NAZISM AS FASCISM

Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930–1945
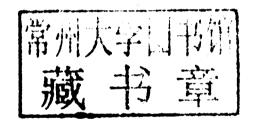
GEOFF ELEY

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PREFACE

While the underlying concerns and commitments go back a lot further, this book brings together my thinking about Nazism from the past 10 to 15 years. It is meant, above all, to help with the urgency of our present discontents. By reflecting in detail on the historiography of the Third Reich and its main interpretive approaches, it seeks to draw out a number of overarching themes, including the character of Nazi ideology, the forms of its presence in everyday life, and the processes that enabled Germans to turn themselves into Nazis. These in their turn build to a larger argument about fascism. If we can once historicize fascism by understanding its early twentieth-century dynamics, I want to argue, we will grasp far better its possible manifestations now. By studying its earlier forms in this way, we not only give it a past, but enable a general concept to be abstracted, one usable for other settings and other times, including the present. The menacing qualities of our current political moment, country by country, make this task pressingly important. A layering of crisis – the brokenness of polities and the collapse of civility; neoliberal transformations of capitalism and the transnationalizing of labor markets; widening extremes of social inequality; social calamities and political dis-orders resulting from global environmental catastrophe; a climate of fear where "security" trumps any other consideration; international rivalries for resources – makes it imperative. Those of us who know about earlier, differing but comparable crises can help with the work of theorizing. Whether spatially or metaphorically, in the United States or elsewhere, there exist zones of exception already actualizing a politics that comes dangerously close to what happened before. A portable concept of fascism helps to make these dangers legible.

For anyone concerned about the resilience of democratic forms in the early twenty-first century, coming to terms with Nazism – with the ease of a society's descent toward violence and barbarism – has to retain its urgency. The pursuit of that question led me in my earliest work to study the political fallout from the social

consequences of Germany's capitalist transformation between the 1880s and 1920s, as that seemed an excellent means of clarifying why Germany became so vulnerable to fascism later on, whether in the crisis years of 1929 to 1933 or the counter-revolutionary violence of ten years before. In contrast to those historians who stressed the baleful effects of longstanding pre-1914 continuities, the backwardness of authoritarian "pre-industrial traditions" that supposedly kept Germany from becoming "modern," I urged the nature of the "fascism-producing crises" themselves (1929 to 1933, 1918 to 1923) as the best place to begin.[1] That could allow us to bring the pre-1914 years into more helpful and realistic perspective. Rather than defining the *origins* of fascism *per se*, including its *essential* German characteristics, a pre-war crisis of right-wing radicalization in the early 1900s brought some key enabling potentials, what I called "a vital condition of future possibility for the emergence of a German fascism."[2] Having established in this way a better ground for judging the question of continuity as the relation between the 1920s and the 1900s, I could then go back to the immediacies of the fascism-producing crisis itself. An earlier generalizing essay was the result, laying some lasting foundations for the discussion that brings this book to a close.[3]

During 2001 to 2002 while on sabbatical in Irvine, California, I updated my knowledge of Third Reich historiography by reading my way through all of the burgeoning new scholarship.[4] It seemed to me then, as a German historian grappling with Nazism from outside of the immediate field, that I could do useful service by making that new wealth of historiography more widely available. Interest in Nazism has never ceased to excite public interest on the very broadest of fronts, after all, whether from varieties of ethical and political concern, from diverse grounds of empathic identification, or simply from dramatic and sometimes lurid curiosity. In whichever case, German historians have counsel to provide. For faculty and graduate students needing access to the more specialized scholarship, for teachers and students seeking the same kind of guidance, and for any reader wanting a way into these difficult and challenging questions – questions that sometimes require unfamiliar language and ideas – my interconnected treatments may be of some help.

There is a clear politics to this book. It considers what happens when democracy, the rule of law, and the rights of citizenship are all swept away. It explores primary aspects of what comes in their place. It asks after the kinds of community imagined and created for a society in which fascists had their way – where equalities under the law, respect for differences, protections for those without power or property, and the principles of fellow feeling and human kindness were all brutally discontinued. What happened when the democratic gains secured so painfully between the late nineteenth century and the early 1920s were violently taken back? How did the new regime set about building its own forms of exclusionary and coercively secured solidarity? How were Germans made into Nazis? Conversely, how far were people able to push back? Under circumstances of Nazi rule, how did the non-Nazis manage to go on making a life – not just the outright opponents and dissenters, but the many different categories of the apolitical, the pragmatic,

and the indifferent, the thoughtlessly patriotic and conformist, and everyone who just "went along," all those described these days somewhat reductively as "bystanders"? "Coming to terms with the [Nazi] past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) requires putting the most basic of questions – those concerning democracy and citizenship, community and the nation, differences among populations, and the elementary decencies of living together in a society. Under the Third Reich, those values of decency became anathema. Revisiting this past helps to remind us just how essential, if demanding, they have to remain.

Early versions of Chapter 2 were presented in lectures and seminars at the Universities of Melbourne, Sydney, and New South Wales (March 2002), University of California, Irvine (April 2002), University of Nottingham (October 2003), Yale University (January 2006), the German Historical Institute in London (May 2007), and the Pembroke Center at Brown University (October 2011). Elements of Chapters 3 and 4 were first ventured in reviews published by *Signs* (14:3, spring 1989), *German Politics and Society* (24–25, Winter 1991–1992), *Gender and History* (17, 2005), and *WerkstattGeschichte* (40, 2005). A different version of Chapter 5 appeared in the proceedings of a conference on "Space, Identity, and National Socialism" at the University of Loughborough (May 2010), where it began as a closing comment.[5] It was also presented to the Eisenberg Institute of Historical Studies at the University of Michigan (January 2012), King's College London (May 2012), and the Triangle Intellectual History Seminar at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina (September 2012). Distantly related to an essay I wrote in 1983, Chapter 6 began as the Bernard Weiner Holocaust Memorial Lecture at Stetson University in April 2011.[6] Written originally for the School of Criticism and Theory in Ithaca, New York (June 2009), Chapter 7 was presented to audiences at Emory University (November 2009), Birkbeck College (May 2010), the Anthropology–History Symposium at the University of Michigan (October 2010), and the University of California, Irvine (March 2011). I am enormously grateful for each of these invitations and opportunities. The resulting discussions always moved my thinking crucially along.

I would like to thank Ken Garner, