement would be primarily geopolitical theory. The *Geopolitik* of Friedrich Ratzel, as channeled through the work of Karl Haushofer, bore significant influence upon Hitler and the Nazis due to two major concepts – *Lebensraum* and the mythical/monistic *Blut und Boden* concept as embodied in the earlier *völkisch* nationalism that preceded the Nazis.

The second element would the cultural phenomenon of youth movements, and in the case of the National Socialists the important predecessor of note would be the various *Wandervögel* movements that sprang up in the late 19th century. The *Wandervögel* represented a political and cultural shift among the youth that later took on a more nationalistic dimension given many of its members also adopted *völkisch* ideology. Like many youth movements, this one was also countercultural, consisted of more middle-class ethnically German youth, and entailed activities such as sexual experimentation, nudism, veganism, exploring alternative religious traditions,

radical environmentalism, and other practices that could easily be associated with later youth countercultural movements such as the hippies, beatniks, and "Goths" of future generations.

The third element would be militarism, and the organization of active military as well as veterans into more grassroots political forces. While this was generally true of many European societies of the time (Mussolini's Fascists started out in a similar fashion), in Germany during the years immediately following World War I many war veterans in particular felt somewhat disillusioned with the stiff penalties imposed upon Germany by the Versailles Treaty, and this led to a massive reaction in which many former military personnel found a new purpose in political organization in the form of the *Freikorps.* The *Freikorps* also included many alumni of the aforementioned *Wandervögel* movement, as many pre-war veterans were youth themselves during that period. This led to the repetition of certain individuals who would be involved in both movements and later became high-profile leaders in the Nazi movement, and some would even have prominent government posts in the Third Reich later.

In and of themselves – political theories, youth movements, and fraternal groups of war veterans – such institutions are neither good nor evil, and in many cases, they are viable and legitimate movements in various societies. However, the one thread that consistently weaves between these German movements is a radical nationalism, which was reinforced by earlier influences such as the pre-Christian paganism of the Germans as embodied in more occultic groups such as Theosophy and its German and Austrian variants. This radical nationalism was also driven by a racial dimension, in that the mythological worldview of the German occultists was merged with the emerging Darwinian biological theories that birth eugenics and a social order called Social Darwinism. As many movements and institutions were infused with this radically ethnocentric form of nationalism – popularly called the *völkisch* ideology – it led to the

evolution of the National Socialist movement as a culmination of all these earlier influences. However, the catalyst that made it possible was the ever-changing political landscape of Germany itself.

From its official unification under the Prussian aristocratic Hohenzollern dynasty in 1871, Germany was at a crossroads of its own national identity. Having been subject for years to other ruling powers – the Holy Roman Empire, Napoleonic France – many German states were quasi-independent entities who had to that point only enjoyed forced unity under outside powers. Shortly after Germany's unification in 1871, an age of rapid industrialization ensued between the years 1873-1895.[110]  The rapid acceleration that this industrial paradigm shift impacted Germany caused some shaking up in the German economy, which to this point had been largely agrarian like much of Europe. The negative economic impact of this shift would foster discontent – this led to attempts by some to define what being a German meant, and the economic conditions of the 1870s led to the proliferation of a number of radical political groups, including the newly-organized Marxists as well as more radically nationalist movements that would accept an evolving ideology known as *völkisch.* Discontent with industrialization led many middle-class youth to pursue a "back to nature" transcendentalism reminiscent of Emerson in the US, and this led to an interest in both pre-Christian paganism and Norse mythology while rejecting the extremes of urbanization and industrialization. Similar movements were happening across the entire West as well, as late 19th century occultism was on the rise in many sectors of Europe and the United States. This led to both the organization of the *Wandervögel* among middle-class German youth, as well as the rise in nationalist occultic societies among the more elite sectors in

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[110] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers LTD., 1985): 33

German and Austrian society. As World War I ensued, a growing German nationalism was also evident, and it found its expression in an amalgamation of ideas that were further reinforced by Germany's defeat, as the punitive stipulations of the Versailles Treaty also caused many Germans to feel persecuted for being German, and radical nationalism would gradually be on the increase throughout the 1920s. The National Socialist Party, founded in 1919, was in essence a merging of many of these elements into a more directly organized movement, particularly in Bavaria where it had its greatest strength. With the economic and political discord that ensued after 1929, much of the discontent that was expressed by these earlier movements such as the *Wandervögel* and the various German *völkisch* occultic groups was harnessed by the early Nazis into a political force. That therefore leads back to some original questions.

Behind every community is a "story" that explains the driving force behind the group and its worldview. This is true of ethnic groups, religious communities, and naturally also among political movements. The story centers around attributes that are called Central Narrative Convictions, or CNCs. CNCs are not just limited to more benevolent or positive groups, but they can also be applied in a similar manner to widely accepted evil groups such as the Nazis. To establish what the CNCs of a group are, it goes back to the original research questions of this entire project, which is what shaped Nazi political ideas? Framing that in the context of CNCs, it requires answering four integral questions.[111]

1.  Where are we (meaning what nature of reality do we find ourselves)?

2.  Who are we (what is the nature and task of who we are)?

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[111] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009): 157-158.

3. What's wrong (how do we understand and account for the evil and brokenness we are experiencing)?

4. What's the remedy (how to find the path from brokenness to wholeness)?

While these questions are often applied in the context of Personalist philosophy or Biblical hermeneutics, they can equally apply to political ideology as well. In the case of the National Socialist movement, the political platform – which was also informed by the earlier occultic/mythological worldviews and Darwinian biological/racial theories – was to an extent a way of establishing CNCs that addressed pressing concerns in Germany at the time. As Hahn and Wiker note, however, there is a deeper issue at play that impacted all cultural realms of not only Germany but the West in general. Beginning with the centuries leading up to the Enlightenment, there was a gradual disconnection between a more traditional approach and a more "rationalistic" Enlightenment understanding of the political, religious, and cultural dimensions of a society, and as this happened, political theorists such as Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Locke embraced a new political philosophy of political liberalism, as well as philosophical and theological modernism.[112] In separating faith from reason, and politics from religion, many modernist philosophers left open a void for emerging radicalism to fill as a reaction to the change. This is one reason even among German Christians some Nazi rhetoric found open acceptance, as many German Protestants in particular were actually more liberal in their theology and thus open to some of these ideas – also, the close connection of Church and State in Germany would foster an acceptance on different levels of the monistic *Blut und Boden* ideology of German personhood being connected to German land. Given that Germany was significantly impacted by these shifts,

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[112] Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture 1300-1700* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2013): 9.

it is of little surprise then that in due course of time a political movement such as the National Socialists would emerge. In many ways, the National Socialist movement was both a reaction to as well as an acceptance of these earlier philosophical and political trends, which is the political paradox of the whole Nazi legacy. While accepting some modernist ideology (notably social Darwinism and the biological theory it possessed) and rejecting others (theological liberalism – the demythologizing of the Bible and thus redefining theology led to a religious vacuum that alternative occultic religious practices easily filled), the Nazis were thus a series of contradictions on many levels. As they eventually gained control of the German nation, they would try to reconcile these contradictions by eschewing certain groups and individuals who contributed to their rise. That will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

The concluding finding of this investigation examined whether the Nazi regime was considered "Right" or "Left" politically. Debate still ensues concerning these designations, as until recently the Nazis were considered a more "right-wing" movement. However, evidence does substantiate that the Nazis also held many things in common with Marxists and others who were traditionally identified with the ideological Left. Therefore, the conclusion is that the National Socialists. like the Bolsheviks, were unquestionably totalitarian and this meant a more political coercion of the public in Germany to accept the Nazi platform once the Third Reich was established. As far as the designations "liberal" and "conservative" however, the various aspects of Nazi ideology would identify them as a more extreme manifestation of the political liberalism proposed by Machiavelli, Locke, and Spinoza. It is commonly accepted that at the time of both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, the actual "Conservative" element in German society would have been identified as the Monarchists and the older Prussian military elites. The Nazis had little influence on either of those sectors, although Hermann Goring did have some

influential connections among them that did somehow convince them that Hitler was the solution to the chaos of the Weimar Republic. That paradox will also be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

The Nazis therefore embodied a climax of the various radically nationalist German political groups and ideologies that preceded them, which in turn they evolved to adopt to their own specific agenda. While they cannot be said to be technically "right-wing," Fascist, or even "populist," they did represent a movement that knew how to utilize language and manipulate current conditions to advance their own power and agenda. Effective propaganda – both by Hitler and later Joseph Goebbels – packaged the ideas in such a way that they appeared to the public to be something they actually would prove not to be, and that was the impetus of National Socialist politics.

**Chapter 5**

**Influences from Philosophy Upon Nazi Ideology**

Having examined the pseudo-scientific, occultic/mythical, and political backgrounds of National Socialism, the remaining component to the evolution of this movement is philosophical. While in many ways the philosophical element is intertwined with the others, there are also details that merit examination on their own. Therefore, in this chapter, the influence of three prominent philosophers – Alfred Gobineau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain – will be examined.

Given that like anything else the National Socialist philosophical vision did not appear out of a vacuum, many of the most influential philosophers that impacted Hitler's thought as well as that of the other leading Nazis did evolve from earlier ideas. In many ways, the National Socialist movement and the Third Reich that it created were products of 17th-century Enlightenment philosophy, and many ideas it espoused were voiced by Enlightenment writers such as Spinoza and their forebears. These ideas provided the early National Socialists with philosophical justification to address the CNC questions which animated their worldview as a movement. The disclaimer here is that adaptation of such ideas does not in any way implicate the originators as proto-Nazis, but they did contribute some of the concepts which evolved into the more radical *völkisch* nationalism which would later evolve into National Socialism. Indeed, many of the ideas that shaped the Nazi ethos were selectively incorporated into their ideological system as they had compatibility with preconceived notions they already possessed. The first section of this chapter will deal specifically with those early influences.

**Tracing the Roots of Philosophical Development**

  Until the Enlightenment created a separation, philosophy and theology were interconnected. Many of the earliest theologians, subsequently, were also noted philosophers, in particular St. Thomas Aquinas. While Enlightenment rationalism did attempt to separate faith from reason, this was an impossibility not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but in non-Christian traditions as well. As the rise in occultism as discussed earlier happened in the West during the latter 19th century, it was not uncommon to see some occultists adapt certain rationalist ideas into their ethos, notably Helena Blavatsky who reconciled the Eastern concept of transmigration of souls with Darwinian evolution. This was also true of *völkisch* writers such as Theodor Fritsch and Georg Lanz von Liebenfels as well. The question here arises as to what earlier philosophical influences shaped many of the ideologues who would contribute to the evolution of National Socialism? Regarding this, it is also vital to look into the earliest philosophical forebears of later figures such as Nietzsche, as it will establish a link between earlier Enlightenment thought and the secularized German philosophers who were influential in shaping the radical German nationalism which facilitated the rise of National Socialism.

  The Enlightenment by and large redefined philosophy as being an organized habit of criticism rather than the traditional definition of philosophy as a set of beliefs, assumptions, and analyses of experience, along with the intellectual skeleton which was constructed upon those.[1] This led to a promotion of the confidence of good will, clear thinking, and the eschewal of superstition as the fundamental (and only) adequate equipment of a genuine philosopher.[2]

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[1] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1966): 130.

[2] Gay, 131.

Although much of this thinking could be attributed to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), it also had

some very influential antecedents as well. One of those was the Islamic philosopher Averroes

(1126-1198), who wrote in one of his writings the following in regard to faith and reason as it

applied to his own Islamic interpretation:

> That is why all Muslims are agreed that all the words of the Law are not to be
> taken literally, nor all of them given an interpretation. But they vary in verses,
> which are or are not to be interpreted.[3]

When the Muslims eventually conquered Spain and ruled it for many centuries, some of

these ideas of Averroes also found their way into the writings of self-identified Christian

philosophers as well, with the earliest being Marsilius of Padua (1270-1342), an Italian politician

and scholar. In his definitive work *Defensor Pacis,* Marsilius makes the case that secular and

religious authority should be segregated, and thus he has a political dimension to his philosophy.

He proposes that religious leadership should be restricted to spiritual matters only and that the

state should be the only arbiter of secular authority.[4] This conviction of Marsalis was largely

based on his study of Averroes, who as noted also proposed that some aspects of religious texts

could not be interpreted literally but were allegorical in nature, and Marsilius adopted this to his

thesis by expanding further that the limitations of hermeneutics also limited the power of the

Church in affairs of the state. This would then lead to the elevation of reason over revelation, or

the rational state over religion, in the thinking of Marsalius – this is due in part to Marsilius's

rejection of religion being the product of divine revelation, but rather the product of philosophers

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[3] Muhammad Jamill Ur-Behman, trans. *The Philosophy and Theology of Averroes* (Baroda: A.G. Widgery, 1921):28

[4] Ephrem Emerton, *The Defensor Pacis of Marsiglio of Padua: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920) :24

for the sake of civil tranquility.[5]  This would be expounded further by later thinkers such as Machiavelli and Spinoza. This in turn would also figure prominently into the philosophy of Kant, as well as even many early Protestant Reformers in Germany. Consequentially, it would pave the way for both theological liberalism among German Protestant circles and would indirectly aid in both the evolution of radical German nationalism as well as the rise of occultism to fill a void left by the increasing liberalization and secularization of much of German Christianity in the 19th century. It could be argued that these were factors that led to the rise of the National Socialist movement, and they will be examined further in their philosophical dimension later in this chapter. At this point however, it is the thinking of Spinoza which does have some bearing on the later Nazi attitudes towards religion in Germany, and it is largely due to Spinoza advocating for the relegation of religion to a limited sphere, as well as the classic divorce of faith and reason in the minds of many Enlightenment thinkers.

Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch/Portuguese philosopher of Jewish heritage who is considered along with Rene Descartes a leading Enlightenment philosophical influence. While it seems ironic that a philosopher of Jewish heritage would espouse ideas which were to be embraced by the virulently antisemitic National Socialists later, Spinoza contributed much to the later conditions that would make the Third Reich possible. Many of Spinoza's ideas were filtered through German philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche, but they nonetheless did have an impact upon Germany later.

In his treatise *The Theological-Political Treatise,* Spinoza proposes that religious practice is subservient to civil law in societies where such practices are illegal. He was perhaps shaped by

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[5] Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture 1300-1700* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013): 30.

his own experience as a Converso (A Jewish person who converted to the Christian faith during

the Inquisition to avoid persecution), but it does have some implications for the modern world,

and Hitler would espouse a similar view when he would elevate a pantheistic view of *Blut und*

*Boden* over any competing ideology in the Third Reich. In this work, Spinoza writes the

following:

> So though these ceremonies were not instituted with respect to
> a state, still they were instituted only with respect to the whole Society.
> 26 So someone who lives alone is not bound by them at all. Indeed,
> someone who lives in a state where the Christian religion is forbidden is
> bound to abstain from these ceremonies.[6]

Spinoza expanded upon Hobbes's theory of purely secular divine right, in other words,

by expanding it further to encompass a thoroughly secular notion of religious toleration based

upon the dictates of the modern quasi-democratic liberal state.[7]  Spinoza then basically identifies

God with an amoral mathematical-mechanical account of nature that also derived from

Descartes.[8]  In essence then, Spinoza built upon the earlier Averroist ideas as well as drawing

from Hobbes and Descartes, and it presents the Enlightenment-era idea of a secular state that

divorces religion from political order as a fruit of separating faith from reason.  This naturally

would lead Spinoza to a conclusion that would indeed have some manifestation within the later

Third Reich, as he proposed that conditions and stipulations of agreements between the leader

and the people in a state were not absolutely binding upon the leader, and at any discretion on the

part of the leader they could be broken and violated indefinitely because the security and

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[6] Baruch Spinoza, *The Theological-Political Treatise* (Amsterdam: Jan Riewertz, 1670) :147

[7] Hahn and Wiker, 378.

[8] Hahn and Wiker, 381.

integrity of the state surpasses any other stipulation.[9] While Hitler and other earlier Nazi leaders did have a familiarity with Machiavelli's work, the influence of Machiavelli upon Nazi policies and their platform may have been more indirect than direct due to the fact few early Nazi sources (if any) mention Machiavelli at all. This idea echoes Machiavelli in many aspects, in that Machiavelli expanded upon this by noting that especially when a new regime takes power, its enemies would need to be neutralized – he notes this in his *Discourses* as follows:

> The ruler who chooses a tyranny and does not kill Brutus, or who chooses a republic and does not kill the sons of Brutus, will not hold power for long.[10]

This can be observed in practice shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933, when he instituted the "Knight of the Long Knives" against his own SA units, purging them and other enemies to consolidate his power. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hitler was an avid reader of Machiavelli by eyewitness accounts and may have derived some inspiration from Machiavelli's ideas. Given the also unorthodox and apparently illegal way Hitler's actions were carried out, it also would qualify Spinoza's view that a secular leader could break agreements and stipulations if he felt it benefitted his own rule. Again, the irony of this observation is that a virulently antisemitic regime (i.e., the Third Reich) is putting into practice what was proposed centuries earlier by a philosopher of Jewish origin (Spinoza) – the irony of this would warrant another discussion, as National Socialism during its time would have emphatically denied the connection between its own ideology and that of a philosopher such as Spinoza. In the case of Hitler and the Third Reich however, it was carried further in that it entailed the future

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[9] Robert Alexander Duff, *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy* (Glasgow: James MacClehose and Sons, 1903):261

[10] Niccolo Machiavelli, and Peter Constantine, ed. and trans., *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli* (New York: The Modern Library, 2007): 261.

implementations of international law regarding conquest and acquisition of *Lebensraum* as embodied in the aforementioned *Geopolitik* of Haushofer and Ratzel.

These earlier influences would also evolve in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant's philosophy is pivotal to understanding much of the later thought of more nationalist philosophers such as Chamberlain and Gobineau, and thus he merits some discussion. Other influences of this period (Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau, etc.) echoed similar ideas, but they were omitted due to minimal relevance to the National Socialist worldview.

**Kant: The Involuntary Link Between Enlightenment Rationalism and Radical German Nationalism.**

The debate of Kant's influence on National Socialism has been a subject of discussion for several decades.[11]  In historiographical terms, the discussion highlights three pivotal sources which argue for a direct link between Kant and the Nazis. The first is the more seminal work of Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1966). Arendt taught Political Philosophy at the New York School of Social Research, and although this edition was

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[11] One of the earliest writers to explore this was the economist F.A. Hayek (1899-1992), who noted in his book, *the Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944) that Kant's position on Rule of Law was a source of justification for the National Socialist agenda to advocate unlimited legislative power for the state because of the democratic process (Hayek, 118-119). The historian George Mosse (1918-1999) also notes a Kantian influence on early *völkisch* thought in his book *The Crisis of German Ideology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964). Mosse notes that the Kantian influence in *völkisch* and later Nazi thought was in the idea that Christianity itself would need to undergo Germanization, which Mosse also identifies as both Kantian influence and Nietzschean re-emphasis (Mosse, 66). Mosse also goes into more detail about how Kantian ideas were appropriated by Chamberlain and others to advance a racial view of German history and religion (Mosse, 95). Ayn Rand scholar Leonard Peikoff in his book *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Penguin, 1982) theorizes a direct connection between Kantian philosophy and Nazi ideology, noting that the link between them was the German nationalist J.G. Fichte (1762-1814), who expanded on Kant's ideas of the state to equal German racial identity to ultimate human character, and thus it would necessitate the totalitarian rule of scholar-dictators (an idea echoed in Liebenfels' *Theozoology* later) to rule and "enlighten" the ignorant masses (Peikoff, 42). Fichte is also integral here as he was the one to introduce Machiavellian concepts to German nationalism as well, particularly in his commentary on Machiavelli's writings he authored in 1807. Machiavelli's influence upon National Socialism was discussed earlier, in particular via Hitler's dialogue with Hermann Rauschning.

published in 1966, the original was authored in 1951. The one influence of Kant's philosophy she notes in this work was in regard to Kant's radical redefinition of evil as "perverted ill will," and thus there was a level of proportionality attributed to evil acts to justify them from the position of those committing the evil.[12]  Elaborating upon this, she goes on to explain that Kant's reasoning that the "idea" of an ideology could be calculated by the appearance of the idea as calculating history rather than being produced by it. The idea behind this, she continues, is that the "idea" is justified by its own "logic," something she attributes to Kantian philosophical conclusions.[13]  In other words, even evil acts were the logical fruit of  "ideas," and this meant that there was a sort of moral relativism rooted in proportionality which drove Kantian philosophical conclusions.

A second author who links Kant to the evolution of National Socialism is William Montgomery McGovern (1897-1964), *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London, George G. Harrap and Co., LTD, 1941). McGovern was a political scientist and professor at Northwestern University, and in his book, he draws upon a linear philosophical link between the earliest influences and the Nazis as formulating a political philosophy drawing from those influences. One of those areas that he notes this influence was evident in is a connection between Kant and Darwin, and thus a justification more or less of social Darwinism as would later be manifested in eugenics. McGovern notes that before Darwin proposed the "survival of the fittest" idea, Kant had presaged this with his own idea of "the survival of the best," and in doing so it even justified evil acts on the part of individuals as being

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[12] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1966): 459.

[13] Arendt, 469.

for mankind's benefit.[14]  To state this more succinctly, it interprets evil as a necessary and even

positive aspect of human evolution. Noting this, McGovern then continues with an ominous

interpretation of Kant's political philosophy which would in practice find its fullest manifestation

in the *Geopolitik* notion of "space for living" (*Lebensraum)* advocated later by Haushofer and

Ratzel. This idea was that the mutual antagonism of man brought forth the state, and the mutual

antagonism of states therefore brought forth a consolidation of power – the negative (bad) traits

of humanity were the necessary catalyst to make this happen.[15]  A similar mentality would be

found among both the various *völkisch* factions in late 19th-century Germany and Austria, as well

as the Nazis that evolved from those movements later. The new problem that the Nazis saw

though as a central narrative conviction was that the German state had been weakened by racial

intermingling, and the remedy to said problem was to somehow purge those elements so that a

"pure Aryan race" could evolve and thus take its rightful place as dominant on the world stage.

In doing so, there is a Kantian rationale (in reading McGovern's understanding of Kant's

philosophy) in that a struggle, and the use of evil means, would have to be employed to bring

about this "greater good" for *Blut und Boden.* While this in no way would implicate Kant

directly in Nazi atrocities, it does merit discussion as to how Kant and other Enlightenment

philosophers did contribute in some way to the Nazi worldview.

The most recent work that addresses the influence of Kant upon the Nazis would be

Leonard Peikoff (born 1933), *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982). Peikoff,

a Canadian-American Objectivist philosopher who was an early protégé of Ayn Rand, later

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[14] William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London, George G, Harrap and Co., LTD, 1941): 152.

[15] McGovern, 154.

published the more specific aspects of the book in another volume, *The Cause of Hitler's*

*Germany* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2013). Peikoff notes in this latter work that three

primary philosophers contributed to the collectivism that characterized the Nazis and other

totalitarian dictators – Plato, Kant, and Hegel. He gained inspiration for this hypothesis from Dr.

Michael Berliner, who focused on the intellectual origins of National Socialism and how the

German version of Enlightenment philosophy (in particular Kant) led to the evolution of Hitler,

and to this regard he notes Nazi ideologist L.G. Tirala, who wrote that "the world of activity and

action is subject to different laws from the world of appearance."[16]   By connecting Kant to the

evolution of Nazism, Peikoff has been criticized by many writers as being simplistic and

distorting Kant's philosophy.[17]   However, while there may be some justification for this criticism

on the part of the author, George Smith, there are a couple of takeaways from Peikoff's work to

consider.  One, Peikoff is not necessarily asserting that Kant himself was overtly proto-Nazi, but

rather he is connecting German philosophical development as a contributing factor in the rise of

Nazism. Also, Peikoff may have some evidence for his thesis in the primary source writings of

some figures who influenced Hitler and the Nazis early on, specifically a volume published by

Houston Stewart Chamberlain in 1914 on Kant's philosophy. More on that will be discussed

later in the section on Chamberlain. Conclusively, Peikoff's work is integral in any discussion of

Kant's indirect influence upon later *völkisch* and Nazi writers.

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[16] Leonard Peikoff, "Nazi Activism and the Two-World Philosophy of Kant," *The Cause of Hitler's Germany (Blog),* 14 November 2021, https://causehitlersgermany.com/nazi-activism-and-the-two-world-philosophy-of-kant/ (Accessed November 16, 2023).

[17] George H. Smith, "Immanuel Kant and Nazism, " Libertarianism.org, 5 February 2016, https://www.libertarianism.org/columns/immanuel-kant-nazism  (Accessed November 16, 2023).

This short historiographical overview highlighted the Kant-Nazi connection as discussed over the past century. However, it is important now to examine more closely aspects of Kant's philosophy that may have impacted the Nazis and their evolution as a political movement.

The major influence that Kant has on later radical German nationalism from which National Socialism evolved is noted by Edward Caird as being related to Kant living through the Thirty Years War, and the occupation of his native Königsberg by Russian forces. Caird observes the following as he writes about this impact:

> The first of these great events was brought home to him, as already indicated, by the Russian occupation of Konigsberg: and we cannot suppose that it had less influence upon him than it had upon others of his nation. It was, indeed, the heroic struggle of Frederic (sic) which first awakened modern Germany to a consciousness of its powers. It made Germans begin to think of themselves as a distinct people and to take pride in their language. It roused the national genius from a long sleep which had held it inactive since the disaster of the Thirty Years' War, and stirred it to that vigorous fermentation out of which came a new national literature.[18]

Caird basically asserts that Kant was a product of his time, and thus a fusion of a revived German nationalism combined with Enlightenment rationalism is what therefore informed his political philosophy. He also notes later that Kant was directly influenced to a degree by the earlier philosophies of Spinoza and Descartes, and as such he also replaced a metaphysical principle for philosophy with a psychological principle.[19] The implications of this would indeed have some bearing on the German nationalism that would evolve later. The somewhat pantheistic conviction that underlies Spinoza's philosophy was also carried over into a purely German context in that it would be the basis for national identity being intrinsically tied to geographical

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[18]Edward Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant Vol. 1* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1909):55.

[19] Caird, 74-75.

location, and in this regard both the later *Geopolitik* of Ratzel in particular and the whole concept

of *Blut und Boden* which became integral to the whole *völkisch* worldview tied national identity

to geographical location and thus would have a more psychological dimension to it which would

account for the eventual union of the individual with the land. Given that Kant himself preceded

both the development of *Geopolitik* as well as the *völkisch* ideology that evolved from it, it

would be inaccurate to say that Kant would give wholesale subscription to these ideas, but the

impact of the same influences that drove his philosophical development would also shape

German nationalism for at least a century to come. We see this particularly in noted British

*völkisch* writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who in his study of Kant makes the connection

more clearly:

> It is for that reason that in a former work I have proposed to draw upon the wealth
> of the German language in order to distinguish between "philosophy" and the
> German word "Weltanschauung." The word philosophy, borrowed from the
> Greek, must always bear the meaning of a learned or scholastic discipline. The
> German word implies a predisposition allied to religion and mythology, altogether
> human, but developed in all manner of different directions, with a network of
> roots nourished by art and science, by philosophy and mathematics, a tendency
> the foremost aim of which is to establish a harmony between the outer eye and the
> inner eye, or should this figure of speech be too bold, between seeing and thinking
> and conduct. If, then, we should press into our service the words philosopher and
> Weussnschauer, drawing the same distinction as we have done between
> philosophy and Weltanschauung, we should know exactly what manner of men to
> select for the purpose of comparison. Not every philosopher has been a
> Weltanschauung and the great Weltanschauers have been poets, painters,
> statesmen, physicians, priests, mathematicians, historians, now and again also,
> philosophers.[20]

Chamberlain, who was a *völkisch* Germanophile and a philosopher in his own right,

clearly would indirectly concur with Spinoza's view of a psychological framework for

philosophy as he tied philosophy to the comprehensive German terminology of *Weltanschauung,*

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[20]Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Immanuel Kant* (London: John Lane Co., 1919):20

which basically internalizes philosophical discourse as part of the psyche. He credits Kant with

being one of the first to truly embody this idea in his writings. Given that Chamberlain, via his

connection with Richard Wagner via marriage to the latter's daughter, was a pivotal formative

influence on Hitler, it stands to reason that Kant's ideas were incorporated into National Socialist

ideology by Hitler, via Chamberlain and the more intellectual elements of the *völkisch*

movement. As one example, Mosse notes that Chamberlain capitalized on an idea he attributed

to Kant in his *Foundations* called *Ding an sich,* a principle of a shared essence of things beyond

comprehension which Chamberlain asserted was the existence of intrinsic racial values.

Likewise, he did devote much to propagating his father-in-law's worldview by upholding

Wagner as a "prophet of Germanism."[21] Chamberlain, however, took this a step further by fusing

eugenics-based racial hygienist biology with Social Darwinism to define the Kantian-derived

idea of *Ding an sich* to mean that the "Germanic race" was superior in intellect if not physical

anatomy to every other group of people.[22]  To this degree, he also was concurrent with Ernst

Haeckel and Paul de LaGarde as well in basically attempting to separate Christianity from its

Jewish origins via the mythos of the "Aryan Christ," and in doing so this would follow a similar

line of reasoning the was proposed by Liebenfels, namely that the true "Christ" was an Aryan.[23]

However, specifically what ideas of Kant were incorporated into Nazi ideology?  It is important

at this juncture to explore Kant's own writings to ascertain that.

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[21] George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021): 94-95.

[22] Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 36.

[23] Daniel Gassman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007): 157. This view is also shared by Liebenfels, who basically called Christ an "evolved master" of a "superior race," and thus Liebenfels attributes Christ as a "creation" rather than "Creator," noting that although Christ was divine, he evolved his divinity – Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology, or The Science of the Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron (*Vienna, 1905): 53.

One of the ideas that the National Socialists and their predecessors seems to have gleaned from Kant is found in his own writings, *Idea for a Universal History,* in which he details a variety of principles to establish the objective. The fourth aligned with the National Socialist idea of *Blut und Boden* occurring through conquest, and he writes the following:

> The means which nature employs to accomplish the development of all faculties is the antagonism of men in society, since this antagonism becomes, in the end, the cause of a lawful order in society.[24]

Although these writings presage Darwin by several decades, they do echo Darwin's "survival of the fittest," which is essentially cloaked in a political dimension by Kant in this passage. This, together with the whole *Übermensch* concept that will be explored in Nietzsche later, provided a basis for the Nazi racial ideology that colored their brand of radical German nationalism. In summary, the struggle for existence, called "antagonism" by Kant, would be an essential element for the establishment of a "lawful order" by the prevailing party in the struggle. This also does underly a later conviction shared by many radical German nationalists regarding conquest and subjugation of non-Germanic peoples who resided on land they thought was by birthright theirs. Further, this was explained as well in racial terms, and Kant is believed to be a contributing factor in this connection by some.

In a 1775 essay authored by Kant, he espouses a monogenic view of human origins, but notes that of the four fundamental races he identifies, only one has the potential to be closer to the original perfect origin of humanity, this being of course the White European. He calls this original race the "stem genus," and identifies it as the purest human race of all the others.[25] This

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[24] Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political Writings* (New York: Random House, 1949):120

[25] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997):47.

view bears an uncanny resemblance to the "Hyperborean" root-race idea of some *völkisch*

writers, and also some similarity to Helena Blavatsky's "Fifth Root Race" that she names

"Aryan" in *The Secret Doctrine.* While a direct connection between Kant and these other sources

cannot be verified by existing scholarship, it does raise the question as to how well-versed in

Kant these later writers were? For instance, while Kant cannot be classified as an evolutionist in

the Darwinian sense, some authors have identified a connection between Kant's ideas and

Darwin's which bear examination.

The one person of note who has been attributed with a connection between Kant and

Darwin is the economist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), who was influenced by the social

Darwinian position of Herbert Spencer and wanted to apply Darwinian evolutionary theory to

economics. Veblen shared many views in common with the Nazis themselves, although he did

not overtly support them as during his lifetime the National Socialist Party was still relatively

obscure on the German political landscape. Among those views were a critical opinion of

Christianity, as he extolled pre-Christian Teutonic/Norse paganism as being superior due to its

seemingly more egalitarian worldview.[26]  He also was overly critical of Jews and has been

labeled an antisemite in some publications. This was evident in the fact that Jewish intellectuals

were treated by Veblen as being an anomaly of a disordered culture.[27]  In this way, he was

similar in his views to the National Socialists in Germany at the concurrent time of his early

career, although he would not live to see the Third Reich come to power. Veblen also came to his

conclusions by combining Darwinian evolution with Kantian causality, and in regard to the

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[26] Phillipa Broda, "Egalitarianism and Bias: Veblen and the Jewish Question," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 31, no.1-2 (2020) :250.

[27] Broda, 248.

latter, it was Kant's emphasis on finalism that Veblen completed by the application of Darwinian evolutionary theory.[28] The term "finalism" is synonymous with teleology in philosophical terms, and ascribes meaning or function for something of its end or final objective, and would therefore be a version of causality which would focus upon the influence a particular thing has upon the production of another event, cause, etc. In this case, Kantian finalism would be applied to Darwinian evolution by individuals such as Veblen to establish that a "superior" incarnation of humanity would need to result from the demise of an "inferior" incarnation, and the actions of the "superior" would thus cement the dominant position. The actions entailed in this case would be a struggle for existence (Kant's "antagonism" and Darwin's "natural selection" synthesized) that would therefore justify practices such as eugenics and other measures to assure the most efficient path for the domination of the "superior." This was a hallmark of Nazi racial policies that can be observed in the Nuremberg Laws of 1936. Again, while Veblen's views are not intrinsically connected to the Nazi views, they do mirror each other with similar ideas. Returning to the idea of CNCs, for instance, the question "what's wrong?" would be answered by the Kantian notion of "antagonism," and it would find the answer to "what's the remedy?" in social Darwinian practice. This then leads to some notes on Kant's views on race.

Immanuel Kant was a product of both Enlightenment rationalism and a revived German nationalism that began to evolve during his lifetime. While it is not fair nor substantiated to label Kant as a sort of "proto-Nazi," and there is generally little evidence other than perhaps Houston Stewart Chamberlain's book on Kant to link Kant directly to Nazism, an argument could be made that Kant, and the National Socialist movement, were both bi-products of the same

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[28] Tiziana Foresti, "Between Darwin and Kant: Veblen's Theory of Causality," *International Review of Sociology* 14, no. 3 (2004):405.

circumstances. This would also include views on race as well as Darwinian evolution, in that there are some allusions to Kant embracing a sort of pre-Darwinian evolutionary position which also informed how he viewed other races. In 1788 for one example he authored an essay in which he claimed people from Africa and the Indian Subcontinent lacked a "drive to activity" and were in essence deficient in mental capacities that would facilitate success and self-motivation.[29]    There are echoes of Malthus as well as later eugenicist sentiments in such a statement, in that the next logical step was that some races were "superior" and others "inferior." While Kant did believe in a more monogenic view of race – that races were based on heritable traits rather than being different species – he nonetheless does ascribe a hierarchical view of race based on his reading of Hume and others.[30]  The implications of this would also shape German philosophical thought for generations to come, and would be used as a justification later for the *Völkisch* ideology and other radically nationalist ideas in Germany and Austria in the late 19th century.

One writer who drew such a parallel between Kant's ideas and Nazism was William Montgomery McGovern, who authored the previously referenced volume *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). McGovern observes that 20th-century Fascism and the totalitarianism it advocated for had its root in what is known as the "idealist" school of philosophy that evolved from the Enlightenment and of which Kant is often identified. By divorcing faith from reason and relegating the former to the realm of private devotion (advocated by earlier philosophers such as Spinoza and Hume), the idealists focused instead on new understandings of the words "liberty" and "freedom," and in

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[29] Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 229 (2007): 573.

[30] Kleingeld, 576.

doing so, they advocated that true freedom came from complete subservience to a totalitarian absolute state.[31] As journalist Jonah Goldberg also notes in his book *Liberal Fascism* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), one aspect of Fascism was in its preservation of some "positives" on pragmatic grounds but also redefinition of those "positives" to conform with their own vision of government, which the Nazis termed *Gleichschaltung,* or "coordination."[32] Another political theorist, Christophe Buffin de Chosal, argues further in his book *The End of Democracy* (Arcadia, CA: Tumblar House Publishing, 2017) that ultimately what is often termed "democracy" in reality does provide the impetus for manipulation by the state in the name of the "common good" to impose totalitarianism on a nation.[33] Chosal's idea on this concurs with McGovern's conclusions that the state can step into chaos it creates itself to impose its own order, an idea that he believes was incorporated into Nazism from Enlightenment idealists. The redefinition of "positives" in a society by a regime, as well as the manipulation of disorder in a society by the state, provide the *Gleichschaltung* necessary for securing control of said society, in this case Germany just prior to the Third Reich. In lieu of central narrative convictions, the concept of *Gleichschaltung* then provided an answer for Hitler and the Nazis as to a remedy to what was wrong at the time in German political and social order. Further, they would use this to their advantage in one important way.

The fortuitous conditions for the Nazis and their rise to power rested upon two very fundamental things – the onerous conditions of the Versailles Treaty, and the economic

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[31] McGovern, 132.

[32] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Change* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007): 297-298.

[33] Christophe Buffin de Chosal, *The End of Democracy* (Arcadia, CA: Tumblar House Publishing, 2017): 26.

conditions precipitated by the 1929 Wall Street Crash that led to the Great Depression worldwide. The chaos which ensued from both events would drive the Nazis to capitalize on sentiments and language to facilitate the growth of their own political influence. As McGovern notes, this was rooted in Enlightenment idealist rationalism as embodied particularly in the philosophy of Kant, which he proposes became the dominant philosophical school in Germany.[34] Given that Kant lived at the end of the 18th century, his ideology was still fresh in regard to 19th century German philosophers such as Nietzsche, who borrowed from Kant the idea that only what was in the mind was perceived as reality and expanded upon it to say that the human mind was irrational rather than rational, and thus reason would be external to control the workings of the mind.[35]  The next political step for this would be that in order for the mind to be brought into rational order, it requires the coordination *(Gleischaltung)* of the state, a Platonic idea adopted by Enlightenment rationalists such as Kant and implemented earlier to a degree by Machiavelli and others. Nietzsche, therefore, would be the culminating major figure in this philosophical influence of National Socialism, and thus will be discussed more in detail.

In conclusion, the connection between Kant and the Nazis is an indirect one, but entails concepts that Kant himself advocated for, such as totalitarian control being ultimately the vehicle of true "liberty," and the rational taking precedence over the spiritual and thus imposing a naturalist view of society that exalts reason and ultimately would need to be enforced by political means in order for "progress" to happen. Similar ideas would be applied to actual Third Reich policies later, from the Nuremburg Laws of 1936 to the invasion of Poland in 1939 which led to the outbreak of World War II.  The Kantian appropriation of struggle ("antagonism") being a

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[34] McGovern, 135.

[35] McGovern, 408

necessary component of true progress (of which "lawful order" was an integral component) was one area that also fused with geopolitical theory and racial interpretations of history grounded in a mythological worldview that together formed the entire crux of National Socialism and its political goals. Nietzsche would do so in a more profound way, although it was in *interpretations* of Nietzsche's ideas by others which would ultimately associate him with the Nazi regime.

**Nietzsche and Nazism: Direct or Indirect Influence?**

The role of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in contributing to the development of National Socialism has been a major subject of debate among scholars in the field and given this is relevant to the understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of Nazism, it merits attention.

The one area that often associates Nietzschean philosophy with Nazism comes from a concept that Nietzsche wrote about concerning the *Übermensch* ("superman")*.* Nietzsche talks about this at length in his most noted 1883 book, *Also Sprach Zarathustra.* In the section of this work entitled "The Higher Man," Nietzsche alludes to a superior form of human being as he notes the following:

> The most careful ask to-day: "How is man to be maintained?" Zarathustra however asketh, as the first and only one: "How is man to be surpassed?" The Superman, I have at heart; that is the first and only thing to me — and not man: not the neighbour, not the poorest, not the sorriest, not the best. — O my brethren, what I can love in man is that he is an over going and a down-going. And also in you there is much that maketh me love and hope.[36]

Nietzsche also expressed an ambivalence toward religion, in particular Christianity, and believed in a quasi-Cartesian worship of self, which would not classify him necessarily as

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[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, and Thomas Common, trans. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: The Modern Library, 1917):321

atheistic. In another passage from *Also Sprach Zarathustra,* Nietzsche expresses a belief that the

"Superman" would supersede the need for God:

> And it is the great noontide, when man is in the middle of his course between animal and Superman, and celebrateth his advance to the evening as his highest hope: for it is the advance to a new morning. At such time will the down-goer bless himself, that he should be an over-goer; and the sun of his knowledge will be at noontide. "Dead are all the Gods: now do we desire the Superman."[37]

Whether or not Nietzsche was advancing a "master race" is something that most

scholarship has left open to interpretation. The consensus of most scholarship is that Nietzsche

himself was more concerned with the idea of a "spiritual aristocracy" rather than focusing on

specific races or ethnicities. However, the early National Socialists, as well as the *völkisch*

nationalists that preceded them, saw in Nietzsche a justification for some ideas they had

incorporated from occultism (Helena Blavatsky) and also from Darwinian evolution (via Ernst

Haeckel). It is from this amalgamation of ideas drawn from divergent sources that a National

Socialist racial ideology would evolve, and in was largely through their *interpretation* of

Nietzschean concepts that they articulated a worldview that was centered on German racial

superiority at the expense of "inferiors."  As will be seen later, much of this also rested on

Nietzsche's views being promulgated through the eyes of his sister Elizabeth, and many of the

more racist and antisemitic aspects of Nietzschean philosophy were filtered through the lens of

Elizabeth Nietzsche, and they were developed further by Nazi thinkers later. The discussion at

this juncture will center on that aspect.

The major idea Nietzsche tried to convey in his ideology was that God did not exist, and

that humans become gods and create their own values. The way to do this, he proposed, was

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[37] Nietzsche and Common, 83.

rising beyond concepts of good and evil and ascending to a higher level of existence – the

*Übermensch.*[38]  Traits that author Stephen Hicks points out regarding Nietzsche's attributes of

the "Superman" are the following:[39]

1. A tyrant led by deepest instinct
2. Eager participation in struggle and conflict (also called Agonism)
3. Accepting inequalities among humanity and acceptance of his own superiority
4. Utilizing ruthlessness and the exploitation of others to achieve his own ends

There is a strong Machiavellian undercurrent to these concepts in that Machiavelli

espoused similar ideas regarding political leadership. Like Nietzsche, Machiavelli was highly

critical of Christianity, and he asserted that the moral code of Christianity rendered the world

weak, and thus he extolled the pagan virtues instead of greatness of spirit, strength of body, and

other attributes that contributed to the strength of the individual.[40]  The main takeaway from

Machiavelli that Nietzsche adapts, however, is the radical separation of morals from politics,

which in turn also motivates Nietzsche to view ethics as relative and proportional, and thus

subject to revision or replacement.[41]  This would later provide some justification for the Nazis to

carry out many of the more horrific aspects of their policies, as they adapted Nietzschean

principles of morality to their own, and when also combined with a more eugenics-based

Darwinian view of race, it gave Nazi political theorists justification for their actions to subjugate

and attempt to eliminate those they saw as "inferior" to advance their own racial objectives.  The

political means of doing this, as was discussed earlier, was the implementation of a geopolitical

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[38] Stephen R.C. Hicks, *Nietzsche and the Nazis* (Rockford, IL: Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2006): 71.

[39] Hicks, 72-73.

[40] Hahn and Wiker, 131.

[41] Diego Von Vacano, *The Art of Power: Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and the Making of an Aesthetic Political Order* (Lexington: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006):75

form of strategy based on Ratzel's *Lebensraum* idea that the Nazis adopted as their own.

However, in all fairness it is perhaps prudent to understand that the Nazis *adopted* aspects of

Nietzschean philosophy that corresponded to their own vision for Germany, and the means of

doing so would inadvertently come through Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche (1846-1935) was the younger sister of Nietzsche, and she

was notably more radical in her political views than her brother, in particular after her marriage

to Berhard Forster (1843-1889), a teacher and noted anti-Semite who would later establish the

colony of Nueva Germania in Paraguay in 1883 after being ostracized for his political views. In

establishing the community in Paraguay, the Forsters would extort the native population as slave

labor serving approximately 40 German expatriate families.[42]  Nietzsche himself thought that his

sister and brother-in-law were too extreme and would disassociate from them. However,

Elizabeth Forster's lens of interpreting her brother's work would forever place Nietzsche as a

philosophical influence upon the future Nazis. Elizabeth had established the Nietzsche Archive

shortly after her brother's death, and much of Nietzsche's work was said to have been filtered

through Elizabeth's lens to the German (and later international) public. In doing so she, along

with her cousin Walther Oehler, gained exclusive control over the dissemination of her brother's

writings. Oehler was part of the Nazi Party later, and the Allies considered the Nietzsche Archive

as a bastion for Nazi propaganda when they defeated Germany in 1945. It has been asserted that

Elizabeth began to develop her own antisemitism in Paraguay, based on a hatred against a wife

of one of her brother's close associates, who she believed to be Jewish.[43]  She is therefore often

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[42] Bianca Felicori, "The Failed Reconstruction of an Aryan Utopia in Paraguay," Elle Décor website, https://www.elledecor.com/it/best-of/a28385313/nueva-germania-community-paraguay/ (October 7, 2019).

[43]H.F. Peters, *Zarathustra's Sister: The Case of Elizabeth and Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1977):98

accused of falsifying her brother's letters and other writings in order to make him look more like a Nazi than he was, according to Christian Nienmeyer.[44]  While the general consensus was that Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth contributed much to the association of her brother with racism and antisemitism, she was also not alone.  Indeed, many *völkisch* and later Nazi writers drew similar conclusions to establish philosophical credibility for their own views by appropriating Nietzschean writings.

One of the most notable Nazis who glorified Nietzsche as a precursor of the Third Reich was Alfred Rosenberg. In a speech delivered in 1944 on centennial of Nietzsche's birth, Rosenberg concludes a verbose identification of Nietzsche with the values of National Socialism by the following:

> This is how we National Socialists see today the activities of those powers which, coming over from the past, began to become a dangerous force of decomposition in the 19th century and today, in a great, purulent process, are leading to the most terrible disease of the European being, and we see at the same time, in the midst of this calamitous stream, some prophets raised their voices demanding that these anti-creation values be broken in order to help realize a new hierarchy of life. Among them we honor the lonely Friedrich Nietzsche today. After shedding everything related to the times and all that was too human, this figure stands spiritually next to us today, and we greet him over the ages as a close relative, as a spiritual brother in the struggle for the rebirth of a great German spirituality, for the formation of a generous one and large-scale thinking and as a herald of European unity, as a necessity for the creative life of our old continent, which is today rejuvenating in a great revolution.[45]

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[44] David Wroe, "'Criminal' Manipulation of Nietzsche by Sister to Make Him Look Antisemitic," *The London Telegraph,* January 19, 2010, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/7018535/Criminal-manipulation-of-Nietzsche-by-sister-to-make-him-look-anti-Semitic.html Accessed November 24, 2023).

[45] Alfred Rosenberg, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Munich: NSDAP National Publishing House, 1944): 27.

Another was the pro-Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger, who wrote his own two-volume

work on Nietzsche and in it proceeds to tie Nietzsche directly to Kant and Hegel regarding his

work *The Will to Power,* which was one of the Nietzschean texts the Nazis utilized often to give

underpinning to their positions. In the first volume, Heidegger specifically notes Nietzsche's

equation of *will* with *being,* with this synonymous concept being animated by *power* (Heidegger

asserts that Nietzsche makes this synonymous with *force),* and in doing so, Heidegger does touch

on a key element of the Nazi worldview:

> Nietzsche often identifies power with force, without defining the latter more
> closely. Force, the capacity to be gathered in itself and prepared to work effects, to
> be in a position to do something, is what the Greeks (above all, Aristotle) denoted
> as *dynamis.* But power is every bit as much a being empowered, in the sense of
> the process of dominance, the being-at-work of force, in Greek, energeia. Power
> is will as willing out beyond itself, precisely in that way to come to itself, to find
> and assert itself in the circumscribed simplicity of its essence, in Greek,
> *entelecheia.* For Nietzsche power means all this at once: *dynamis, energeia,*
> *entelecheia.*[46]

Heidegger attempts to tie all of Nietzsche's concepts to Aristotelian philosophy, and in

doing so he makes the connection between what Aristotle called *dunamis* with the application of

force (*ernergeia)* and with self-assertion (*entelecheia).* In doing so, Heidegger would provide a

philosophical dimension to the *Geopolitik* of Ratzel and Haushofer as adopted by the Nazis, and

thus the conclusion based on an interpretation of Nietzsche through the lens of Heidegger's

brand of Aristotelian philosophy which was identical to that which the Nazis already subscribed,

was that *Lebensraum* had to be achieved through the self-assertion of necessary force to achieve

the goal of expanding the race and of providing resources for this expansion. While nothing

directly ties Heidegger's observations in this regard directly to National Socialism, the fact that

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[46]Martin Heidegger and David Ferrell Krell, trans., *Nietzsche Vol I/II* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984) :64.

Heidegger himself openly identified as part of the party would lend credence to the adaptation of his ideas to Nazi policies.

Therefore, in interpreting Nietzsche through the eyes of others, there was a Nietzschean dimension to Nazi ideology that cannot be ignored, whether by chance or deliberate. As Nietzsche had passed on long before the National Socialist Party was formed, but he did live during the time that *völkisch* ideology was popular in many German nationalist circles, it could be concluded that Nietzschean philosophy may have contributed some ideas to the later National Socialist platform largely via *völkisch* borrowings of Nietzschean concepts which fit into their agenda and worldview. This is particularly true regarding at least two pivotal works of Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (which the Nazis partially based their "Aryan man" idea upon due to Nietzsche's frequent reference to the *Übermensch)* and *The Will to Power* (which gave the Nazis justification to pursue conquering the geographical regions of "inferior races" in order to advance *Lebensraum).* The role also of Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth also was critical, as her own antisemitic convictions colored the way she presented her late brother's work in publication, and accusations of falsifying some of his materials have indeed surfaced. In the case of Nietzsche however, his own aversion to overt antisemitism would more than likely have been at odds with the *völkisch* and later Nazi ideologies which tried to appropriate his philosophical positions to validate their own positions. This is complicated further by the lens through which his sister viewed his work through and disseminated it.

In dealing with Nietzsche and Kant, there are influences in both their works which impacted the Nazis as a whole. However, they cannot be said to be technically proto-Nazis, as their writings also contained other ideas which would be antithetical to National Socialism as well as to it *völkisch* predecessors. However, there are two further philosophers who did exert

direct influence upon the Nazis – Alfred Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. A discussion of each of their influences is the next step in the ideological development of National Socialism through a philosophical context.

**Count Arthur Gobineau – Racial Philosophical Forerunner of National Socialism**

Up to this point, the majority of the philosophical influences that contributed to Nazi ideology were indirect. While Spinoza, Kant, and Nietzsche contributed ideas that would shape National Socialism from a philosophical dimension, none of these would be considered overtly Nazi or racist and indeed are considered major figures in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophical development. The Enlightenment ideas thus far that have been established include the following:

1. A separation of faith and reason
2. A relegation to religious faith to the periphery of society
3. The will and right of a despotic leader to make or break contract and law at will.
4. Manipulation of the concepts of "liberty" and "freedom"
5. The importance of struggle and conflict in the achievement and maintenance of power
6. The evolution of a "superman" who would embody the true will and thus also be the future of mankind.

These six ideas, which collectively would be gleaned from previous philosophers, formed a foundation upon which a more nationalistic and even racial ideology could be constructed. With the rise of German nationalism in the mid-19th century, as well as the rise of interest in alternative religious beliefs and the promulgation of the Darwinian variant of biological evolution, the conditions were established for a more race-based form of nationalism and political philosophy that would contribute significantly to the *völkisch* movement that arose in the late 19th century, as well as the later emergence of the National Socialist political movement in Germany in the 1920s. Two pivotal individuals – one of whom was French, and the other

British – would contribute to this in ways that would directly impact the evolution of the Nazis and later provide an ideological underpinning to the more destructive policies of the Third Reich. The first of these individuals was Count Arthur Gobineau, and the second was Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The focus now will be on Gobineau's ideology, as it was directly tied to both the *völkisch* and Nazi ideologies.

Comte Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) was a French diplomat and publicist who also was considered an influential philosopher of race-based ideology. His most influential work in this regard was *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races,* published initially in 1853 and then expanded in 1855. Although largely obscure in his native France, Gobineau's work was recognized by segments of the German public, in particular the more radically nationalist elements.[47]  Much like many early Darwinians such as Ernst Haeckel, Gobineau's whole thesis was that humans had a polygenic origin, and consisted of a variety of different species with different levels of evolution – this made the various races unequal and thus would open a door for eugenics, and a radical *Geopolitik* that mirrored Ratzel suggesting that the "superior" races had rights to subjugate and even exterminate "inferior" races due to the fact they were different species and thus no moral limitations would prevent doing so.  There are echoes of Kant as well as the *Geopolitik* of Ratzel in the following passage from Gobineau's work:

> I can well believe that sometimes, in the midst of these storms,
> a wise and potent law-giver came, like a sunbeam, to shed the
> light of his beneficence on the peoples he ruled. The light
> remained only for a short space ; and just as its absence had
> not caused death, so its presence did not bring life. For this,
> the times of prosperity would have had to be frequent and of

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[47] Louis L, Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 117.

long duration.[48]

Gobineau also echoes Nietzsche's idea of the "superman tyrant" as well, in that the phrase in particular "the light of his beneficence" could in practice apply to the equation of *will* and *being* as found in Nietzsche in the regard of recognizing inequalities within all humanity and the recognition of the "superior's" own superiority. This in turn also appropriates the Machiavellian principle that once a "superior" achieves power, the enemies of the "superior" need to be eliminated and neutralized. Another area Gobineau emphasizes is minimizing the effect of the Church upon civilization. Gobineau echoes Machiavelli and Spinoza in that regard, and his view is the complete separation of faith from reason in the political as well as the social realm by denying any influence of Judeo-Christian morality upon a civilization:

> Once more, Christianity is not a civilizing power, and has
> excellent reasons for not being so.[49]

Gobineau sees Christianity as a non-factor in "civilizing power" in much the same way later Nazis and Marxists would see it, in that he sees Christianity as *weakening* political power due to its Personalist philosophical foundation in affirming the dignity of *all* persons. In the mind of Gobineau, as well as in the *völkisch* and Nazi elements that appropriated similar positions later, this Christian egalitarianism threatens the life of a nation by weakening its strongest parts, and in this case that would apply to race. Gobineau never explicitly states his "excellent reasons" for Christianity not being a civilizing power, but he does attribute the virtues of charity and forgiveness as weakening factors politically. He considered the egalitarian aspect of Christian

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[48] Arthur De Gobineau, and Adrian Collins, trans., *The Inequality of Human Races* (London: William Heinemann, 1915):21

[49] Gobineau, 76.

belief to be antithetical to the idea of natural inequality he espoused.[50]  The Kantian association

of soul and landscape was also appropriated by Gobineau and radically redefined as a precursor

to the *Blut und Boden* idea of the *völkisch* proponents that would also evolve in Nazism via

Albert Darre and other leading Nazis.[51]  Gobineau viewed race as the ultimate trait of

aristocracy, and thus the preservation of it was crucial to societal survival in his view.[52]  This, in

terms of central narrative convictions regarding Gobineau's views, stated that "what's wrong"

was that racial degeneration was weakening many European societies, and that at the root of this

for him was the egalitarian ideas of Christianity.  Therefore, for Gobineau, the answer to the

question "what's the remedy" would be to force any social influence of the Church back into the

religious sphere (an idea that echoed both Spinoza and Machiavelli) and then embark on

measures to restore the "superior" race, which would be implemented by the social Darwinism of

Herbert Spencer as well as the rising interest in eugenics based upon Darwinian natural selection,

which saw human intervention as a natural process to accelerate this selection.  That idea would

later be codified by the Nazis in the Nuremburg Laws of 1936. Gobineau states that the problem

of degeneration in society is due to the loss of racial purity, and thus race is tied to progress in

his view.[53]  This is a sentiment that will be echoed by *völkisch* occultists such as Liebenfels, who

in *Theozoology* would radically redefine some aspects of Biblical morality in terms of racial

traits – as noted in previous chapters, Liebenfels even went as far as to say a concept such as

"sodomy" was understood to be interspecies sexual activity rather than homosexuality, as it had

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[50] Michael D. Bidiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1979): 169.

[51] Biddiss, 108.

[52] Gerald M. Spring, *The Vitalism of Count de Gobineau* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1932):86

[53] Spring, 94.

been understood for generations prior. The different "species" that Liebenfels would identify would be considered different races of people, with some "mongrelized" by inappropriate breeding and thus introducing moral decay into a pure society. This is a similar vein that Gobineau seems to asserting, although with less occultic and overly explicit language than Liebenfels expressed his own views.

Many of Gobineau's ideas would find fertile ground among radical German and Austrian nationalists of the late 19th century, and they would be easily incorporated into *völkisch* ideology. The major transitory figure between Gobineau and the Nazis which would emerge later was a British philosopher, Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Michael Biddiss points out two defining aspects of Chamberlain's thinking that would mirror Gobineau's, and they are the following:[54]

1. The races of men, according to both Gobineau and Chamberlain, were not based on mere differences, but rather a hierarchy of talent and virtue.
2. The interplay of unequal races is considered by both to be the fundamental key to explaining social and political phenomena in all their complexity.

From Gobineau (and later Chamberlain), the German and Austrian *völkisch* movements would elaborate and further dehumanize "inferior" races in cruder language. They would use the philosophies of Gobineau and Chamberlain to underwrite their own views, and in turn Gobineau and Chamberlain would draw their ideas from earlier philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche. At this point, Chamberlain's specific contributions will be discussed apart from Gobineau.

**Houston Stewart Chamberlain – The British Mentor to German Radicals**

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[54] Biddiss, 257.

The paradox of both the Nazis and their *völkisch* predecessors is embodied in the fact that many of their influences were non-German, despite these groups being radical German nationalists. One of the most enigmatic of influences directly upon Hitler as well as many of his sycophants was that of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927). A British citizen and the scion of a British admiral, Chamberlain wrote prolifically on philosophical and historical subjects, which qualifies him as a direct philosophical influence upon the Nazis[55]. He is also noted for being the son-in-law of German composer (and radical nationalist) Richard Wagner, whose work also impacted Hitler in a significant way. Chamberlain met Hitler personally in 1923, prior to the Munich Putsch. In meeting Hitler, Chamberlain later corresponded with him and in a letter stated, "My faith in the Germans has never wavered for a moment, but my hope, I must own, was sunk to a low ebb. At one stroke you have transformed the state of my soul."[56]  In this, Chamberlain mirrors Hitler's early mentor Dietrich Eckhart in essentially declaring Hitler a "German Messiah." Likewise, Chamberlain was recognized by Nazi "philosopher" Alfred Rosenberg as a pioneer of National Socialism.[57]  Although Chamberlain died in 1927, approximately 6 years before the Third Reich emerged, he was perhaps the only significant philosopher aside from Martin Heidegger who was actively engaged with the Nazis themselves.

After Chamberlain relocated to Vienna in 1889, he actively studied the works of Darwin, Huxley, and other biological evolutionists, and thus adopted their positions. While primarily focusing on this topic as part of his dissertation work in the field of plant physiology,

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[55] Snyder, 50.

[56] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 151.

[57] Phillip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 57.

Chamberlain was a protégé of Julius Wiesner, the noted Austrian botanist.[58]  Later losing interest

in science as a vocation, Chamberlain then decided to act as a de facto philosophy commentator

and would give lectures on the writings of Kant and Schopenhauer at the university.

Additionally, his devotion to his father-in-law Wagner also played a significant role in his later

involvement with radical German nationalists in Austria, and he also began to articulate more his

racial-based antisemitic views.[59]   As he progressed in these pursuits, Chamberlain became

openly identified with the *völkisch* movements in Vienna and surrounding areas, and echoed in

his writings much of what earlier ideologues such as Gobineau and Paul LaGarde espoused.[60]

Upon his move to Germany in the late 1890s, Chamberlain became more identified with the

Wagnerian form of German nationalism, and its neopagan mythological worldview it shared

with individuals such as Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels.  His writings, including

his 2-volume major work *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century,* would be the means he utilized

to disseminate and propagate his views to a wider audience – as he originally wrote these works

in German, his target audience consisted of disaffected Germans who were becoming more

radically nationalist.

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[58] Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981):94.

[59] Field, 113.

[60] Field, 114.

The major foundation of Chamberlain's philosophical framework was essentially Kantian idealism. While the aforementioned Kantian views have been discussed elsewhere, the basic ideas extracted from his 1781 book *Critique of Pure Reason* can be summarized in five points:[61]

1.      Space and time are merely the form of one's sensible intuition of objects.

2.      The intuited objects in space are appearances, and do not exist independently in themselves.

3.      Objects are cognizant only via intuition.

4.      Objects of thought are instinctively categories.

5.      Things in themselves affect the individual, activating sensible faculties.

Chamberlain authored his own text on Kant's philosophy in 1914, and he appropriated Kant's ideas with what would be essentially a Nietzschean lens in that "intuition"(from Kant) and "will" (from Nietzsche) are connected and even viewed as somewhat synonymous by Chamberlain. He speaks of this in the following passage from his text on Kant:

> The ruling power is a strong, rugged, passionless will, or perhaps we should rather say a will which inexorably fights down all those inborn passions of which there is no lack of evidence, forcing them into the channels which he chooses ; and this rigidly determined scheme of life helps us to expect with certainty; that we shall come in contact with an order of thought strictly and arbitrarily planned, manifestly organized upon a few leading principles. Beyond all this Kant's whole life bears witness to a necessity for thinking abnormally predominant over the necessity for seeing.[62]

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[61]  Nicholas F. Stang, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.),  https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism.

[62] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Immanuel Kant* (New York: The John Lane Co., 1914):36

In this passage, Chamberlain also evoked the Cartesian idea of "I think, therefore I am," which is consistent with Kant's relegating space and time to individual intuition – there is a relativistic slant to this in that reality is shaped by the one perceiving it, an idea which would also be influential to Chamberlain's racial ideology. Therefore, Chamberlain does adopt a semi-Kantian idealist framework for his own views, which is what led him to be a student of Kant originally, as is noted on page 5 as he writes the following:

> And so, as the years ran on, I became more and more intimate with Kant, his manner of thinking grew into me, or I into it.[63]

Aside from Kantian idealism, Chamberlain was also heavily influenced by his father-in-law Richard Wagner, and devoted a volume to his legacy as well. It was largely from Wagner that Chamberlain also adopted the mythological worldview that was shared by many *völkisch* occultists such as List and Liebenfels. In his biography of Wagner, Chamberlain notes that a strong sense of German nationalism inspired his operas based on the mythology of the pre-Christian Germans:

> When Wagner came to Paris, he really imagined that he would be able to compose music to French libretti. Mozart had however already been obliged to give up the attempt. " This language," he cried in despair, " the devil has made!" That testifies to the depth of his dramatic instinct. Wagner, with whom the poem in tones is inseparable from the poem in words, could only speak in one language—the German ; he himself found this out in Paris. If Mozart in Paris " could find no great pleasure in anything " except in feeling " that he was an honest German," ^ Wagner felt in a remarkably similar way, his own heart was German ; he had made acquaintance with the most different races of Germans: but the distinctive character of the German only became clear to him through his intimacy with the vastly different character of the French. Now there awoke a burning love for his German fatherland ; now he first swore " eternal fidelity " to it (i. 24) ; now arose his first longing for everything which had grown up on the soil of his home, and his first conviction that his art could only strike root in that soil. Die Feen had been sketched from a dramatic tale of Gozzi ; Das Liebesverbot from a comedy by Shakespeare

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[63] Chamberlain, 5.

Rienzi from a novel of Bulwer Lytton. But in his Paris misery the first figure —after Beethoven—which appeared to comfort him was Goethe/ and Faust led the Meister—whose German consciousness was now awakened—back to the German legend. In Paris, the first germs of Tannhduser and Lohengrin were conceived ; in Paris he laid the foundation of his extensive knowledge of the German legend and the Teutonic myth.[64]

Chamberlain was directly influenced through his marriage to Wagner's daughter, but it was a similar influence that Hitler shared as well. In an interview with an American correspondent in 1930 for instance, Hitler stated "For me, Wagner is something Godly and his music is my religion."[65]  Hitler's childhood friend, August Kubizek, also noted this in his memoirs when he observed the following during their youth in Vienna:

Richard Wagner's musical dramas were still the object of our undivided love and enthusiasm. For Adolf, nothing could compete with the great mystical world that the master conjured up for us. Thus, for instance, when I wanted to see some magnificent Verdi production at the Hof Opera, he (Adolf) would bully me until I gave up my Verdi and went with him to the Volkshoper in Wahring, where they were doing Wagner. He preferred a mediocre Wagner performance a hundred times to a first-class Verdi. I thought differently, but what was the use? I had to yield, as usual, for when it was a question of a Wagner performance, Adolf would tolerate no opposition.[66]

Hitler's own pantheistic tendencies were likely influenced by his exposure to Wagner, who portrayed Teutonic pagan themes in his operas which appealed to many *völkisch* nationalists as well. While it is unclear whether Chamberlain shared that mythological fascination of his father-in-law's work, there seems to have been an element that inspired Chamberlain to be a committed Germanophile later, leading to his moving from his native Britain to Vienna first and later to Germany. Such imagery would also inspire much of the more race-based rhetoric that

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[64] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1900):46-47

[65] Waite, 113.

[66] August Kubizek, and Geoffrey Brooks, trans. *The Young Hitler I Knew* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021): 185.

both Chamberlain and the future Nazis would express, and therefore this aspect of Chamberlain's

convictions were overtly Wagnerian as well.

Chamberlain's most noted work, *Foundations of the 19th Century* published originally in

1900, contains the bulk of his original thought, which impacted many aspects of Nazi ideology

and later Third Reich policies. In the first volume of *Foundations,* for instance, Chamberlain

asserts his emphasis on the virtue of racial identity as he states the following:

> Race lifts a man above himself: it endows him with extraordinary—I might
> almost say supernatural—powers, so entirely does it distinguish him from the
> individual who springs from the chaotic jumble of peoples drawn from all parts of
> the world and should this man of pure origin be perchance gifted above his
> fellows, then the fact of Race strengthens and elevates him on every hand, and he
> becomes a genius towering over the rest of mankind, not because he has been
> thrown upon the earth like a flaming meteor by a freak of nature, but because he
> soars heavenward like some strong and stately tree, nourished by thousands and
> thousands of roots—no solitary individual, but the living sum of untold souls
> striving for the same goal.[67]

The two observations to make about this passage have to do with the placing of race as a

cardinal virtue by Chamberlain. First, there is a pantheistic element in the last sentence of that

passage that seems to allude to a type of race-based ancestor worship. Secondly, Chamberlain

indicates that pureness of race is the source of natural talents and gifts, not necessarily the

cultivation and merit of work and study. These two aspects of Chamberlain's view would

animate the *völkisch* and later Nazi attitudes toward Jews and others – it views the

accomplishments of other "inferior" races to either a hijacking or borrowing of those

accomplishments from a "purer" race. In terms of the central narrative convictions of

Chamberlain's writing, it means the question "who are we?" must be answered by first

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[67] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the 19th Century, Vol. 1* (New York: John Lane Co., 1906):269

identifying "what's wrong" regarding perceived cultural deterioration, and the "remedy" therefore would rest on the identification of the problem in this dialectic approach. In philosophical terms, only the "purest" races therefore can have incommunicable traits, and others who emulate them are somehow stealing those attributes from the "purer" races, and thus the other races make what was originally incommunicable as communicable attributes, and in terms of racial perfection, this led to the decay of the "purer" race by infection from "inferior" races. The "remedy," therefore, to this was to purge the "purer" race of those tainted elements, and Chamberlain and others who thought in similar terms would look to Darwinian biology – and more specifically, eugenics – as the means of accomplishing this. This bears a lot of similarity to Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels's *Theozoology,* which even had implications for totally redefining Christian ideals on sexuality and other areas to promote the supposed "virtue" of the "superior" race. Chamberlain adds the philosophical dimension, therefore, to the mythological/occultic worldview of those such as Liebenfels, List, and Fritsch, and it therefore creates a bridge between the religious and intellectual aspects of the ideology that would evolve to create National Socialism in the immediate aftermath of World War I, in which the questions as to what was wrong and what the remedy was to fix it were addressed in regard to Germany's political circumstances.

This alleged degenerative interracial commingling that Chamberlain laments also is echoed by Gobineau, who Chamberlain references in the following passage:

> With this is connected Gobineau's further fantastic idea, that the originally "pure" noble races crossed with each other in the course of history, and with every crossing became irrevocably less pure and less noble. From this we must of necessity derive a hopelessly pessimistic view of the future of the human race. But this supposition rests upon total ignorance of the physiological importance of what we have to understand by "race."[68]

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[68] Chamberlain, 263.

Chamberlain is referencing Gobineau's previously mentioned *Essay on the Inequality of Races,* and he builds upon this by also identifying a problem he alleges that comes from weakening a "superior" race by mixing with an "inferior" race. In *Theozoology,* Liebenfels goes even further by calling this a type of "sodomy."[69]  Liebenfels elaborates on this idea by echoing Haeckel's polygenic human origins position in saying that "inferior" races were in fact the offspring of humans committing "sodomy" with "demonic apes," which is an esoteric reading of Genesis 6. These various components would later also underwrite Nazi racial ideology, as many *völkisch* and early Nazi ideologues borrowed heavily both from philosophical sources such as Chamberlain as well as occultic/mythical interpretations of Biblical texts such as those of Liebenfels.

Chamberlain then later advocates for a type of eugenics based selective breeding that has its foundation in Darwinian evolution. It is the proposed "remedy" to the original problem that Chamberlain and those like him perceived, and given Chamberlain's undue influence upon future Nazis, these ideas would make their way into official Third Reich policies in the implementation of the 1936 Nuremberg Laws. Chamberlain gives his position in the following paragraph:

> But inbreeding *pur et simple* does not suffice; along with it there must be selection, or, as the specialists say, "artificial selection." We understand this law best when we" study the principles of artificial breeding in the animal and vegetable worlds; I should recommend everyone to do so, for there are few things which so enrich our conceptions of the plastic possibilities of life. When one has come to understand what miracles are performed by selection, how a racehorse or a Dachshund or a choice chrysanthemum is gradually produced by the careful elimination of everything that is of indifferent quality, one will recognize that the same phenomenon is found in the human race, although of course it can never be seen with the same clearness and definiteness as in the other spheres I have

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[69] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology: Or the Science of the Sodomite Apelings and the Divine Electron* (Europa House, 2004):8-9

already advanced the example of the Jews ; the exposure of weak infants is another point and was in any case one of the most beneficial laws of the Greeks, Romans and Teutonic peoples; hard times, which only the strong man and the hardy woman can survive, have a similar effect.[70]

By "artificial selection" here, Chamberlain is talking about the implementation of a form of eugenics that would be implemented by scientists and others to accelerate the process of natural selection. While this was discussed more at length in Chapter 3 with a scientific pretext, Chamberlain is giving philosophical merit to a scientific position, and thus there is an intersection between the Kantian idealism that Chamberlain adapts and Darwinian evolutionary theory. It would be translated into social policy by both the Nazis as well as by eugenicists in other Western nations, most notably by Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger in the US, who stated her objectives with eugenics, birth control, and other similar policies was to "create a race of thoroughbreds" by facilitating the "elimination of human weeds" through abortion and birth control as eugenics measures.[71]  In her book *The Pivot of Civilization,* Sanger echoes Chamberlain's views as she proposes this based on a quote from Dr. Edward Kempf where she also "borrows" the "human thoroughbreds" reference.[72]  It therefore establishes again that much of the rhetoric adopted by *völkisch* nationalists in Germany and Austria at the end of the 19th century in reality may have had British and American origins, including the philosophical framework created from Chamberlain's work.

The impact of Chamberlain upon Hitler extends back to his incarceration at Landsberg Prison after the 1923 Munich Putsch. Chamberlain became a major philosophical influence upon

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[70] Chamberlain, 277.

[71] Donald de Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004): 297-298.

[72] Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Bretano's Publishers, 1922): 144-145.

many German *völkisch* groups, and through his writings and others, the central strands of

*völkisch* ideology are identified as the following as noted by Ian Kershaw:[73]

1.      Extreme nationalism

2.      Racial antisemitism

3.      A mythological/romanticized view of German history


        In a personal conversation later with Hans Frank, Hitler also acknowledged his particular

interest in Chamberlain, as he called his incarceration at Landsberg a "university paid for by the

state," and thus he read much of both Nietzsche and Chamberlain:[74]  Leonard Peikoff elaborates

on this further as he attributes the direct source of Nazi racial ideas to both Gobineau and

Chamberlain, and the views of the latter were essentially what was called collectivism:[75]

Collectivism is defined as the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual

part of it, or that the "collective" is the sole unit of reality and the standard of value.[76]  It filtered

to Chamberlain's ideology via two sources – one was Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1869), a

German philosopher who was directly influenced by Kantian transcendental idealism and in turn

impacted Nietzsche.  The other was Richard Wagner, Chamberlain's father-in-law, who was also

a disciple of Schopenhauer.[77]  The importance of Schopenhauer is somewhat beyond the scope

of this research, but he did provide the link between Kant, Nietzsche, and Wagner, and therefore

was an influential philosophical contributor to much of the philosophy that Chamberlain would

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[73] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998): 135-136.

[74] Kershaw, 240.

[75] Leonard Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Meridian, 1993): 40.

[76] Peikoff, 17.

[77] Peikoff, 43.

digest and later regurgitate to the Nazis as a major philosophical influence upon them. In summary, Chamberlain could be said therefore, with Gobineau, to be the most direct philosophical influence upon the Nazis.

**Direct Kantian Philosophical Influences on Early National Socialism**

There were more mainstream philosophical influences that directly impacted National Socialism, the two philosophers that many *völkisch* predecessors to the Nazi movement relied on were Kant and Nietzsche. The significance of Nietzsche to Nazi ideology has been previously discussed, so the focus here will be on how early Nazi leadership coopted Kantian philosophy instead. As George Mosse notes, from Kant many early *völkisch* proponents incorporated into their theories of race Kantian elements such as geographically determined racial characteristics as part of a greater "inner life force."[78]  One example of this was the notorious SS officer Adolf Eichmann, who was described by Leonard Peikoff as a "faithful Kantian" in that he associated "duty" with "inclination."[79]  Although Eichmann was a Third Reich-era Nazi leader, an earlier figure in Nazi circles an Austrian zoologist named L.G. Tirala (1886-1974),[80] connected the *völkisch* racial ideology the Nazis adapted to Kantian principles by noting that the "action" of the Aryan race arises from a predisposition toward the race's own chosen destiny.[81] This is reflected by Drexler, Hitler, and Feder in #12 of the "25 Point Program" of the National Socialist Party as drafted in 1919:

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[78] George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021): 90.

[79] Leonard Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Meridian, 1982): 96.

[80] Tirala joined the DNSAP, an early Austrian affiliate of the National Socialists, in 1927 and then joined the National Socialist Party in 1934 officially.

[81] Lothar Gottlieb Tirala, *Rasse, Gieste, und Seele* (Munich: J. F. Lehrmanns Verlag, 1935): 220

12. In view of the enormous sacrifice of life and property demanded of a nation by every war, personal enrichment due to a war must be regarded as a crime against the nation. We demand therefore ruthless confiscation of all war gains.[82]

This aggressive stance on the part of the early party leadership was largely due in part to the Kantian presuppositions introduced primarily by Chamberlain's writings via other early party ideologues such as Alfred Rosenberg. In his voluminous work *The Myth of the 20th Century,* Rosenberg also utilizes Kant to underpin the antisemitic convictions he and other National Socialists held:

> If the actively willed organic lie is the death of the Nordic man, then this also signifies the vital element of Jewry. Expressed paradoxically, the constant lie is the organic truth of the Jewish antirace. The fact that the real content of the concept of honour is remote, draws with it a swindle which is often a commandment of religious law. Such is laid down in the Talmud and in the Schulchan Aruch in a monumentally frank way. That brutal searcher for truth, Schopenhauer, called the Jews the great masters of lies. Further, they are a nation of shopkeepers and swindlers, according to Kant. Because this is so, the Jew cannot attain mastery in a state which is supported by enhanced concepts of honour. For exactly the same reason, however, the German cannot really live within the democratic system and be fruitful. Capitalist democracy is built up upon mass swindling and exploitation in great and small things. Either one overcomes it after being poisoned ideally and materially, or else he perishes without salvation from sins against his organic truth.[83]

Given Rosenberg joined the National Socialist Party before Hitler did, he would be considered a pioneering Nazi leader, and also gave himself the identification as a "philosopher," which he also shared with his fellow Thulist and early Nazi leader Dietrich Eckart. Eckart, for his part, also appealed to Kant to justify antisemitism in his posthumously published 1924 book *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin.*[84]

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[82] Gottfried Feder, *The Collected Writings of Gottfried Feder* (Sudentenland Verlag, n.d.):21

[83] Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the 20th Century* (Berlin, 1930):461

[84] Dietrich Eckart and William Pierce, trans., *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zwiegespräch zwischen Hitler und mi* (Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin) (original publisher unknown, 1924):16

Tirala was more than likely introduced to this idea via his close association with Houston Stewart Chamberlain.[85] However, Mosse notes that this Kantian flavor to early Nazi ideology was filtered primarily through the lens of Chamberlain as well as from early *Wandervögel* ideologues such as Hans Breuer and Julius Langbehn, both of whom introduced *völkisch* ideology to the *Wandervögel* movement which would then impact other future Nazi leadership such as Heinrich Himmler and Walther Darre, both of whom were part of the *Wandervögel* movement prior to their introduction to National Socialism.[86]

To summarize, Kant was utilized and appealed to by early Nazi leadership to justify two things. First, it gave philosophical underpinning to antisemitism. Secondly, the concept of duty/inclination which also would later undergird the whole *Führerprinzip* concept which would make Hitler an almost messianic figure was given this authority based on Kantian philosophy. Like many ideas however that were assimilated by the National Socialists beginning even with their *völkisch* antecedents, these ideas were co-opted and filtered through the lens of their own ideology to provide a legitimacy for their ideas. This was evident in both the aforementioned philosophical and political influences the Nazis would assimilate.

**Summary Observations**

The philosophical context of National Socialism is complex in its evolution, and not as simplistic as has been assumed. Many of the philosophical aspects of National Socialism are also intertwined with the political and mythological dimensions of the different strains of thought that contributed to the movement's evolution. However, in summary of the philosophical development of National Socialism, there are several aspects that need to be reviewed.

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[85] Florian Mildenberger, "Race and Breathing Therapy: The Career of Lothar Gottlieb Tirala (1886-1974)," *Sign Systems Studies* 32, no. ½ (2004): 255-257.

[86] Mosse, 182.

1.      The separation of faith and reason (Averroes, Marsilius of Padua, Descartes)

2.      The relegation of the role of religious belief to the periphery of the political sphere (Spinoza, Machiavelli)

3.      Secular leadership views fear as its natural ally (Machiavelli)

4.      Secular leadership can make or break laws arbitrarily (Spinoza, Machiavelli, Hume, Hobbes)

5.      Antagonism (struggle) is necessary for establishing order (Kant)

6.      The coordination of the state makes the irrational mind of the individual rational (Kant)

7.      The inclination/duty of the individual for the state and the role of antisemitic sentiments to enforce it (Kant)

8.      The equation of *will* with *being*, and that power exercised by the will was the domain of individuals advanced enough to carry it forward (Nietzsche, via Heidegger)

9.      The *Übermensch* as the perfect human evolutionary goal, and the will of the *Übermensch* initiating and thus overcoming struggle (Nietzsche)

10.     The Nietzschean *Übermensch* is the most racially pure and superior of all races, and thus has the right to subjugate and even eliminate "inferior" races of humanity (Gobineau and Chamberlain)

These ten aspects of philosophical worldview were implemented by the Nazis, advocated by their *völkisch* predecessors, and were turned into the basis for state policy by the Third Reich. To further simplify, these philosophical aspects would also be aided by the mythological views of prominent *völkisch* occultists such as List and Liebenfels, given scientific underpinning by the adaptation of Darwinian evolutionary biology, and then to be realized by the adaptation of *Geopolitik* by the Nazis in order to exercise the use of war and struggle to obtain *Lebensraum* for

a new evolution of a "master race," the Nazi interpretation of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* as the "Aryan man." The framework for implementing these ideas, therefore, would require a response to some central narrative convictions provided by history.

Reviewing the concept of the central narrative conviction, it is defined by Kenneth Archer as the primary story used to explain why a particular community exists, and they shape and influence the concept of "meaning" for said group.[87] Expanding upon this, Walsh and Middleton note that there are four basic questions in this context to be answered, namely these:[88]

1. Who are we?
2. Where are we?
3. What's wrong?
4. What's the remedy?

While Archer, Walsh, and Middleton are applying this to the context of theology and worldview, it can be adapted for analyzing the worldview of any particular group, including in a negative context such as National Socialism. In looking at it from this perspective, one aspect of these central narrative convictions entails parsing a distinction between goodness and rightness. It is a question that is part of a school of thought called proportionalism, which would assert that these terms – goodness and rightness – are subjective in their nature,[89] and this view when applied to the worldview of a faith, political system, or even a nation will determine the policies and actions of said community. This idea particularly resonates regarding the whole Cartesian/Spinozian/Kantian Enlightenment sentiment that truth is defined by how it is

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[87] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2005): 156-157.

[88] Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Academic, 1984): 35.

[89] Christopher Kaczor, *Proportionalism and the Natural Law Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002): 9-11.

perceived, and therefore concepts of right and wrong become subjective in light of political power. That in turn would assert that the possessor of power has the arbitrary prerogative to determine law and order based on their premise. In Nietzschean terms, this is the will of the *Übermensch* over all else. This was the driving impetus behind much of the German nationalism which birthed *völkisch* ideology as well as the National Socialist movement.

Philosophically therefore, the Nazis are often seen as being in conflict with the Enlightenment, but in reality, they are the ultimate expression of Enlightenment philosophy, particularly the German variation of it as espoused by Kant and his contemporaries. This philosophy thus was utilized in its final manifestation by the Nazis to create their utopian (or dystopian) society in the form of the Third Reich. Given that Gobineau, Chamberlain, and their contemporaries were informed by ideas advanced by Enlightenment philosophers (in particular Nietzsche, who in turn was influenced by Kant via Schopenhauer), this exerted a direct and tangible connection between the race-based ideology of National Socialism and Enlightenment philosophy. A proportionalist understanding of Enlightenment philosophical work viewed through the lens of *völkisch* nationalism thus provided the philosophical underpinnings of the Nazis and their political platform.

Brief mention must also be included here of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger's relationship with Nazism is a controversial topic, in that unlike the earlier philosophers discussed, Heidegger was contemporaneous with the Third Reich and seemed to actually be *influenced by* certain Nazi convictions rather than being an *influencer* of them. Heidegger was a student of both Kant's and Nietzsche's writings, and there is some confusion as to how these would influence Heidegger to become a member of the National Socialist Party. One observation

is made in this passage taken from the introductory essay to the one volume edition of David

Farrell Krell's English translation of Heidegger's two-volume work on Nietzsche:

> Was Heidegger a nazi? Yes, if carrying the membership card and
> paying the dues is our standard. No, not if we stress the most horrifying
> aspect of National Socialism, its vulgar racism and virulent Antisemitism.
> Yes, if we stress the importance of Hitler himself and of his
> cult of nationalism, militarism, and anti-parliamentarian elitism.
> Indeed, when Heidegger conjoins liberalism and the dominant
> National Socialism, which has declined his spiritual leadership, there
> is reason to observe that if Heidegger was not a nazi it was only
> because the Party was too liberal for him. At the same time, we have
> to remember the Party's rejection of Heidegger's "private" version of
> National Socialism already in 1934 and the waxing intensity of the
> polemics against him by Party ideologues in the mid-1930s. Furthermore,
> Heidegger's disaffection from the Party in the course of the
> 1930s has direct relevance for his work on Nietzsche: when Party censorship
> of the Nietzsche edition that Heidegger was helping to prepare
> intensified in 1938, he stopped working with the Commission
> that was charged with the edition. Thus the year 1938 assumes symbolic
> importance for our theme: as the Party insists on sanitizing the
> Nietzsche edition, purging from it Nietzsche's anti-anti-Semitism and
> anti-Germanism, Heidegger opts for Nietzsche, and the triad of terms
> in our title falls apart. In a word, and to answer a complex question
> peremptorily: if we stress Heidegger's active and inventive support of
> the regime in 1933 and 1934, the answer is a resounding, catastrophic *yes.*
> as the 1930s ended, opening onto an even more disastrous
> era, the answer is *no.* As for Heidegger's silence after the war, it
> responds to our own need to know why with-silence.[90]

Krell accurately observes the complex relationship that Heidegger had with the Nazi

Party during the Third Reich, in that it appears that Heidegger accepted some aspects of Nazi

ideology while eschewing others. However, while claiming to eschew in particular the

antisemitic aspects of Nazism, Heidegger was discovered to have intimated in a series of

publications called *Black Books* a brand of antisemitism of his own which accused the Jews of

plotting through machinations to "take over the world" due to their allegiance to race and their

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[90] David Farrell Krell, "Heidegger, Nietzsche, Nazism," Heidegger, and Krell, trans., *Nietzsche, Vol. I and II* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991):xxv

inherently calculative nature.[91] Therefore, the debate continues as to how committed Heidegger was to National Socialism and if the influence of Nietzsche was a factor in that commitment. As noted, Heidegger is an enigmatic figure as far as philosophers associated with National Socialism, and there seems to be a lack of evidence connecting him in any way to the writings of Gobineau and Chamberlain, who exerted direct influence upon the *völkisch* ideology from which National Socialism evolved. It remains then to be determined if Heidegger was a significant enough influence to be considered in shaping National Socialism.

A final note to keep in mind as well is that with the possible exceptions of Gobineau and Chamberlain, many of the earlier philosophers could not fairly be identified as National Socialist forebears. For one, they were mostly identified with Enlightenment idealism as well as a form of rationalism that – in the case of Kant – was adopted in a unique German context. The evolution of Kant's ideas to Nazism was based on more of a selective borrowing of his ideology, as it was as well with Nietzsche. The difference with Kant and Nietzsche, however, was the lens in which their respective work was viewed – Nietzsche has been often more closely identified with both *völkisch* and Nazi ideology due to the fact much of his work was filtered through the lens of his sister Elizabeth. Further, the direct link between Kant and Nietzsche would be the work of Schopenhauer, who was active in the years immediately between. With this being kept in mind, other ideas such as the rise of German nationalism after the 1871 unification of Germany brought a renewed interest in German philosophers such as Kant, and therefore some nationalists in Germany (as well as Austria) attempted to give philosophical legitimacy to their nationalist sentiments by selectively incorporating elements of Kantian philosophy – the *völkisch* ideology

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[91] Monisha Choudhary, "Martin Heidegger's Antisemitism: The Personal and the Political," The Collector, August 30, 2022, https://www.thecollector.com/martin-heidegger-antisemitism/ (Accessed November 30, 2023).

that evolved from this would do the same with Nietzsche toward the end of the 19ᵗʰ century.

This amalgamation of ideas would be from which the Nazi worldview would draw significant

influence later.

While there appears to be a tension between these philosophical influences and the more

occultic influences of groups like Thule and individuals such as List and Liebenfels, in reality

they are merged in such a way in Nazi ideology that they attempt to answer the same

fundamental CNC questions from two different dimensions. In one sphere, the esotericism

introduced by Blavatsky of Eastern concepts such as the transmigration of souls provided an

answer to the *völkisch* question of "who are we?" Incorporation of ideas from Nietzsche –

particularly the whole *Übermensch* concept – also gave an answer to this question by

underpinning the more occultic/mythological aspects with philosophical justification. Naturally,

this led to the other two questions of "what's wrong" and "what's the remedy" being addressed

in that this amalgamation of ideas proposed that a problem of diminished German identity

existed and needed to be fixed, so writers such as Gobineau, LaGarde, Chamberlain, and others

capitalized on that aspect, applying both the Darwinian biology of Haeckel (as well as the Monist

ideas of "blood and soil") as well as the mythology of occultists like Liebenfels and the

geopolitical theories as contributed indirectly by Ratzel via Haushofer. The final product of the

National Socialist platform then was a selective incorporation of all these fragments of ideas via

their own party platform. While Drexler focused more on the political aspects in his work, Feder

was more pronounced in his articulation of the party platform in 1923 in that without naming

specific influences, he expresses the objective of being a racial-based state in which only the

dominant culture would be at liberty of expression:

5. Our cultural aim is that all the sciences and fine arts shall flourish on the basis of a politically free, economically healthy State. The means of achieving this will be:

a. Training the young up to be healthy in body and free in mind, after the great traditions of German culture.

b. Complete liberty of creed and conscience.

c. Special protection for the Christian denominations.

d. Discouragement of dogmas, which are opposed to German moral instincts and contain matter injurious to the State and the nation.

e. Discouragement of all evil influences in the press, in literature, the stage, the arts and the picture theatres.

f. Liberty of instruction in the German secondary schools; formation of a ruling class of high-minded men. [92]

While Feder primarily focused on the economic aspects of the NSDAP, this brief statement drew upon many previous thinkers such as Gobineau, Lagarde, and Chamberlain. While, for instance, a nominal protection of "Christian denominations" was proposed, it also "discouraged" anything dissenting from the party's agenda. Although it could be read into the statement that the hostility against more orthodox forms of Christianity based upon Jewish origins was upheld, the Nazi platform also left the opportunity open to redefine religion in terms of German nationalism. This echoes both Machiavelli and Spinoza who wanted religion subjugated to the state and separated from it in such a way that it would either be rendered useless or as an apparatus of state propaganda.

In conclusion, National Socialism borrowed heavily from earlier philosophers such as Machiavelli and Kant, Nietzsche, and others, and as it did so it redefined some of the content to fit into the overall worldview which would in time become national policies of the Third Reich.

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[92]*The Collected Writings of Gottfried Feder*, 33.

When combined with Darwinian biology, geopolitical theory, and a mythological/occultic romanticism, both the earlier *völkisch* and National Socialist movements constructed a worldview that would express their central narrative convictions to address current issues in German and Austrian society. As these views would be adopted after 1933 as national policies, they would have catastrophic consequences not only upon Germany itself, but upon all of Europe.

Therefore, it must again be stated that National Socialism was a philosophical expression of Enlightenment, rather than being opposed to it. Looking at it in this light, it also puts the totalitarian aspects of the Third Reich on a comparable (albeit with distinctions) level with the regime of Robespierre in the French Revolution, who could point to similar influences. This intertwining of politics and philosophy thus presents the origins from where some of these regimes evolved.

**Chapter 6**

**Further Questions and Addressing Contradictions**

After examining each of the four areas of influence in detail, the main questions will be revisited in this chapter along with addressing contradictions in National Socialist policy and practice. First, what central narrative convictions constructed the "story" where these ideologies were adopted? The conditions in which National Socialism evolved were political and social, as is the consensus of most historical research. However, while this principle of central narrative convictions is a tool which is often applied to the field of Biblical hermeneutics, it can also be applied to culture as well. It constitutes the outline of the base narrative of the "story" as to what a group is and why it exists. While this model often is applied in a more positive environment to religious traditions and cultural groups, it also can be universally applied to less-favorable ideologies such as National Socialism, as a narrative does drive both the roots of such movements as well as the fruits of their policies and ideologies.

Second, what conflicts, contradictions, and other issues caused Hitler during the Third Reich era to actively persecute and oppose the very groups and individuals who influenced the rise of the Nazis prior to 1933? The connection between these two questions makes Nazi policies enacted later during the Third Reich era more complex, and thus there are what appear to be contradictions between the early ideologies of the Nazis and their later implementation of those ideologies. In many cases, this latter question has been dismissed as a kind of labeling of Hitler as opportunistic, and while that is a fair and valid assessment that may play into some of his decisions as Fuhrer later, the circumstances surrounding those decisions have layers of complication that need to be examined as well. Many individuals who were either close to or influential upon Hitler earlier – Rudolf von Sebottendorf, Karl Haushofer, Ernst Rohm – were

either exiled, imprisoned, or executed upon the Fuhrer's orders later. This merits more in-depth examination as well. A second question that will be revisited in this chapter is regarding the overlap of ideology that was specifically National Socialist as well as those components of ideology that were assimilated from earlier movements into Nazi ideology. Applying the ideas of personalist philosophy this will also be examined more closely.

Therefore, this chapter is a way of analyzing the four areas of influence as they intersected, but also it addresses the initial questions posed to "connect the dots" and give a more concise picture of what National Socialism was and how it was impacted by earlier influences but at the same time developing its own narrative as a distinct movement. This narrative is important to other areas as well, as it does shed some light on the implementation of atrocities such as the Holocaust, but it also shows that the Nazi Party as a movement was not an anomaly that esoterically materialized from an ideological vacuum. There were many factors in existence that provided the impetus for the Nazi Party to emerge when it did, and those factors are essential to understanding how such a movement gained control of a nation and impacted geopolitical events in the way it would do so before encountering its own demise.

First the "story" will be examined, along with its central narrative convictions. Secondly, the communicable vs. incommunicable attributes of National Socialism will be discussed. Thirdly, the conflicts and contradictions between the Third Reich and the predecessors of Nazism will be addressed, focusing specifically on the exile of Sebottendorf, the imprisonment of Karl Haushofer, and the execution of Ernst Rohm. In Rohm's example, a discussion of the complex history of National Socialism's relation to the subject of homosexuality will also be examined, as this has been a major topic of debate among historians based upon the persecution of

homosexuals during the Holocaust. The purpose of addressing these issues also shows the impact certain behaviors and ideologies had upon the early evolution of National Socialism.

What will not be included in the latter aspect of these questions will be the role of Benito Mussolini and Fascism upon National Socialism, but the rationale for this conclusion does merit discussion. The reason for this is twofold. First, the Nazis are often considered to be a variant of Fascism, but in reality they were a distinct movement. Secondly, the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler has been broadly covered by other historical works, and thus it would be redundant to focus as much on that in relation to the questions posed. While there is no dispute that Mussolini did have some influence on National Socialism, the argument could be made that this was a minor aspect. In reality, Mussolini does not appear to have a lot of political or ideological influence on the evolution of National Socialism, as many factors that shaped it preceded Mussolini by decades. The last section of the chapter will address this in more detail.

### The "Story" and the Central Narrative Convictions that Shaped National Socialism

At the core of every ethnic, religious, or other types of communities is a narrative that defines the worldview of said group. In many ways this is also a review and summary of the preceding four chapters as some familiar content will bear repetition. It will entail an intersection of all four previously discussed areas of influence, and thus tie them into these questions posed by the formation of central narrative convictions that shaped the National Socialist movement and Nazi ideological platforms (many of which materialized into Third Reich policies). This narrative is called by Dr. Kenneth Archer the "story" of the group, and it becomes a filter through which the worldview of a particular group is shaped. While individuals contribute to this "story" and do have their own particular narrative, the historical interpretation of this "story" is

participatory by nature, as Archer also notes.[1]  This narrative is defined by a series of questions which form the basis of what are called central narrative convictions, or CNCs. CNCs are based in the participatory aspect of the group "story," and as such they are framed by four basic questions: Who are we? Where are we? What's wrong?, and What's the remedy?[2] In practice, this principle is applied to Biblical hermeneutics of a religious tradition, but it does have application to other sociological and ideological settings. The group to which these principles are applied to ascertain their own ideology can be either a "good" group (such as a religious denomination or an ethnolinguistic community), or it can be what is universally thought of as an evil group such as the Nazis. However, it is integral to understand a group's worldview to get a more concise picture of how said group operated historically. Movements such as National Socialism cannot be properly understood unless that context is applied in some fashion. In the previous chapters, four distinct areas of ideological influence were examined in relation to the evolution of the Nazis. Each of those influences was shaped by their own set of CNCs which facilitated their emergence. That leads to the second aspect of the discussion.

In evaluating various groups of any sort throughout history, the first understanding of the emergence of a certain group or movement is that there were antecedents which preceded and had influential impact on the development of said group. This is true as well of the National Socialist movement in Germany. National Socialism borrowed heavily from earlier movements such as *völkisch* ideology, and it also adapted many aspects of scientific, ethical, philosophical, and even religious trends of the time. In examining this, a principle from the field of Personalist

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[1] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009): 130.

[2] Brian J. Walsh and J Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984): 35.

philosophy warrants application. In his book *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), John F. Crosby makes a distinction between what are called communicable and incommunicable traits of individuals. He notes, for instance, that *communicable* traits are those an individual has in common with other beings of its kind. In contrast, *incommunicable* traits are those which are unique to an individual and not shared with others.[3] While Crosby and other philosophers attribute this distinction to individuals, it can also apply equally to groups. In regard to CNCs then, many individuals within a given group share communicable traits that are molded by the particular CNCs of the group. At the same time however, the individuals can have their own incommunicable dimension which likewise contributes to the group in a reciprocal way – the group influences the individual, and the individual in turn would contribute something to the group "story." This holds true of any groups – good or evil by perspective – and an application of this can be made to the Nazis as well. As will be seen, this creates a more comprehensive picture between those antecedent movements that shaped National Socialism, as well as also bringing into perspective how a figure such as Adolf Hitler made his own contributions to National Socialism, thus molding it into what it would be notorious for later. The first part of this discussion therefore will focus upon those factors which shaped the CNCs which animated the Nazi worldview and from which their ideology evolved.

The construction of the discussion will center around the four pivotal CNC questions that Middleton and Walsh proposed, and the first of those is "Who are we?" The root of this question as it relates to the evolution of National Socialism extends back to the creation of the German

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[3] John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996): 42-47.

Empire in 1871. A new sense of German nationalism (which was dominated by Prussia, the most influential state of this new union) contributed to a definition of what it meant to be German. Until this point, regional identity was more integral to those who would make up Germany than a given national identity, and this evolving national identity was embodied in the personage of Bismarck, who as early as 1848 participated in a campaign to wrest the northern province of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, which was accomplished in 1864.[4] This created a problem with the newly reorganized Hapsburg realms, now known as Austria-Hungary, and due to the more ethnically-diverse Hapsburg entity, Austria was expelled from the German Confederation in 1866.

This likewise created some tensions within the Hapsburg realms as well, and an equivalence of ideological with ethno-cultural differences threatened the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 1880s, leading to a proliferation of various ethnic/nationalist movements within the Empire itself.[5]  One of the groups asserting this new ethnonationalism was the German-speaking population of what is now the modern nation of Austria. These German nationalists found common ground with the German Confederation (later Empire), and a new type of German nationalism was birthed that would have as its core objective the unification of *all* Germans under one nation. This newfound German nationalism would find a more extreme variation in what would be known as *völkisch* ideology. Although as a movement *völkisch* ideology would not emerge until after World War I, there were antecedents which shaped this

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[4] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire: 1871-1918* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1985): 24-25.

[5] Peter M. Judson, *The Hapsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016): 299, 309.

radically ethnocentric nationalism embodied in groups such as the *All-Deutscher Verein* (Pan-German League) and *Ostmarkverein* (Eastern Provinces Association).[6]

The Victorian fascination with occultism which later would have some elements of German ethnocentrism sought to fill a void that was left by an increasing acceptance of theological liberalism on the part of German clergy, which itself was an outgrowth of earlier Enlightenment rationalism embodied particularly in Kantian and Cartesian philosophy. While it was a predominant trend in the West in general, it did impact Germany in an incredibly unique way and thus provided an impetus for efforts at self-discovery of German identity by adding a mythological dimension to it. As Alison Butler notes, another factor came into play as well, that being the Darwinian concept of evolution and the Spencerian goal of self-betterment based on social applications of Darwin as well as Malthus – the objectives of both these movements and occultism dovetailed together as a synthesis of ideas which led to a number of occultic societies such as the Theosophical Society that aimed at discovering and nurturing the occult powers of the individual.[7]

Added to this was also a romanticism that fostered a renewed interest in folklore and the more sinister side of romantic literature – it was seen essentially as a way to push boundaries due to the Enlightenment emphasis on the individual, but it also provided an alternative to fill the void left by a liberalized and "demythologized" Christianity being promoted in particular by German theologians of the time. This mythological worldview was adapted by youth movements in Germany such as the *Wandervögel,* and it also gave rise to a whole new body of German cosmologies based upon a mythological romanticism which was in turn given shape by

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[6] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 362.

[7] Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic Invoking Tradition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011): 1

Blavatsky and other Victorian occultists. This found its way into the writings of Guido von List

and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, and it gave an anagogical dimension to German nationalism that

promoted the German "race" as being unique, superior, and destined to dominate the world as a

race of "supermen" given the anthropologically-appropriated term "Aryan." Therefore, the

question "who are we?" was answered by this enigmatic fusion of Darwinian biology, a rising

German nationalism, and an occultic/mythological cosmology which in the eyes of its

proponents elevated the German nation to a level of exceptionalism and racial primacy. It would

be out of this that the Nazis – and indeed Hitler himself via Richard Wagner's operas – would

craft their own race-based political platform for their movement.

Regarding the question "where are we?' in relation to National Socialism, two

components of this must be taken into consideration. First, there is a geographical dimension,

and secondly there is a historical/social dimension. In the previous chapters, geopolitical theory

was discussed regarding the influence of Karl Haushofer on Hitler, via Hess. When a revival of

German nationalism began to emerge prior to 1871 when Germany was unified as an empire, a

form of geopolitical aspiration accompanied that nationalism in a profound way. Although it is

questionable whether Haushofer himself embraced the total ideology of Nazi geopolitics, one

concept that National Socialism co-opted from Haushofer and other geopolitical theorists was the

social Darwinian idea that the fittest nations would dominate the others in both political and

cultural arenas.[8] This idea is elaborated upon by Johannes Mattern in his book *Geopolitik:*

*Doctrine of National Self-Sufficiency and Empire* in the following passage:

> Geopolitik of the German type proposes the accomplishment of national self-
> sufficiency, if necessary by the redistribution of the natural resources of the
> world. It sanctions this redistribution by whatever methods it can be achieved,

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[8]Nicola Bassoni, "Karl Haushofer as a 'Pioneer' of National Socialist Cultural Diplomacy in Italy," *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 427.

including that of forceful seizure by the states of nations lacking in resources from those enjoying an abundance of them, particularly from those also who are, or are alleged to be, improvident and incompetent in the use of their resources.[9]

This is where two earlier concepts of this Nazi application of *Geopolitik* come into focus – the idea of *Lebensraum* and the ideology of *Blut und Boden.* These are two interconnected concepts that were often implemented together – the achievement of *Lebensraum* restores, in the minds of National Socialists, the sanctity of *German* land by recovering it from "inferior" peoples and nations. Therefore, the question of "where are we?" is both rooted in geography and race, which for the National Socialist would have been intrinsically interconnected.

The question of "what's wrong?" is specifically a Nazi concern after World War I, and it derives from a variety of factors – the Versailles Treaty, economic challenges in Germany, the loss of a concept of *Reich,* or empire, and the need to find someone to blame for all of this (ultimately, the Jews). Another deeper factor that Leonard Peikoff notes is that there was also a Nazi animosity against urbanization and industrialization (despite the fact they would utilize both during the regime of the Third Reich) – industrialization was seen by National Socialism as a sort of "necessary evil" due to the need for armaments, but was to be subject to men who had more allegiance to instinct and raw nature.[10] This was a form of romanticism, as Peikoff further notes,[11] which is somewhat rooted in the whole *Völkisch* variant of the whole *Wandervögel* movement that arose in Germany in the late 19th century. The reactionary emphasis of the *Wandervögel* was rooted in a rebellion against what they saw as the older generation who had somehow corrupted the national order of things, and thus the current problems were attributed to

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[9] Johannes Mattern, *Geopolitik: Doctrine of National Self-Sufficiency and Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942): 12.

[10] Leonard Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Penguin Group, 1982): 49.

[11] Peikoff, 49.

that corruption.[12] The radical *völkisch* faction took this further by asserting that Germany's (and Austria's too by extension) problems were rooted in racial impurity which produced corrupt peoples that weakened Germany. Added to that was the rise in *Freikorps* factions of disaffected German war veterans returning from World War I service. The vacuum left by the end of the Kaiser's rule and the collapse of the German military structure on November 9, 1918, led to disaffection on both sides of the radical political spectrum. Both *Freikorps* nationalists as well as emerging groups of Communists were reacting to and struggling with the collapse of the old order and what should replace it. The chaos and lack of organization at the outset of the formation of the Weimar Republic was fertile ground therefore for political unrest.[13] This impacted both the disaffected *Freikorps* veterans as well as the youth movements, as both capitalized on what they perceived as a liberal bourgeois society in decay.[14] This general dissatisfaction was evident across the postwar German political spectrum. And, it answered the question broadly of "what is wrong?" In time, the more radical factions of these movements, infused with the *völkisch* ideology of early German nationalists as well as occultists such as von List and Liebenfels, would begin to embrace antisemitism and other forms of race-based sentiments which would in turn culminate in the emergence of National Socialism, which was initially founded as an obscure group within the entire movement. Once Hitler gained prominence in the fledgling National Socialist movement, this racial identity politic would be

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[12] Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984): vi.

[13] Nigel Jones, *The Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* (London: Robinson, 1987): 30.

[14] Robert G.L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918-1923* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952): 18.

taken to new levels as it would be identified as the true problem contributing to Germany's weaknesses, and therefore it would lead to the next question.

In order to address the question "what's the remedy?" the earlier question of "what's wrong?" must have an identifiable source. This is true of any and all groups, positive and negative, and usually what happens is that a series of manifestos and other ideological writings will prescribe a remedy based on the worldview of the group seeking it. This is true of religious, national, and political groups, and the Nazis were no exception to this process. It is in the remedies they proposed that perhaps some of the most evil and egregious policies were later developed that led to tragedies such as the Holocaust. Again, these ideas did not appear just to the National Socialists, but rather they had a long evolution which saw their culmination in future Third Reich policies. The proposed remedies these earlier predecessors of the National Socialists advanced would find their reality in some of the most horrendous policies of the Third Reich, and those are what will be explored here now.

When examining the question of "what's the remedy?" it merits consideration in relation to the previous question of what is wrong. The previous question was one of *identification,* and what necessarily follows entails two dimensions. First would be the *proposition* of the solution followed by its *implementation.* In the case of National Socialism, the former was drawn primarily from Darwinian eugenics and was at its core primarily an ethical issue. The latter would see its culmination in policies such as the Nuremburg Laws and the rapid implementing of concentration camps that facilitated the atrocities of the Holocaust. The political dimension to this would be the establishment of what was essentially a totalitarian political structure to force such policies on the German population. The aspect of totalitarianism is what will be discussed at this point.

Richard Overy notes that Hitler shared in common with other totalitarian dictators of the time a vision of utopianism. The implementation of this was the evolution of the older order into a new order regime as quickly as possible.[15] Hitler, in a similar fashion to other German pan-nationalists (particularly in his native Austria) appropriated Wagnerian mythological romanticism to claim a sort of "divine choseness" which also adapted Christian and Biblical language (notably Liebenfels) to what was essentially an occultic framework.[16] This then would relate this last question to the first – who a group is will determine the remedy to the social issues which are considered detrimental to said group. The idea here is that resistance to the utopian vision of the dictator or movement should be eliminated, and in the case of Nazi ideology this entailed race. This led to the adaptation of scientific methods as well as pseudo-science such as eugenics as being a means of accomplishing this objective. This is evident in a two-pronged approach implemented by the Nurenburg Laws that would encourage the proliferation and multiplication of the "superior" race and the elimination of the "inferiors" through the scientific mechanisms of clinical sterilization and euthanasia. This led to the implementation in particular of the policy of *Gesundheitspflicht* ("Obligation of Health"), the objective of which was to cleanse the *Volk* of everything sick, alien, and "abnormal" in order to propagate a pure "Aryan" German nation free of foreign influence.[17] The issue arose however regarding the public's acceptance of these policies, for which Hitler relied on the skills of Joseph Goebbels to condition

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[15] Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004): 229.

[16] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968): 233.

[17] Gotz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994): 14-15.

the thinking of the public. However, in order to implement such policies, a totalitarian system had to be implemented as well. It is this political dimension which will be discussed now.

There has been an ongoing political debate about whether the Third Reich was authoritarian or totalitarian, and the first aspect of this is to define terms[18]. Essentially, authoritarianism is a strong central government that does allow some leeway regarding civil liberties, but it does exercise complete political control. To that degree, leaders such as Francisco Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, and Hafez al-Assad of Syria would all be considered authoritarian leaders. Although somewhat debatable, Saddam Hussein could also be characterized in this fashion as well. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, would be defined as a virtually unlimited state apparatus that essentially dictates and controls even minute aspects of everyday life of the individual citizen. It even seeks to control the thought, morality, and core beliefs of the people as a whole by implementing an explicit or implied national ideology.[19] Robert Longley goes on to also differentiate fascism from the other two as well, as he notes that in addition to a totalitarian governance, Fascism also promoted the idea that their particular nation was "superior" to others and thus the need to implement eugenics-based genetic

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[18] Two historians who capitalize on this are Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) and Frank McDonough, *Conflict, Communism, and Fascism: Europe 1890-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). A third source which notes similarities between the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin in particular is Michael Lynch, *Authoritarian States* (London: Hodder Education, 2013). Overy, McDonough, and Lynch all essentially make the argument that there is a distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism based upon the control exercised by the relevant dictator over individuals under their rule. Another view of this is explored by Kevin Slack, *War on the American Republic: How Liberalism Became Despotism* (New York: Encounter Books, 2023). Slack is associate professor of political science at Hillsdale College, and he discusses the "horseshoe theory" of politics proposed by French philosopher Jean-Pierre Faye (b. 1925) in his work *The Century of Ideologies* (2002) that concludes the radical Right and Left are essentially one and the same, a theory taken up by American and British political theorists identified with what is called the Pluralist School, which predated Faye's work and was proposed earlier by Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell as well as German political scientist Eckart Jesse (b. 1948). This is one reason the debate between historians about whether National Socialism was "right" or "left" has gained more momentum in recent years.

[19] Robert Longley, "Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Fascism; What's the Difference?" ThoughtCo.com, March 2, 2022, https://www.thoughtco.com/totalitarianism-authoritarianism-fascism-4147699 (Accessed January 18, 2024).

modification programs to create a "pure national race" through selective breeding.[20]  While Longley ties racial policies to Fascism in general, other sources note that Fascism is distinct from National Socialism in that the state rather than race is all-powerful, and thus no individual or spiritual value exists beyond the state.  Race, therefore, has little influence in Fascism but it is at the core of National Socialism.[21]  The conclusion this chapter will adopt is that although National Socialism and Fascism were distinct, the former could arguably be categorized as a variant of the latter.  Hitler, who was influenced by Mussolini initially, adopted Fascist totalitarian ideas into his own policies, and thus he saw totalitarianism as a necessary vehicle to correct the weaknesses he perceived in the German state and its people. As the "remedy," therefore, a totalitarian control of even how Germans procreated was seen as essential for the restoration of the "superior Aryan" species he envisioned.  Further, not being constrained by limited geography, Hitler adapted and adjusted conventional geopolitical theory to conform to his *Blut and Boden* vision of *Lebensraum* by reclamation of tangible geographic territory he felt belonged to the "superior" German race.  Thus, at the core of Hitler's ultimate implementation of his proposed vision were two aspects – purification of the people and expansion of territory.  A totalitarian government therefore was the way to effectively implement policies to facilitate those objectives, and thus applying the remedy would restore identity of what he perceived as the "true master race." Hitler was astute enough to understand that these objectives would not find popular support initially with the German people, as many did not share his ideas, so in order to get the public on his side he needed aggressive propaganda measures to condition the populace to accept his ideas. In time, that almost succeeded, but resistance was still there in many sectors – the Christian

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Author unknown, "Fascism vs. Nazism: Difference Between Fascism and Nazism," BYJU's Exam Prep, November 14, 2023, https://byjusexamprep.com/upsc-exam/fascism-vs-nazism (Accessed January 18, 2024).

churches, rival political ideologies, and even the "old guard" Monarchist conservatives in both Germany and Austria.  In order to alleviate that problem, Hitler sought to purge these elements by execution or imprisonment.  This "remedy" was then couched in patriotic language that drew from both the mythological worldview the National Socialists co-opted, as well as addressing the problems Germany faced as a nation.  The propaganda apparatus of Goebbels ultimately was empowered by both of these.

In examining all four questions that formed the basis of the CNCs which shaped who the National Socialists were, the questions flow from each other and each builds upon the premise of the preceding question.  The question of identity, for instance, is elaborated by place and time, and time determines identifying what is wrong and needs to be corrected.  The remedy then is applied based on restoring an affirmative answer to the question "Who are we?"  Despite the evil and negative impact of the National Socialists upon the history of Germany and Austria in particular, these questions are what fueled the narrative which was implemented in the policies which ultimately were enforced by the Third Reich.  As mentioned, these ideas and concepts that animate the questions were not born out of a vacuum, but rather were drawn from earlier individuals and movements.   This will be the basis of the next aspect of the discussion, concerning which ideas of National Socialism were unique to it, as opposed to which ones were adopted from their predecessors.

**The Communicable vs. the Incommunicable Attributes of National Socialism**

Although in the field of Personalist philosophy the question of communicable and incommunicable attributes are generally applied to individuals, in certain contexts it is also possible to apply them to groups as well.  At the risk of repetition, communicable attributes as defined by Crosby are those things that are shared in common with others.  A synonymous term

also employed in this context is *universals.*[22]  On the other hand, incommunicable attributes are those uniquely held by an individual – or in this context, a group/movement.  These communicable and incommunicable attributes are factors in the formation of CNCs as well, given that the reaction to the questions posed that constitute the "story" of said individual or group is contingent upon these attributes and the worldview they assist and generate.  At this point, it also merits noting that as a whole, individual Nazis were diverse on many minor points of the agenda of their party, in particular how they would relate to occultism – while Himmler, Rosenberg, and Hess were all attracted to occultic practices, others such as Martin Borrman were avowed atheists and wanted to suppress *all* religion in German public life.  Likewise, even the degree of antisemitism was somewhat diverse, as some such as Göring were more opportunistic and didn't make antisemitism a pivotal issue as did Goebbels and other later Nazi officials.  This by no means would suggest that the Nazis were not antisemitic as a whole, as that idea was central to their party platform.  Rather, it was more of a question of emphasis – some early Nazi leaders were more focused on the economic situation of Germany (notably Feder), or the geopolitical issues that arose from Versailles rather than focusing on the Jews and the alleged "threat" they posed (which would characterize Göring and Ludendorf in particular in the early days of the party). What was the commonality of the party as a whole was that a positive and mythological view of German identity and superiority (the "who are we?" question) was paired with the negative and racial sentiments that elevated antisemitism as an issue regarding why there was an apparent decline in German society (the "what's wrong?" question). These were two factors that the Nazis assimilated from the earlier *völkisch* movements that preceded them.

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[22] John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996): 42-43.

The context of this discussion has to do with what the National Socialist movement inherited from earlier movements as communicable attributes, as well as what distinctly Nazi attributes (incommunicables) can be identified, in particular in this instance as it relates to the impact Hitler's involvement and leadership in the party had.  The primary focus of examination will be on Hitler and his Nazi subordinates' views on race, in particular the use of the term "Aryan."

Given that a significant percentage of the content of the National Socialist platform was co-opted from earlier individuals and movements, the focus first will be on that percentage.  As noted several times throughout the previous chapters, National Socialism did not appear suddenly out of an ideological vacuum.  Rather, it was shaped by factors in politics and society, and the reaction of those who were part of it was shaped by the influences of other individuals – political movements, scientific theories, philosophers, occultists, nationalist movements prior to the 20$^{th}$ century, etc. These influences were discussed at length in the previous chapters, and therefore it would be redundant to spend considerable time on them in this context.  The focus here is rather to identify what specific areas were communicable attributes from earlier movements that were assimilated into the National Socialist political platform.

The first of these communicable attributes is found in the term "Aryan,"  as well as the racial ideology which co-opted and adopted the term. Anthropologically speaking, the term "Aryan" applies specifically to the people who dispersed throughout Europe and Asia and are considered the progenitors of the Indo-European linguistic family.  It constitutes a wide swath of languages ranging from Hindi to ancient Briton, and in anthropological context, it is viewed as an ethnolinguistic concept.  However, in the late 19$^{th}$ century as occultism began to also somehow assimilate Darwinian evolution, a system of human origins (cosmology) developed that assumed that "godhood" could be achieved through biological evolution.   This led to a

polygenic theory of human origins that also incorporated another aspect of Darwinian evolution – natural selection – which viewed different ethnicities as distinct species, and the next logical step for this was to label some "species" as "superior" while others were deemed "inferior." In the scientific realm, this was adapted to evolutionary biology by Ernst Haeckel, and was expanded by anthropologist Hans Weinert (1887-1967) in his 1941 book *Entstehung der Menshenrassen* to assert that "racial mixing" was detrimental to evolutionary progress, and as an avid eugenicist as well he had written in an earlier work he authored in 1936 that the Nordic race had evolved to a higher level than other races and therefore any dilution of that stock would be detrimental to its evolution.[23] Weinert, who also was a member of the National Socialist Party and also was part of the SS Race and Settlement Office, as in turn a student of anthropologist Theodor Mollison (1874-1952),[24] who adapted Haeckel's German variant of Darwinian evolution from his own mentor, Theodor Boveri (1862-1915), a cytologist and zoologist who applied Darwinian ideas to his work on genetics based on collaboration with Eugen Fischer (1874-1967), the German eugenicist who exerted a significant influence upon the codification of the Nuremburg Laws of 1935 – Weikart notes that Fischer in particular was heavily influenced by Gobineau in his application of eugenics to race.[25] In his work with geneticist Edwin Baur (1875-1933), Fischer in turn co-authored a 1921 book entitled *Menschliche Erblichkeitslehre (Human Heredity)* which Hitler was introduced to and read in Landesberg Prison and would

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[23] Richard Weikart, *Darwinian Racism: How Darwinism Influenced Hitler, Nazism, and White Nationalism* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2022): 68-71.

[24] Matthew Goodrum, "Hans Weinert (1887-1967)," Pressbooks, 2022, https://pressbooks.lib.vt.edu/paleoanthropology/chapter/hansweinert/ (Accessed January 19, 2024).

[25] Weikart, 67.

serve as source material for Hitler's racial ideology in *Mein Kampf*.[26]  Therefore, while Hitler

was open to these racial ideas, they were not incommunicable to him but rather were adapted as

was most of the Nazi political platform from earlier sources such as these.  The racial

justification for the ideas therefore established, the co-opting of the term "Aryan" from orthodox

ethnolinguistic literature now becomes a term that would be used for the "superior" race of

Nordic extraction which was at the foundation of Nazi racial policies.

The first coinage of the term "Aryan" in a racial/eugenics context can be traced back to

the work of Friedrich Schlegel, Christian Lassen, Adolph Pictet, and linguist Max Muller in the

early 19th century.  All of these individuals defined "Aryan" as being a root-race of most modern

European peoples, and the term was applied to anthropology as well as linguistics.  The racial

connotations of the term as far as ideological influences are concerned though began with Count

Alfred Gobineau, who built upon post-Enlightenment romanticism by combining it with

Darwinian biology.  In doing so, a new view of race called "Aryanism" emerged that built upon

the earlier ideas of individuals such as Fichte, who asserted there was a strong bond between

race, language, and nature, and Gobineau also expanded upon Rousseau's rejection of the

degradation of contemporary society by crafting a utopian past that belong to the "Aryans"

alone.[27]  Therefore, there was nothing particularly incommunicable about using the term "Aryan"

in a racial sense, as it was borrowed from previous writers who in turn borrowed it from even

earlier sources.  It was Gobineau, however, who coined the term "Aryan" in a racial context, but

at around the same time, occultists in different nations of the West were also appropriating the

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[26] Jonathan M. Marks, *Human Biodiversity: Genes, Race, and History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995):88

[27] Michael J. Biddis, *Father of Racist Ideology: the Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970): 108-109.

term as a way to reconcile occultism with Darwinian evolution, and among the most prominent

of these was the Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Blavatsky's contribution of the term "Aryan" is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, but

as a review Blavatsky used the term "Aryan" to refer to what she called the "fifth root race," and

she uses an odd mix of Biblical imagery, mythology, and biological evolution to describe these

"Aryans" as being a sort of demigod species that essentially would found all of human

civilization.[28]  This imagery was later borrowed from Blavatsky by German and Austrian

*völkisch* occultists such as Liebenfels, who took the term "Aryan" further by asserting that this

original race of "god-men" were corrupted and weakened by "sodomizing" animals and creating

other race/species, and in order for this race of "god-men" (Aryans) to survive, it is necessary to

purge the bloodline and thus evolve the "fifth race" into the perfect "sixth race" (Blavatsky's

"Aquarian Man").[29]  Combining this with Gobineau's more philosophical romanticist use of the

term "Aryan," the National Socialists would borrow that and expand upon it and officially codify

into policy the German ethnicity as the true "Aryan master race."  Therefore, like so many

concepts the National Socialists held, this term was not original to them but rather a

communicable position that had its roots in 19th-century occultism and romanticism.  In some

cases, this also involves a variant of euhemerism[30] which is often seen in two ways.  In a positive

way, the Biblical passages from Genesis 6 are appropriated by some occultists to mean that the

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[28] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine Vol. 2.* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company LTD, 1888): 424-429.

[29] Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Theozoology* (Vienna: self-published, 1905):16-18.

[30] Euhemerism is a view which asserts that within mythology and folklore, there is a foundation of truth that inspired such stories. There are actually orthodox Christian euhemerists as well who hold varying opinions on mythology, including John Daniel Cook, "Euhemerism: A Medieval Interpretation of Classical Paganism," *Speculum* 2, no. 4 (1927): 396-410; and Jacob Bryant and George Stanley Faber. These individuals and the position they subscribed to are not in any way synonymous with the variant espoused by German and Austrian *Volkisch* occultists however.

"god-men" themselves were fathered by a "race of gods," and thus this produced the "super race." A more negative view taken by others is that the original human race was a race of gods, but then was corrupted by the same events of Genesis 6. These views are often espoused by a wide range of movements, ranging from Blavatsky-based Theosophical occultists to the recent emerging transhumanist movement. The views proposed by Blavatsky and then expanded upon by *völkisch* occultists in Germany and Austria at the beginning of the 20th century would contribute significantly to Hitler's dystopian vision of a "master race" that would purge inferior elements from the human gene pool, elements that Hitler also embraced from earlier sources which categorized different races as different species. While there are other areas which could be seen as being adopted by the National Socialists from earlier movements and figures, the particular racial ideology which came to define the Nazi agenda was neither limited to the National Socialists themselves, nor was it original to them. Rather, it was a communicable attribute of their ideology that formed a significant basis of their mythological worldview.

As for the discussion as to what is unique to the National Socialists as incommunicable attributes, this becomes a bit more challenging as in reality the National Socialists were the natural evolution of many earlier movements. Historical discourse on this topic by and large concludes that much of the Nazi party platform was cherry-picked by Hitler and other early National Socialists because it validated their own sentiments. This is true to an extent, and it does make it more challenging to find anything that is unique to Nazi thought. Indeed, many of the sources that influenced the evolution of what would become National Socialism were themselves not exactly German in origin either – the eugenics movement, social Darwinism, and geopolitical theories adapted by Hitler and the National Socialists had their origins primarily in British and American sources, and the occult-based mythological worldview the National

Socialists embraced was intertwined with a rise in interest in the occult that occurred in the late

19th century throughout the West in general. This was also true with the embrace of Darwinian

evolution that fueled much of the racial policies of the Nazi state during the Third Reich. While

many of these borrowed concepts were recast in a distinctly German context by German

ideologues who adapted them, the National Socialists still incorporated many of these

Germanized versions of earlier concepts into their own identity by appropriating them from the

very individuals who adapted more Germanized concepts. Therefore, what would be considered

incommunicable to the National Socialists themselves? Rather than ideological, the National

Socialists were distinct from their predecessors via more practical means.

The most incommunicable aspect of National Socialism that made it distinct from

movements that preceded it is the codification of its ideology in the form of a political movement

which later gained control of the entire nation. In doing so, National Socialism relied upon a

propaganda apparatus which made many of its more controversial ideas digestible to the German

public. Therefore, whereas many ordinary Germans would reject many of these ideas from

earlier sources, the National Socialists were able to package them in such a way as to make them

more "German" and patriotic, and this is one reason why some Christian sectors of German

society would later embrace Nazism, which for them was a natural extension of some Biblical

concepts due in part to the post-Enlightenment liberalization of Christianity in Germany. Even

those actively opposed to the Third Reich among theologians – Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, and Jurgen Moltmann – inadervertently contributed to the

mindset that allowed Nazi ideology to take root, and thus theological liberalism also contributed

to blanket acceptance in a short time by a large percentage of Germans who identified as

Christian. This same theological liberalism – which itself was a product of Kantian and Cartesian

Enlightenment worldview – also was a major factor in the widespread interest in occultism which was found throughout the West in the late 19th century. While primarily Protestants, this was also not lost on Catholics either, as the liberalization of the Jesuit order in particular allowed individuals such as Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard de Chardin actually held ideas that mirrored Victorian occultists such as Blavatsky on the evolution of a "superior race," and the form of theistic evolution he espoused centered upon an idea he called the "Point Omega," which he asserted was a point in the historical future where a convergence of the cosmos would produce a "superior human" who would be essentially part of a Godhood (a form of pantheistic thinking).[31] This idea has been revived in recent years by Transhumanists and is now called the "Singularity." It bears a remarkable similarity to Hitler's own vision of a revived German super-race, which also had a mystical dimension that Himmler would incorporate into his SS organization. In reality, Teilhard's "Point Omega" was practically the same in principle as the "Thousand-Year Reich" that the National Socialists wanted to bring into existence, and it forms a sort of unique eschatology for National Socialism which incorporates similar elements from other sources.

In summary, if the incommunicable aspects of National Socialism were to be identified, they would be essentially a codification and refining of the various streams of influence they assimilated, and thus it could be argued that the Third Reich *was* the incommunicable fruit of National Socialism.

### Contradictions in National Socialist Policies

One aspect that Hitler and the National Socialists possessed was the utilitarian attitude they displayed when it came to influences and contributions earlier groups and people made.

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[31] Wolfgang Smith, *Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012): 95.

The historical record bears this out in a few examples that follow concerning how Hitler dealt with such groups and individuals when they proved to be no longer useful to his agenda.  The focus here will be on three individuals – Rudolf von Sebbotendorf, Ernst Rohm, and Karl Haushofer – who were all originally influential upon Hitler and the National Socialists but later fell out of favor once Hitler instituted the Third Reich in 1933.  Relating to these individuals, occultists and homosexuals will also be addressed in regard to somewhat contradictory policies the Third Reich enacted against both.

### A.  Sebottendorf and Nazi Conflicts with German Occultists

Rudolf von Sebottendorf (1875-1945), was a German occultist, mystic, and was the leading figure in the notorious occultic Thule Society, which was founded in 1912 as a group of *völkisch* disciples of Guido von List and was originally called the *Germanen-Orden.*  After Sebottendorf assumed leadership of this group, he renamed it the Thule Society after a Nordic mythological land that was similar in many aspects to the Atlantis legends.[32]  The name was chosen by Walter Nauhaus, an early colleague of Sebottendorf's, largely based upon the popularity of the accounts of the expeditions of Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen.[33]  In 1919, the Thule Society, which was at that point made up of elite *völkisch* occultists, decided to establish a political arm to attract working-class men to their ideology.  The leader they chose to organize that was Munich-born locksmith Anton Drexler (1884-1942), who had his own history of antisemitic political activism since at least the World War I period.[34]  Although by late 1919

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[32] Phillip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 352.

[33] David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012): 71-72.

[34] Louis Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 74.

Hitler would enter the party and would overshadow Drexler as well as transform the whole identity of an obscure movement, the origins of the National Socialist Party were nonetheless rooted in the patronage of an occultic society and thus would also be connected to Sebottendorf's endeavors.  Although Sebottendorf continued the Thule Society well into the early 1930s, in 1934 he fell out of favor with Hitler and the Nazis when they began to crack down on the very occultists that once influenced them.  On March 1, 1934, Sebottendorf's book *Bevor Hitler kam* was officially banned, and he was imprisoned but later was released and exiled to Turkey, where he held citizenship.  When Sebottendorf was expelled from Turkey in 1944, he committed suicide by drowning in the Bosporus.[35]  In his later years, Sebottendorf revised his earlier occultic convictions by conversion to Sufi Islam.  In the National Socialist official notes added to Sebottendorf's text after it was banned, the clue to its reason can be found:

> The events that subsequently occurred should, unfortunately, allow Sebottendoff
> to understand the extent to which he was sentient and malevolent, tending to
> discredit her, they murmured against Sebottendorf the fact that the distribution of
> copies of the article was deaf was not a little offensive of the Publishing Company
> had been hired by Ott; LaForce had been entrusted the following: state its
> provenance, including trendy and nationally inspired circles to the management of
> the periodical, full autonomy of decision. Neither their actions nor their behavior
> towards others Looking for a collaborator, of working-class condition, endowed
> with the Messrs. Hanns Georg Miiller, Wilhelm LaForce, Max Sesselmann and
> Johann Ott, all domiciled in Munich, a smear campaign fingers were,
> unfortunately, compatriots, costs man, a baker sympathetic to the ideas of the
> Movement, who had co reading to three. This notification, registered on July 15
> r919, is available for all legal purposes. moved to the expectations of
> Sebottendorff and the Publisher, Miss Kathe Bierbau then aiming their arrows,
> soaked in poison, at Sebottendorff himself "Hanseatic Inn". The Commercial
> Management "Miinchener Beobachter", a part of the copies drawn, of a room on
> the ground floor of a building, located in Thiersch Strasse - in which the
> Publishing House is still based - which had bios enmities. son of a certain number
> of copies, certified by the Judicial Counselor Dr. Forst, of the infamous article
> entitled "Unusual Events", Miss Kathe Bierbaumer announces that the nominees
> and company to the advertising department. deluded on behalf of the editors

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[35] Luhrssen, 199-200.

Sesselmann and Miiller when, overestimating their rectitude and abilities, he had granted them.[36]

In short, the ruling Nazi leadership did not want a conflicting narrative which would discredit the Fuhrer and his prominence in the National Socialist Party, as it would be detrimental to the propaganda campaign the Third Reich implemented. After being briefly imprisoned, Sebottendorf also began to distance himself from his Nazi beneficiaries as he devoted more of his efforts to Sufi mysticism once he was exiled to Turkey.

The parting of Sebottendorf and the National Socialists was also part of a larger crackdown on occultism within Germany. While many of the occultic groups were once influential on the Nazis during their formative years, they were quickly disavowed in a propaganda campaign to make the Nazi Party look more "Christian," although in reality the Nazis were also ambivalent to Christianity as well and only utilized it for a Machiavellian purpose of promoting the party agenda. Among other occultists however, the crackdown was particularly strong based on political reasoning rather than ideological commonality the Nazi leadership may have had with the occultic traditions. Both Himmler and Hess, for instance, remained avidly interested in occultism, while other Nazi leaders such as Martin Bormann were atheists and not favorable to any religious belief. While speculative writers like Michael Fitzgerald attempt to make the case that while Hitler was outrightly against people such as Aleister Crowley, Fitzgerald in particular maintains that Hitler borrowed ideas from Crowley's *Book of the Law* and paraphrased them.[37] A similar writer, Peter Levenda, notes as well that Crowley's book attacked most historical religious traditions and thus would appeal to some

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[36] Rudolf von Sebottendorf, *Bevor Hitler Kam* (Munich: Deufula-Verlag Graffinger and Co., 1933): 130.

[37] Michael Fitzgerald, *Hitler's Occult War* (London: Robert Hale, 1990): 174.

degree to the inner circles of the Third Reich.[38]   However, the more likely explanation for the

adaptation of some occultic belief into Nazi thinking is that it was via Guido von List, Jorg Lanz

von Liebenfels, and Theodor Fritsch as discussed in Chapter 2.  All of these early German and

Austrian *völkisch* occultists did hold similar views to Crowley, as they had in common a mystical

esotericism adapted from Blavatsky's Theosophical teachings. And, as Richard Weikart notes, at

the basis of even Himmler's SS policies was a type of naturalistic pantheism that gave an

underpinning to the older *völkisch* idea of *Blut und Boden* that was central to Nazi racial and

geopolitical aims.[39]  It is this geopolitical dimension that would more than likely cause

Crowley's work to be banned in Germany, especially during World War II.  Crowley's British

citizenship made him suspect as a spy, so he was banned from the Third Reich more so for

political reasons than he was for religious or ideological reasons. This is evidence of a pattern in

Nazi appropriation of ideas as a whole – they are cherry-picked essentially if proven useful, but

easily suppressed if they cause any compromise of their power.  This is also true with the later

discussion here of the Nazi relationship to homosexuality.

　　　With an obvious influence of the occult in Nazi Germany, why were occultic societies

banned in 1941? The answer to that seems to be two-fold. First, it could be concluded that an

association with occultic groups who did have an impact on the early formation of the Nazi Party

could prove to be an embarrassment, and Hitler banned them in order to distance himself from

any association with such groups and individuals. However, another reason could be Hitler's

own megalomaniac tendencies, in which he possessed a sort of messianic complex and only

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[38] Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2019): 120.

[39] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs That Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016): 198.

utilized occultists until they proved no longer necessary to his agenda. This is an evident trait of Hitler not only as far as occultism is concerned, but in other areas as well. Therefore, while Hitler and the Third Reich had occultic influences and even borrowed from occultists and occult societies, it would not be accurate to say that the Nazis themselves were officially occultists, but rather that they were occult-influenced.

Another occultist who came under scrutiny from the Third Reich was Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner had founded a breakaway sect of Theosophy that he called Anthroposophy, and although he had been the leader of the Theosophical Society's German branch since 1902, he broke with it in 1913 to found his own movement. Less inclined to subscribe to the Eastern-based mysticism of Blavatsky, Steiner instead focused on a more esoteric-based rationalism that looked to Nietzsche and Haeckel.[40] Part of Steiner's program was the founding of the "Waldorf Schools," and these institutions had a tumultuous relationship with the Third Reich between the years of 1933-1941. Despite the fact that Steiner in reality held a lot of common views with the *völkisch* occultists that helped shape National Socialism (as both were based upon Blavatsky's Theosophist ideas), he was nonetheless considered a threat to the Third Reich and the Anthroposophical Society was outlawed in 1935. Again, a lot of the issue did not necessarily come with Steiner's beliefs, but rather was related to the issue of control, relative to the Waldorf institutions Steiner established. The Nazi apparatus wanted to have totalitarian control over all institutions, including education. Particular to that area, the Third Reich had a policy of *Gleichschaltung* ("Coordination") in which schools were subjected to Nazification and this often

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[40] George A Mather and Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993): 22.

even involved intense enforcement.[41] While a more complex situation existed in regard to the

Waldorf institutions as contrasted with other schools, it was due to two things – these schools

were not dependent upon state subsidies, and thus were isolated from state control and also were

few in number. Secondly, there was an element of racism in Steiner's teachings that carried over

from its Theosophical roots, although not as pronounced as the more *völkisch* variants of von

List and Liebenfels.[42] It could also be argued that Steiner's ideology did not differ much from

the National Socialists themselves, and thus was not conceived as a direct threat ideologically.

However, politically Steiner presented an issue, and it could be argued that the Waldorf Schools

and the ultimate control of *all* education by the state was the motivating factor in the Third Reich

coming against Steiner. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke notes the complexity of the relationship by

citing Theodore Ravenscroft's assertion that there was attached to Nazi mythology an

Anthroposophical root via his conversations with Walter Johannes Stein, an Austrian Jewish

national who had emigrated to Britain after Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933.

Ravenscroft noted that Stein tied this Anthroposophical view to the mythical setting of Wolfram

von Eschenbach's *Parsifal,* which was later adopted into an opera by Richard Wagner, of whom

Hitler was a fanatical devotee.[43] However, the more plausible explanation was that Hitler's

mythological worldview was informed by both Wagner directly as well as the writings of

Liebenfels in particular, and there is not identifiable connection to Steiner at all. However, like

Liebenfels, Steiner did hold to a mythological framework that was informed by Helena

Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine.* Therefore, despite some commonalities with the *völkisch* occultists

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[41] Karen Priestman, "Illusion of Coexistence: The Waldorf Schools in the Third Reich 1933-1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wifred Laurier University, 2009): 3.

[42] Priestman, 4.

[43] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992): 221.

that proliferated in Germany and Austria in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Steiner's Anthroposophy was a distinct movement that had negligible impact on the development of National Socialism.

With the outlawing of Steiner and Crowley, and the break with Sebottendorf, the Nazi regime itself was attempting to distance itself from its occultic roots while still appropriating a mythological/occultic worldview. The reasons for this are seen as a political movement to appeal to the greater German public via a coordinated propaganda apparatus that even sought to "Christianize" National Socialism via using Biblical language (a technique also employed by Liebenfels, and to a lesser degree, Blavatsky) and thus attempting to redefine National Socialism in "Christian" language to gain support. In time however, this façade would be dropped as well, given that many Church leaders and theologians across the spectrum would condemn National Socialism. Many occultists outside of Germany – notably Crowley – would follow suit as well.

## B. Ernst Rohm and the Complex Relationship Between National Socialism and Homosexuality

The case of Ernst Rohm (1887-1934) has been an issue of much discussion in a historical context in that it highlights a debatable issue: homosexuality as it related to National Socialism. The execution by Hitler's SS of Rohm and many of the SA officers in the 1934 "Night of the Long Knives" is used as justification that Hitler killed Rohm over his open sexuality. However, evidence seems to indicate that Hitler was well aware of Rohm's proclivities since the early days of the Nazi movement, so this is a question that bears further exploration. To this regard, the issue of homosexuality has been intrinsically connected to the Darwinian evolutionary theory, as it was tolerated (if not directly participated in and celebrated) by many early Nazis in part contingent upon both the "third sex theory" of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and the radical redefinitions of terms such as "sodomy" by Liebenfels and others as discussed in Chapter 2.

One aspect of Rohm's personality from an early age was a strong aversion to authority –
he was not very amicable to the officer corps of the German military during his service in World
War I. One perspective as to why this was the case is offered by Nicolai Tolstoy in his book
about the "Night of the Long Knives." Tolstoy notes that because Rohm was himself a part of
the officer corps, this would not provide adequate justification for his attitude. However, he also
makes this observation – the officer corps in the German Army during and prior to World War I
did not look on homosexual behavior well, and thus this issue is what Tolstoy saw as an
alienating factor in Rohm's relationship with his fellow officers. He notes that Rohm often
protested being treated differently because of his homosexual behavior was hypocritical on
behalf of the officer corps, and that his sexual preferences did not affect his ability to be an
effective military officer.[44] Rohm, who also was active in the *Freikorps* movement, became an
ally of Hitler and via the SA "Stormtroopers" was the de facto enforcer of the Party. This
relationship was seen as an asset by Hitler, and he and Rohm even had a close friendship
addressing each other in the familiar *du* rather than the more formal *Sie* in conversations (a
relationship he also maintained with Rudolf Hess as well). This has led to some speculation
about Hitler's own sexuality. Robert G.L. Waite, for instance, does not say that Hitler was
himself homosexual, but rather that he possessed "homoerotic tendencies" such as an effeminate
walk.[45] However, Waite also notes that Hitler was very self-conscious of these tendencies and
was ashamed of them and suppressed them, masking his insecurities in stereotypes of gender
roles and also a display of paranoia.[46] This may have been a factor later in his outlawing of

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[44] Nicolai Tolstoy, *Night of the Long Knives* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972): 28.

[45] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler, The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 271-272.

[46] Waite, 273.

homosexuality in Germany at the outset of the Third Reich, as it could be seen as a way of

overcompensation for personal insecurities. Hitler was reported to be somewhat intimidated by

women as well as personally repulsed by homosexual behavior.[47] Despite these contradictory

aspects of Hitler's personality, there is no evidence that he was openly homosexual, as his

documented relationships were all with women.

In addressing the predominance of homosexuality in Nazi Party circles, journalist

William Shirer made a comment in his seminal *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* which he

states that Nazi leadership in the early years had a considerable proportion of homosexuals.[48]

Naturally, this has led in recent years to extensive criticism of Shirer as being "homophobic,"

and accusations that he downplayed the persecution of homosexuals in the Third Reich.

However, the historical evidence indicates that not only did homosexuals play a significant role

in the advancement of National Socialism, but that they also were strongly present in earlier

movements that preceded the Nazis, such as the *Wandervögel* and *Freikorps* movements as

covered in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. When Hitler did eventually purge the SA during the

"Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, homosexuality among SA officers was not really the

motivating factor – Hitler saw Rohm as a threat to his own leadership and used Rohm's sexual

proclivities as a motivation to purge threats to his own authority, and Rohm's more aggressive

stance in regard to gaining a foothold in German politics was at variance with the more nuanced

approach Hitler adapted while in prison at Landesberg.[49] The natural aversion to authority that

Tolstoy noted as an attribute of Rohm's personality may have also been a factor, as Rohm was

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[47] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936 – Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998): 44-45.

[48] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster,1960): 38.

[49] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 – Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998): 520.

not content with being a mere "kingmaker" for Hitler, but felt he deserved to be in charge of the

National Socialist movement. Therefore, the question remains as to why Hitler eventually sent

homosexuals to the concentration camps – was it simply because they were homosexuals, or was

it because of other reasons? This will now be explored in more detail.

As noted in Chapter 3, the issue of homosexuality is tied to Darwinian evolution,

particularly its German variant advanced by Ernst Haeckel. The intrinsic connection between

evolution and homosexuality was made by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (and later elaborated further by

Magnus Hirschfeld as well as radical feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Elizabeth

Badinter and particularly sexologist Alfred Kinsey, who noted that sexual deviance is a natural

part of the evolutionary process),[50] who asserted that homosexuals and lesbians were an evolving

"third sex."  This is also in line with the views of *völkisch* occultists such as Liebenfels, who

even radically redefined 'sodomy" in terms of racial identity. With Nazi ideology being very

Darwinian in relation to biology, it would therefore make homosexuality more desirable and the

procreation of the species only a necessity rather than the accepted order. This is one reason in

recent years the accepted view of "persecuted homosexuals" in the Third Reich has faced

challenges.

Many historians of the LGBT movement, such as John Scagliotti, assert that after the

National Socialists came to power in 1933, they specifically targeted homosexuals as an

"undesirable" group, and in doing so they cited a Weimar-era German law called Paragraph 175.

Paragraph 175 was an official law that criminalized homosexuality, but during the Weimar era it

was rarely enforced. In 1936, the Third Reich revised the law to broaden penalties against

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[50] Donald de Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004): 277.

homosexual behavior (which was understood at that point to be men, according to Scagliotti, and did not acknowledge lesbians).[51]  Scagliotti, along with Alet Biletszki of Quinnipiac University, continue by criticizing the accounts of William Shirer and other standard works on German history by accusing them of ignoring the LGBT element of the Holocaust. However, they also note that by statistics, only around 15,000 alleged homosexuals were exterminated in the death camps such as Auschwitz. Therefore, if the homosexual subculture was as widespread in Weimar-era Germany as gay historians often assert, it begs the question as to why there were not more of them being sent to the camps? In their 1995 book *The Pink Swastika,* Kevin Abrams and Scott Lively note five reasons the revisionist narrative of LGBT activists must be rejected in regard to homosexual persecution in the Third Reich. These reasons are as follows:[52]

1. Due to their continued role in the Third Reich leadership of the National Socialist Party, homosexuals as a class were never targeted for extermination.
2. Most of the homosexuals who were casualties of the camps died as a result of mistreatment and poor conditions in labor camps rather than in gas chambers.
3. Public displays of homosexual activities were considered criminal prior to the Third Reich (Paragraph 175), as well as in other nations of the period.
4. The number of homosexuals in the camps (15,000 to 30,000) was not proportional to the number of homosexuals in Germany and they also were a small percentage of concentration camp population.
5. Many of the SS guards and administrators of the camps and responsible for their atrocities were themselves homosexuals in several cases, and thus it would negate the idea that homosexuals in general were a targeted class.

There seems to be some justification of these doubts even from pro-LGBT literature on the Holocaust, most notably the account of Heinz Heger, a homosexual who was interned in a

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[51] Doug Stewart, "Targeted by Nazi Germany, Their Tales Forgotten: The Story of Gays and the Holocaust,"  Fox 61, 27 January 2023, https://www.fox61.com/article/news/local/lgbtq-pride-month/gays-and-the-holocaust-the-forgotten-story/520-2922c529-5185-4409-ad86-1478d8f2fc84  (Accessed January 24, 2024).

[52] Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika; Homosexuality and the Nazi Party* (Keiser, OR: Founders Publishing Corporation, 1997): 151-152.

concentration camp. Heger notes that due to Ernst Rohm's own homosexuality, the Nazi regime did not actively enforce Paragraph 175 until after Rohm's execution in the "Night of the Long Knives." It was at this point, Heger notes, that Hitler decided to launch a crusade to purge homosexuals from the various National Socialist organizations.[53] Even a gay writer such as Heger admits though that Hitler's actions were politically motivated as a means of quelling dissension against him. However, Heger also downplays the Nazi connections to homosexuality among many of its members by dismissing the allegations as a product of Soviet propaganda after the war.[54] Similar arguments are also made by Richard Plant in his book *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* as well as Ken Setterington, *Branded By the Pink Triangle*. Ironically, however, Setterington admits in his book that many homosexuals who were ethnically Jewish were interned in camps for being Jewish rather than homosexual,[55] particularly after the passing of anti-Jewish codes in 1935 and 1936. Therefore, although there were strict penalties for homosexuals in the Third Reich (although it could be argued that the USSR under Stalin was more restrictive), the evidence does not support that homosexuals were a targeted group. Rather, many homosexuals – both openly and accused – seem to have been targeted for other reasons, such as politics or race. Much like the occultists then, the homosexual internees at concentration camps or those simply targeted were often singled out due to the fact that in some way they conflicted with the Third Reich and its objectives on political or ethnic/racial grounds. It is also worth noting that being *accused* of homosexual behavior was often a trumped-up allegation that targeted many individuals who in reality were not homosexuals. Hitler did this

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[53] Heinz Heger, *The Men With the Pink Triangle* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1980): 10.

[54] Heger, 10-11.

[55] Ken Setterington, *Branded By the Pink Triangle* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2013): 81.

even with some of his military generals who opposed him, notably the cases of Generals Werner von Blomberg and Freiherr Werner von Fritsch, the latter of whom was implicated by faulty evidence presented by Himmler as "documentary proof" that von Fritsch had violated Paragraph 175.[56] Although later exonerated, von Fritsch was never restored to his post and died in combat at the beginning of the war on September 22, 1939.[57] These framed allegations may have also inflated the number of homosexuals in the Third Reich as well, which provided fodder for both the Nazi propaganda apparatus of Goebbels as well as current revisionist literature of LGBT activists.

In summary, homosexuality in relation to the National Socialist movement has a more complex history than is often presented, and therefore it is necessary to establish that while the Nazi platform really was unconcerned overall about homosexuality in Germany, it did also seek to legitimize itself by distancing from individuals who could scandalize its political objectives, notably Ernst Rohm. Many early precursors to the National Socialists were themselves either openly homosexuals or they were sympathetic to homosexuality, even promoting it as a "necessary step in human evolution." Likewise, it could be argued that the deeply-ingrained militaristic nationalism of Germany itself contributed to the presence of homosexuality in political circles – this would be the argument that writers such as Samuel Igra take.[58] Therefore, the evidence seems to conclude that many homosexuals who were persecuted during the Third Reich were often targeted for other reasons, usually political or ethnic. Likewise, the charge of homosexuality was often used in a defamatory context to give sanction to imprison or execute

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[56] William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984): 290.

[57] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 102.

[58] Samuel Igra, *Germany's National Vice* (London: Quality Press, 1945): 38-39.

opponents of the Third Reich (as was the case of von Fritsch) who were not homosexuals in reality. The impression therefore is that while the National Socialists *officially* opposed homosexual activity and even expanded the Paragraph 175 law, *unofficially* it was not a priority for either Hitler or any of the leading Nazi officials.

### C. Karl Haushofer's Falling From Grace

While both the demise of Ernst Rohm and the exile of Rudolf von Sebottendorf could be seen as a way for the Nazi leadership to "save face" by dissociation with occultic societies and homosexual behavior, the case of Karl Haushofer proves more enigmatic in that there was nothing particularly evident that would prove embarrassing for the Nazi leadership to distance themselves from him. However, there are two separate things which do cause this separation of Nazi identity from Haushofer to make more sense. While much of the reason for Hitler's disavowal of Haushofer had more to do with the 1941 Hess incident, there are two other fundamental issues which may have motivated the Nazi persecution of Haushofer and his family in the later years of the Third Reich,  The first had to do with the fact that not only was Haushofer not antisemitic, but his wife was of Jewish background. Secondly, Haushofer's trouble with the Third Reich arose in part from his son being implicated in an assassination plot against Hitler. As patterns of Hitler's own dissociations with people he had originally thought of as influential and were integral to the rise of early National Socialism, Haushofer's situation merits examination as an apparent example of the contradictions posed by Hitler's purging from German society even those who originally contributed to Nazi ideology in some fashion. These two areas will be examined in more detail.

First, the issue of Haushofer's son will be examined due to the fact it had the greater impact upon Haushofer's reputation with the National Socialist regime. Albrecht Haushofer

(1903-1945) was an educator, poet, and novelist and former professor of political geography at the University of Berlin.[59]  After his tenure with the university, the Foreign Office of the Third Reich employed the younger Haushofer. It is at this point he began to harbor some concerns about the Third Reich, considering it to be detrimental to the German people as a whole. This led to his involvement in *Operation Valkyrie* with Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, and his subsequent arrest in 1944. He was executed by the SS on April 23, 1945, shortly before the war ended. Being that in many instances the system of Nazi justice implicated entire families, this would lead to Karl Haushofer's arrest not long after his son, and he and his wife would later commit suicide after the war on March 10, 1946.[60]  The details of Albrecht Haushofer's involvement with the *Valkyrie* operation bear some further examination, as they are the key to understanding how his father was also implicated.

In a passage from his *Moabit Sonnets* which he composed in prison, Albrecht Haushofer expresses the general attitude he came to develop regarding disillusionment with National Socialism in a poem called "The Watchmen:"

> The guards who are placed on our arrest
> Are good boys. Peasant blood.
> Torn from the protection of their villages
> Into an alien world not understood.
>
> They scarcely speak. Only their eyes ask
> Dumbly sometimes, as if they wished to know
> What their hearts, which bear the heavy fate
> Of their homeland, should never learn.
>
> Yet they wait perhaps for a life-sign
> They serve quietly. They too are captive.

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[59] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1976): 139.

[60] Phillip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Third Reich Since 1890* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990): 173.

Do they comprehend it? Tomorrow? Later? Never?[61]

The psychological implication for Haushofer's writings was that he was witnessing what he believed was a quiet disillusionment even on the part of the SS guards and Gestapo who held him in custody, yet he also observes that they are not openly expressing it due to the fact they could suffer his fate as well. In general, this would also reflect some of the accounts given by American, British, and Russian troops who entered Berlin in 1945, as there was a general disavowal of National Socialism and the regime of the Third Reich at the time the war ended in Germany. Ian Kershaw notes that this was a general trend among the population as well, as expressed by a sign on the *Feldherrnhalle* in Munich witnessed by British Jewish journalist Victor Gollancz which stated in bold letters "I am ashamed to be a German".[62] While William Shirer presents a different picture based on his earlier observations from his time in prewar Germany and his subsequent return after the war ended during the Nuremberg trials – he said that despite the dazed and numbed state many Germans were in, he himself witnessed little bitterness on their part against Hitler.[63] However, the fact that organized resistance existed at all levels during the Third Reich itself – from old-guard military officers to youth movements such as the "Swing Kids" – would call this initial observation into question. Albrecht Haushofer, by his own endeavors at resistance, represented a large but underreported dissatisfaction with the Nazi regime.

Shirer also notes that the execution of political dissidents intensified during the final days of the Third Reich, and he notes that Albrecht Haushofer was executed by firing squad along

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[61] Albrecht Haushofer and Angela Clifford, *Moabit Sonnets (1944-1945) with an English Translation* (Belfast: Athol Books, 2001) :41

[62] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000): 840.

[63] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960): 1140.

with other prominent dissenters such as Count Albrecht von Bernstorff, Klaus Bonhoeffer

(brother of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer), and others.[64]  Albrecht Haushofer was, by all

indications, a political prisoner. His father Karl though was targeted by the Nazi regime for two

other reasons.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Haushofer was the main influence upon Hitler and

the National Socialist variant of *Geopolitik,* and he was also a lifelong friend and mentor to

Hiter's deputy, Rudolf Hess. Although there is evidence that Haushofer rejected much of the

Nazi rhetoric, he is often alleged to have been a factor in the National Socialists' rise to power.

Both the elder and younger Haushofers had begun to experience friction with Hitler as early as

1939 due to two related issues:[65]

1. Both Haushofers had doubts about Germany confronting Britain in war.
2. Both also had reservations about how Hitler treated the German-speaking population
   in South Tyrol in Italy – Hitler wanted to deport them to Bavaria and then transplant
   them after conquering the Soviet Union in Crimea as part of the whole *Lebensraum*
   scheme, but Haushofer counseled that South Tyrol should be given autonomy and its
   people remain where they are.

An issue related to this was based on Haushofer's friendship with Hess – he was asking Hess to

persuade the Fuhrer to change his mind on these issues. It could be argued that Haushofer

impacted Hess's decision to take the ill-fated "peace mission" flight to Scotland in order to meet

with the Duke of Hamilton in order to attempt to forge an alliance between Britain and Germany.

This "mission" of Hess's occurred in 1941, and it was not well-received by either Hitler or

Hess's British captors. Later, although Hitler had been friends with Hess since the Beer Hall

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[64] Shirer, 1072.

[65] James Douglas- Hamilton, *Motive for a Mission: The Story Behind Hess's Flight to Britain* (London: MacMillan and Co., LTD, 1971) :88-89

Putsch in 1923, Hess had even helped him compile and edit *Mein Kampf,* Hitler viewed Hess's

departure as a betrayal and purged his position in the party, which enabled a far more ambitious

sycophant, Martin Bormann, to come to power.[66]  This also brought into scrutiny Hess's

friendship with Karl Haushofer and his son Albrecht. Hess himself credited Haushofer with the

idea, noting that Haushofer's views on the importance of Britain as a key factor in German

politics. Despite this, Haushofer was always embarrassed with being associated with National

Socialism because of his geopolitical theories.[67]  He believed that some poorly educated Nazi

leaders actually did not understand his geopolitical theories, and more importantly he felt his

ideas that formed the basis of the whole *Lebensraum* program of the Third Reich were being

taken to extremes he never intended. He believed, for instance, that *Lebensraum* should only be

in areas which had historically significant German-speaking populations, and that war and

conquest were not the means they should be incorporated into a greater German realm.[68]  Like

many legitimate disciplines that were appropriated by the National Socialists, Haushofer

therefore believed his legitimate geopolitical positions had been corrupted and changed into

something different by Hitler and the National Socialists. Naturally, his objections to this invited

close scrutiny from the SS and Gestapo, and Hess's ill-fated 1941 flight to Scotland would

intensify these suspicions on the part of the Third Reich, and thus Hess's crediting of inspiration

from Haushofer would also bring suspicion. Another aspect of this friction was because unlike

the Nazi variant of *Geopolitik,* Haushofer and earlier German geopolitical theorists such as

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[66] Kershaw, 371-372.

[67] Snyder, 140.

[68] Seyed Nader Nourbaksh and Farajola Ahmadi, "Geopolitics and Territorial Expansion in Germany: The Influence of Haushofer Ideas on Hitler," International Quarterly of Geopolitics website, July 2021, https://journal.iag.ir/article_110048.html?lang=en#:~:text=Haushofer%20believed%20some%20low%2Deducated, Germany%20and%20the%20united%20states. (Accessed January 25, 2024).

Friedrich Ratzel rejected the idea of race being a factor in national unity, but geographical boundaries.[69] By this definition, anyone of any ethnicity would be entitled to being part of the nation. This viewpoint was more consistent with the geographical definitions of other Western states such as pre-war Austria-Hungary, Canada, Australia, and the United States. It is quite plausible that the racial policies of the Third Reich then were a major source of contention with Haushofer as well. This also has a personal dimension which also led to Haushofer's fall from grace.

Haushofer's wife was of Jewish heritage, and subsequentially this meant that Albrecht Haushofer was also 50% Jewish as well. Despite this, Rudolf Hess still maintained a personal friendship with the family, and it was even reported that Haushofer used his influence with Hess to protect his family from suffering the same fate as other Jewish victims of Nazi policies, which he had justifiable fears in doing.[70] However, with his son Albrecht's involvement with an assassination attempt on the Fuhrer and Hess's absence, Haushofer's position was quickly at risk and it would result in he and his wife being interned in a concentration camp until their liberation at the end of the war.

Haushofer's fall from grace, along with so many others, demonstrated that Hitler and the National Socialists desired to keep in control of Germany at any cost, even if it meant the elimination of those they formerly would have considered allies. It also has sparked discussion in recent years about how much impact Haushofer actually had upon Hitler, and it calls into question as to whether or not Haushofer could be considered an "influential Nazi influence."

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[69] Mark Bassin, "Race Contra Space: The Conflict Between German *Geopolitik* and National Socialism," *Political Geography Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1987): 118.

[70] Snyder, 140.

**Summary**

To give a summary of this chapter, there are three important aspects to the rise of the National Socialist Party and the emergence of the Third Reich.

*Establishing a narrative* – this entails the use of central narrative convictions to give an air of legitimacy to the National Socialist "story," including factors as to what made its rise possible, and what factors proved to drive the narrative.

*Forging an identity* – The National Socialists, like so many other movements across the spectrum, were formed by a variety of influences and factors that made their narrative possible. The preceding chapters were a more in-depth examination of what those factors were, while the discussion then would progress to what factors did the National Socialists incorporate (communicable attributes) versus what was unique to them (incommunicable attributes).

*Streamlining and purging* – while many factors influenced National Socialism, not every aspect of the influential factors agreed with their worldview. Therefore, they felt it necessary to purge their ranks of anything that would offer opposition or disagreement to their authority. What was embarrassing to them needed to be purged, and those who would express opposition to their variations on themes were to be eliminated as well. This in particular would apply to earlier associations of National Socialism with esoteric occultic societies and homosexual activities among some of its early members, but it also implied the elimination of others who came to disagree with their agenda, such as Karl Haushofer.

These steps were seen as integral to consolidating Nazi control not only over German society, but over the entire world. To reiterate the premise, National Socialism did not appear mysteriously out of a vacuum, but rather had antecedents from which it evolved. This is true of most other movements as well.

## Chapter 7

## Conclusion

In exploring what the "story" is behind the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the early 20th century, the premise reiterated is the identification of the central narrative convictions (CNCs) that formed the underlying narrative of Nazi origins. Although Hitler was the dominant force in the National Socialist Party from its beginnings, many of the factors that made Hitler into the person he became were rooted in earlier movements and individuals from which he drew much of his ideology. That ideology, however, was not unique to Hitler, but rather encompassed National Socialism in general. That being established, the fact that Hitler's personal views and the platform of the National Socialist Party converged and were intertwined have presented a unique challenge to research, and thus at times in the research many key Nazi ideas were also Hitler's as well. This became more pronounced as Hitler rose in leadership in the party, to the point that after the Third Reich was established in 1933, a speech by Rudolph Hess the following year, his deputy and closest associate, summarized what had indeed happened: "*Adolf Hitler ist Deutschland, und Deutschland ist Adolf Hitler!*"[1] The ultimate goal of the National Socialist Party was indeed to recreate Germany in their own image, as is evident from this line in Hess's 1934 speech. This objective required a narrative, and the narrative was built upon the framework of the CNC's previously referenced. Therefore, with that being the primary question explored, the findings of the CNCs will be discussed in summary.

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[1] Rudolf Hess, *Reden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1938): 10-14.

**"Who Are We?"**

The first question, "who are we?" was based upon a new focus on German nationalism which arose in 1871 after the German Empire was founder, and it has a Bismarckian signature in that Bismarck was considered the pivotal political force in a renewed German nationalism which would supersede the earlier Prussian model by imposing it upon all the German states. An effective shift of power in 1862 contributed to the rise of Bismarck in power, as he represented the interests of this new militaristic form of Prussian pan-German nationalism. This did not make Bismarck a precursor to Nazi ideology by any means (evidence suggests that as an ardent Monarchist, he would have opposed such groups) but he did provide a foundation for German nationalism from which several more militant strains would emerge, culminating in the National Socialists at the end of World War I. Bismarck also introduced the authoritarian militaristic model of German politics which would be implemented by the various nationalist factions from which the Nazi Party evolved in such a way that nationalism would be strictly enforced.[2] However, this alone would not suffice for the rise of such a virulent group as the National Socialists, and they therefore had to justify their own identity in other ways.

The rise of occultism in the late 19th century in Europe and America provided a further framework for capitalizing on German nationalism. The aspiration to be a "chosen people" and something unique and special found fertile ground in the new occultic trends which also were finding some popularity in Germany. The mythological worldview offered by occultism focused upon the spiritual development of the individual in a form of self-realization – achieving a

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[2] Hans Ulrich- Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (New York: Berg, 1991): 27.

"higher self" was an ultimate objective of many involved in these occultic groups.[3]  This idea

was then also reconciled with Darwinian evolution by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in particular,

who combined this self-realization aspect of occultism with the Hindu concept of transmigration

of souls (reincarnation) as framed as a more supernatural definition of Darwinian evolution in

that Blavatsky proposed a revised version of reincarnation as being evolutionary in nature.[4]

Some German occultists who were also identified with *völkisch* ideology such as Guido von List

and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, then applied this Theosophical framework to German national

identity as well, and thus the "Aryan" Nordic super-race was adapted as a mythological

justification of Germany's identity. It also reflected a trend rooted in early *völkisch*  nationalism,

which also was marked by a trend of the agricultural sector to rebel against "foreign"

urbanization and industrialization of German society, which was seen as a bi-product of

capitalism.[5]  Another aspect of this was somewhat contradictory, but it also demonstrated how

close two divergent ideologies – that of pantheism and evolution – really were. This was seen in

the writings of Ernst Haeckel, in particular, who used an artistic view of nature as a means of

conveying a mystical fascination with life and regeneration. This was a monistic view of nature

in which Haeckel saw evolution as a cosmic force, the creative energy of nature, and thus it

reduced man to being one animal in connection with many others.[6]  What this meant, as Daniel

Gasman suggests, is that Haeckel was defining evolution in *religious* terms and thus was going

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[3] Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2011): 153.

[4] Sarah Bartels, *The Devil and the Victorians: Supernatural Evil in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2021): 136.

[5] R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust (*Salem, OR: Trust House Publishers, 2018): 213.

[6] Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007): 11.

beyond the naturalism of Darwin, which earned him criticism from his mentors such as Rudolf

Virchow.[7] It was therefore not a great leap for these ideas to be reconciled by occultists such as

Blavatsky with the Eastern concept of transmigration of souls (reincarnation). The mythological

worldview derived from esoteric occultism was therefore a means for National Socialism to

make German identity look unique and even special, and in doing so they provided their own

answer to the question "who are we?"

### "Where are We?"

The question "where are we" comprises two different dimensions in the context of what

drove the narrative of National Socialism. The first is geographical, meaning what defines

"authentic German land." The second is chronological, meaning where Germany sees itself at a

particular point in time.

As to chronology, the question of "where Germany was" has as much to do with the next

question – "what's wrong?" The collapse of the German Empire and the abdication of the

Kaiser, after its creation some 40 years earlier, left Germany with a question of who it was as a

nation, and provided many opportunities for extremist movements such as National Socialism to

frame German identity in the language of mythology. The aftermath of World War I also

presented challenges to Germany's future, and it led to an identity crisis on the part of Germany

as a whole. National Socialism sought to address this by redefining German identity in terms of

race as well as in terms of what some variant geopolitical ideas defined as what Germany was. It

led to the question of how to consolidate German populations into one entity. This was a large

part of the impetus behind the annexation of Austria, as well as the taking of the Rhineland areas

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[7] Gasman, 11-12.

under France's control and the Sudetenland annexations from Czechoslovakia in the years leading up to World War II. Hitler, in the previously mentioned earlier conversation with Rauschning, equated a "greater Germany" with a "greater Europe," and thus the consolidation of German-speaking communities throughout Europe served as the motivation of the expansionism of World War II, and it also provided the mythological framework for supposed "German superiority" over all else. This is essentially *where* the National Socialist vision of Germany saw itself.

As noted, these questions all intersect and overlap, and the next question, "what's wrong," will elaborate upon the "where" and "who" questions by noting that the contemporary political and social situation of the time fed into Nazi ideology perfectly, and thus provided the impetus for the eventual creation of the Third Reich.

### "What's Wrong?"

Extremist political movements like the National Socialists required a variety of factors to facilitate their emergence. Social unrest, war, and economic instability prove to be catalytic factors in the rise of such movements. Often, they emerge due to asking the very question of what is wrong, and in doing so they also claim to be the salvation of a society experiencing chaos. In the case of National Socialism, which is no different.

National Socialism was a culmination of many things which were occurring in Germany beginning at least as far back as German Unification in 1871. In trying to discern what it meant to be German, many extremists also came to the rationalization that what also needed definition is what was *not* German, and in doing so, it also meant that any problems Germany faced as a nation would be the responsibility of non-German elements which were seen as weakening

German homogeny. On an international level, this entailed rival European powers (Great Britain, France, Russia as well as other lesser powers) suppressing German ambitions and thus it forged a militarism in German society which sought to convey the superiority and strength of Germany as a nation. On a more domestic level, the problems could not be seen as being self-inflicting, so the search for culprits who contributed to German weakness led to the singling out of certain groups (Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and others) as scapegoats for all that was wrong in German society. These two issues were fundamentally what the National Socialists and other (as well as earlier) extremists used to identify what was wrong with Germany.

The unrest came to a head after World War I and Germany's defeat when the Allied forces enacted stiff penalties on Germany for its involvement in the war. Ian Kershaw calls this unrest a "trauma" that Hitler, as well as many Germans and Austrians, felt by seeing the defeat in the war as a betrayal and therefore processing what happened and then labeling culprits who caused this catastrophe.[8] Further, the abdication of the Kaiser on November 9, 1918, left a political vacuum which sparked a series of revolutionary actions across Germany – Communists, *Freikorps* nationalists, and others clashed in the streets of German cities.[9] The *Freikorps,* as noted earlier, were made up of disillusioned German war veterans of whom a sizable number embraced the racial-based *völkisch* ideology which would later influence the Nazis. Added to this were the strict penalties imposed by Versailles.

This ties into as well the writings of *völkisch* occultists such as Liebenfels, who labeled other ethnicities as "inferior species" and even redefined terms such as "sodomy" to be

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[8] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 – Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998): 104.

[9] Nigel Jones, *The Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* (London: Robinson, 2004): 24.

equivalent with bestiality because to such individuals race and species were the same. It is also

evident in the writings of American eugenicists such as Margaret Sanger, who in her work *The*

*Pivot of Civilization* echoed a neo-Malthusian sentiment regarding population growth:

> The lack of balance between the birth rate
> of the "unfit" and the "fit," admittedly the
> greatest present menace to civilization, can
> never be rectified by the inauguration of a
> cradle competition between these two classes.
> The example of the inferior classes, the fertility
> of the feeble-minded, the mentally defective,
> the poverty-stricken, should not be held up for
> emulation to the mentally and physically fit,
> and therefore less fertile, parents of the educated
> and well-to-do classes.[10]

Sanger identified "fit" and "unfit" stocks in such a way that it was identified as the major

factor in the success of a society – if the "unfit" outbred the "fit," it weakened society in this

view.[11] This idea was paralleled in Nazi ideology as well, and the problem of "racial impurity"

was thus identified as an additional problem of German society and why it was weakened.

In summary, in Nazi thinking, the twin problems of Western domination of the German

economy and the issue of "racial compromise" weakening German blood were identified as what

was wrong. This would then lead to proposals of radical solutions that would be codified as

official policies during the Third Reich once the National Socialists gained power in 1933.

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[10] Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Brentano's, 1922): 25.

[11] Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 178.

**"What's the Remedy?"**

In addressing the issues that Nazi leadership in general – and Hitler in particular – saw as being what is wrong with Germany, the solutions they produced were two major concepts that shaped National Socialist policies. The first was geopolitical and centered around the idea of *Lebensraum.* The second was biological and was an adaptation of eugenics. Both of these in turn were based in the earlier concept of *Blut und Boden,* which also reinforced the mythological worldview that drove much of earlier *völkisch* ideology and was also incorporated by Nazi leadership in the form of an alleged "master race" which bore the term "Aryan." For the National Socialists to implement their utopian/racist vision, they needed to remedy the other issues of geographical confinement and "racial impurity." While this summary will not go into all the details behind these measures, the remedy was reduced to racial purification and geographical expansion.

Underlying the remedy was a central conviction that the National Socialists inherited from their predecessors, and that was a mythological connection between the land and the people. This idea was fundamentally pantheistic, and according to Richard Weikart's assessment of Hitler's own adaptation of it, this pantheism was scientific in that he fundamentally believed that cosmic and human history were entirely subject to laws that could be understood scientifically.[12] The dilemma, as Weikart also notes, was how to exert one's will if everything in the universe was dictated by prior natural causes? The answer to this was found in the earlier works of individuals like Herbert Spencer, who promoted social Darwinism. Like Hitler, Spencer actually subscribed to the assumption that environment was a fixed norm, but as an ethical

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[12] Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Religion: The Twisted Beliefs that Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016): 217.

pragmatist he also saw evolution as a way that the environment could be manipulated in order to objectify the "ideal."[13]  In terms of human progress, this meant even manipulating reproduction in such a way as the "ideal man" could be engineered , and this formed the central tenet of Galton's eugenics. This was to be achieved through a selective breeding program to "weed out" the alleged defects in a population, and if anyone did not fit the "ideal," they were considered to be evolutionarily disadvantaged and thus a burden on society to be eliminated.[14] While in prison in Landsberg in 1924, Hitler read the works of eugenicists such as Philalethias Kuhn, Hans Reiter, and Fritz Lenz (particularly Lenz), and developed many of his concepts on "racial hygiene" from Lenz's work in particular as a way to accelerate the evolution of his "Aryan man."[15]  While this focuses on Hitler's particular influences, it also resonated with the National Socialist movement in general as the idea of racial cleansing through eugenics was eagerly embraced even by some *völkisch*  nationalists prior to the National Socialists. Therefore, the remedy for the problem of German racial degeneration was a eugenics program that sought to first purge German biology of any "inferior" elements that would cause any weakness – this is where euthanasia would become a factor in Third Reich policies as a result of the Nuremburg laws of 1936. Secondly, once this was achieved in a satisfactory way, then non-German "inferior" races (particularly the Jews) were to be purged from all aspects of German society – that would result in the genocidal measures of the Final Solution in the concentration camp system. Oddly, this German model of eugenics policy was based on *American* legislation, but as Jerry Bergman notes, even American legislation was considered a bit too harsh for the Third

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[13] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992): 123-124.

[14] Bashford and Levine, 55.

[15] John Cornwall, *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (New York: Viking, 2003): 87.

Reich due to the fact that Germany's objective was to prevent *future* mixed marriages by either encouraging the mixed couples to separate, be sterilized to prevent the propagation of children who were mixed-race, or they were simply left alone for the moment until a more concrete solution was implemented.[16] The reason for this is that unlike the Jim Crow legislation in America that targeted an oppressed racial minority, in Germany the Jews were much more affluent and integrated into society, and thus other measures would need to be implemented by the Third Reich to address the issue.[17] Therefore, the "remedy" for the race problem that National Socialism implemented was through legislation once they gained power in Germany and established the Third Reich. As Hitler had learned to be more nuanced in his approach to gaining power after his imprisonment, he and other leading Nazis understood that this was a process that would take time, and thus it took a well-crafted propaganda mechanism to convince the public on these issues. This is one reason the National Socialists initially thought that similar racial policies in other Western Nations were a bit much, but nonetheless the Third Reich would eventually take those measures to extremes as they implemented "remedies" to correct biological weaknesses.

The story of National Socialism therefore comprised the components of establishing an identity (*Volk)* and the accompanying mythology to enable it*,* and then assessing Germany's situation both geographically and historically. It then attempted to identify what was wrong with Germany by utilizing eugenics-based Darwinian biology and an aggressive geopolitical strategy that entailed recovering lands intricately considered to be connected to the German race through

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[16] Jerry Bergman, *Darwinian Eugenics and the Holocaust: American Industrial Involvement* (Involgo Press, 2020): 102.

[17] James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017): 99.

war and conquest if necessary – was proposed and later implemented. This all encompassed the narrative from which National Socialism rationalized its own existence, and thus the "story" defined it as a movement. However, many elements of that story were not unique to the National Socialists themselves, and thus the next aspect of the discussion is determining what was incorporated into National Socialism versus what was unique and original to it.

### National Socialism – What is Borrowed and What Was Original

In summary of what constitutes what the National Socialists borrowed from earlier movements (communicable attributes) as opposed to what is unique to them (incommunicable), the major consensus is that most of what the National Socialist platform consisted of was assimilated from earlier movements such as *völkisch* ideology, youth movements such as the *Wandervögel,* and the organized but scattered groups of disaffected German war veterans that made up the *Freikorps* after World War I. There are two examples of this which will be noted here, that of the swastika symbol and the antisemitism that served as the major identifying factor of National Socialism.

The racism and antisemitism of the National Socialist movement was likewise a communicable aspect that had deep roots, as antisemitism had existed in some form in German society since at least medieval times. This is one reason Hitler did appropriate Martin Luther's ideas into his own ideology, as an example – many prominent *völkisch* occultists such as Lanz, List, Fritsch, and Wagner all referenced Luther's antisemitic tract *On the Jews and Their Lies* as a justification for their own antisemitic positions.[18] Even the evolution from religious antisemitism to racial antisemitism was not the exclusive domain of the Nazis, but rather it was a

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[18] Robert G.L. Waite, *Adolf Hitler: The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 288.

trait of all *völkisch* nationalists who preceded them. The unique contribution of the Nazi regime

to this deeply ingrained antisemitic element of German nationalism was the implementation of

laws and policies which led to the Holocaust.

These are but two examples of how the National Socialists adopted pre-existing concepts,

as there are many others as well. However, what makes the National Socialists unique is not so

much in the adaptation of these things, but rather the implementation of them in such a way that

they still are notoriously associated with Nazism even today.

### Totalitarian or Authoritarian?

A further argument would be whether the National Socialists would be considered

authoritarian or totalitarian? While often these two terms are confused with one another, there is

a significant difference to note. Totalitarianism tends to exert control over the entirety of its

people's lives, whereas authoritarianism tends to promote autocratic leadership but still

maintains a degree of personal freedom for individuals.

Richard Overy notes that the hallmark aspect of the social vision of both Nazi Germany

and Stalinist Russia was utopianism – completing the perfect society by compelling their

subjects to struggle against the imperfect present.[19]  For the Communists, this meant economic

overhaul, and for the National Socialists it meant ethnic/racial identity. However, the result was a

society conforming to the image of the ruling party, and the coerced participation of every

individual in the particular society to conform to that image. Ian Kershaw further elaborates on

this idea by noting that the National Socialist Party was a potpourri of ideas co-opted from earlier

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[19] Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004): 229.

movements including prejudices, phobias, and utopian social expectations which bore little coherence in the beginning, and this did create an anti-Marxist form of socialism that fused with radical nationalism.[20]  To this regard, the National Socialist movement, with its radically anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois sentiments, would more aptly be a left-wing phenomenon that was distinguished from Communism by being anti-Marxist as well. The key aspect of totalitarianism also, as Hannah Arendt notes, is the concept of total domination, which she defines as being an organization "of the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all humanity were just one individual,"[21] and that the means of achieving this is through both ideological indoctrination and absolute terror against those who oppose this utopianism. The similarity between totalitarian dictatorships such as those of Stalin and Hitler suggest that both practiced these means. Therefore, the utopian vision of a totalitarian regime is realized through the implementation of total domination of every aspect of society, enforced by indoctrination and terror. This would therefore characterize the Nazi vision of Germany as totalitarian in practice, which was fully evident during the Third Reich.

The anti-capitalist emphasis of both Nazism and Communism (as well as Fascism) was a reaction against the elites of their unique societies, who were seen as the "conservatives" and thus who they wanted to revolt against. It was a response to the CNC question "what's wrong" in that it labeled diverse groups as being destructive to national identity – for Communists, it was the bourgeois class, while for the National Socialists it was primarily the Jews (and other

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[20] Kershaw, 234.

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1968): 438.

ethnicities they felt were crippling Germany). Therefore, the initial impression of National

Socialism is that it was a movement which was reactionary in focus but revolutionary in tactics.

In summary, the National Socialists did possess a totalitarian utopian vision for Germany

which they would fully implement during the Third Reich. Further, as more research is

conducted, it appears as if the traditional label of "right-wing" for the National Socialists may be

undergoing a re-examination. National Socialism had more affinity with left-wing revolutionary

movements, as often what was considered "right-wing" were the more conservative elements of

the Monarchists and others. It is not totally a consensus as to whether or not the National

Socialist movement was "right-wing" or "left-wing," so the analysis for purposes of this

examination would be that a more appropriate designation of National Socialism (and the Third

Reich as a political power) is that it was a totalitarian state which shared many things in common

with the Communists and others who are traditionally defined as "left-wing."

**A Product of Or a Reaction Against Enlightenment Principles?**

National Socialism found itself in an ideological assemblage of contradictory ideas. On

one hand, there was a sort of proto-pagan romanticism which also embraced a pantheistic view

of the land and people being one (the concept of *Blut und Boden),* but on the other hand there is a

rationalism that wants to cast off "regressive" traditional ideas in favor of a more rationalist

perception which embraces Darwinian biology. Therefore, it is evident that the Nazis were not

just romanticists, but rather were utilitarian in that they adopted many things from diverse

sources which gave validity to their worldview (or so they believed). Therefore, it should not be

surprising that the National Socialists could be viewed as both a *reaction against* Enlightenment

concepts as well as a *product of* them. George Mosse, for instance, emphasizes what the Nazis

rejected as part of Enlightenment philosophy in that he notes that this distinguished National

Socialism even from Fascism in many respects – one of those was the connection of Nazi

worldview with an earlier *Völkisch* tenet of reconciling a mystical concept of nature with a

exceptionalist view of the cosmos.[22] Herf notes this strange amalgamation of ideologies as being

a conclusion reached by reactionary modernists that the totalitarian forms of government

advocated by National Socialism, Fascism, and Communism were in reality distinctively modern

forms of government.[23]

Therefore, the very terms often identified as "Enlightenment principles" would be

redefined as relics of a premodern era, and that "true Enlightenment" therefore would be

something which necessarily would be the trend of the future in the form of totalitarianism. This

would be a clear application of Enlightenment language to National Socialist politics. The "self"

of the "Aryan" man was connected to nation, and thus the CNC of the nation became the CNC of

the individual – the national problem, for the National Socialist, was a personal issue then for the

individual German *Volk.* However, for National Socialism, a new dimension was undertaken

which applied a racial/ethnic dimension to Cartesian notions of "self" by merging it with the

Nietzschean *Ubermensch,* which was identified by *völkisch* occultists (through Blavatsky's

writings primarily) as the "Aryan man" who is to evolve and thus achieve dominance. But this

could not occur alone, so the adaptation of Darwinian biology (specifically eugenics) was a

means of achieving the "higher self" as a nation. Therefore, anything which would inhibit that

evolution could be seen as parasitic and in need of purging, and that included other races or

ethnicities. This was justified by appropriating geopolitical justification from Ratzel and others

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[22] Mosse, 317.

[23] Herf, 83.

about "spaceless" peoples, in particular by later writers such as Siegfried Passarge, who even was one of the first individuals in German academia to accuse the Jews of being responsible for Germany's defeat in World War I and he and other individuals attempted to make antisemitism a scientific issue.[24] Therefore, the logical conclusion these individuals reached was that since the Jews were a problem for German national survival, the survival of Germany as a nation could only be assured by the removal of the problem by using ideological means to implement political policies. The Nazi contribution to this scheme was creating the political order to implement the policies which would make this happen – thus the Third Reich.

Additionally, the antisemitism which the National Socialists embraced also had another Enlightenment parallel in Voltaire, who was notoriously antisemitic but at the same time was considered one of the foremost figures of the Enlightenment in France. Voltaire wanted to discredit Jews in order to discredit Christianity, and this was echoed as well by Kant, who in his missive *Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason* also said Jews were an immoral and greedy alien people with no real religion.[25] The Kantian influence on cultural antisemitism is beyond the scope of this study and would warrant an investigation of its own, but it could be said that there were Kantian elements to it based on what was examined in Chapter 5.

In summary, while the influence of Enlightenment thought on National Socialism remains a topic of historical discussion, the conclusion here is that like many other ideas that were incorporated into the Nazi worldview, aspects of Enlightenment philosophy were co-opted and reshaped to fit into the agenda the party wanted to communicate to greater German society.

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[24] Michel, 4.

[25] Allan Arkush, "The Enlightenment and Its Negative Consequences," in Stephen Katz, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 302.

Therefore, while the more romanticist and mythological aspects of Nazi ideology would be reactionary, the way ideas that buttressed these key areas were appropriated from Enlightenment principles and thus would indirectly make National Socialism a product of Enlightenment rationalism. While it could be argued as well by critics of Enlightenment rationalism that National Socialism represented the ultimate application of these principles, nonetheless the influence can be evidenced. This would appear also to characterize National Socialism as a reactionary movement on one level that used revolutionary means to achieve its goals.

**Conclusion and Findings**

In answering the question about what the central narrative convictions were that facilitated the emergence of the National Socialist movement in post-WWI Germany, the environment which provided the incubation mechanism from which it would evolve, along with trends in Western society, as a whole were factors in forming a "story" of this radical movement. Those factors are focused into four ideological streams that fed into the Nazi narrative – occultic/mythological, eugenics/Darwinian biology, political movements and geopolitical theory, and a variety of philosophical precedents (the Enlightenment, Nietzsche, Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Richard Wagner, and to a lesser extent, Martin Heidegger). Each of these were examined in greater detail covering Chapters 2-5. The conclusion is that the factors that facilitated the rise of a more militant nationalism which also fed upon the effects of the Versailles Treaty after the war, as well as tapping into strains of antisemitism which had existed some centuries prior, made an ideal climate for the National Socialist movement to take root.

The question also as to what influenced the rise of National Socialism would naturally be connected to what it held in common with earlier movements (including some that were not

specifically German in origin) versus what was unique to it. Even the mythological/occultic worldview of the National Socialists had a foreign source, as much of that could be traced to the Russian occultist and mystic Helena Blavatsky – much of the *völkisch* occultism of List and Liebenfels for instance was a variant of her Theosophical movement. Further, the rise of occultism in Germany also reflected a trend toward romanticism and interest in occultism in Europe and America in general during the late 19th century. The same is true of the geopolitical theories that were incorporated into Nazi ideology via Haushofer – German geopolitical scholars such as Haushofer and Ratzel drew heavily upon general European geopolitical theory, in particular those proposed by Mackinder and Mahan. These ideas were assimilated into Nazi ideology from their predecessor movements, and thus were not necessarily unique to them. However, the incommunicable attribute of Nazi ideology was more in its later implementation rather than its substance, for when Hitler and his party gained power in 1933, the ideas they had proposed were eventually made into the national policies of the Third Reich. Also, many of these ideas were streamlined and refined to appeal to the German public, and thus their implementation was the unique contribution of the National Socialists to their own ideology.

The question of whether the National Socialists were right-wing or left-wing as well as whether they could be considered totalitarian, or authoritarian are interrelated questions. Much of the research has concluded that despite the generally accepted view that the National Socialists were a right-wing movement, in reality they embraced a number of left-wing ideas including even a socialist economic outlook which was merged with corporatism. The difference between the National Socialists and other movements associated with the Left (such as the Bolsheviks) was a radical nationalism. Whereas Communism tended to look at the world through a more globalist and economic lens, National Socialism looked at it through the lens of radical

nationalism and ethnocentric sentiments. This also distinguished National Socialism from

Fascism as well, in that although Fascists such as Mussolini shared the emphasis on radical

nationalism, Fascism was not necessarily ethnocentric – the historical record bears out that

Mussolini did not really embrace much of the racial politics of Hitler until he became the

secondary partner in the Axis alliance. However, both National Socialism and Fascism did share

a commonality with the left-wing of the political spectrum, but they must be viewed as separate

movements. The National Socialist racial policies also were markedly totalitarian because Hitler

wanted to use racial hygiene on a basic level to remake Germany, and he and the Nazis in

general also had a view that the individual and the state were the same via the pantheistic view of

*Blut und Boden.* While it could be easily concluded that National Socialism was inherently "left-

wing" in orientation, the reality of the evidence presented is that this is still a matter of debate

and a question that bears further examination. A more concise definition of Nazi

political/economic ideology was that it was fundamentally totalitarian in scope, and utilized

tactics normally associated with left-wing radicalism. While this would not merit labeling the

Nazis a left-wing movement, it also would merit re-examination of whether or not they could be

considered right-wing either.

The final question as to whether or not the National Socialists were considered a product

of or a reaction against the Enlightenment is equally complex, and the foregoing conclusion is

that in many aspects it was both – by embracing occultism and romanticism, it was reacting

against the principles of the Enlightenment, but on other issues (industrialization and the

scientism it embraced by utilizing Darwinian biology and eugenics) National Socialism

embraced Enlightenment rationalism. Therefore, it could be said that the Third Reich was the

ultimate embodiment of an Enlightenment state in its negative aspects, but also was irrational in

its embrace of a mythological worldview which was race-based. The result was that National Socialism as a whole could be said to have both elements of reactionary and revolutionary nature, and thus it could be categorized as either/or, based on the context of the discussion (political, economic, ideological, etc.).

The complex "story" of National Socialism involves many streams of influence, reconciliation of contradictions, and forging something unique to it from other influences it assimilated. The result was a totalitarian system animated by a mythological worldview and radical nationalism that required a total conformity of Germany to the vision of Hitler and the National Socialists. This total conformity was enforced upon all German citizens and those conquered during WWII, and anything that did not conform was subject to destruction. The human life of an individual therefore was subservient to the *Volk,* the "pure Aryan superman" that Nietzsche proclaimed would come and would be engineered by a variant form of "science" called eugenics. Therefore, the mystical "god-man" of the *völkisch* occultists (which also was merged with the *Übermensch* of Nietzschean philosophy animated by Wagnerian expression). was given an avenue to be made reality by a totalitarian regime that was the creation of what was once a fringe political movement. In its construction therefore National Socialism could be said to capitalize upon reactionary sentiments to forge itself into a revolutionary movement. This means the amalgamation of a mythological worldview, a geopolitical agenda that had at its core racial identity, and the implementation of that agenda by "reclamation" of what its proponents believed were historically German lands that needed to be cleansed of those elements it thought were "inferior" and were responsible for German defeat in wars and the decline of German society (primarily through eugenics based on Darwinian biology). For this, the National Socialists capitalized on earlier movements that mirrored their ideas and incorporated them into a

party agenda which would come to control a nation. For that, they needed the final element of an

aggressive leader in Adolf Hitler. That is the "story" of National Socialism.

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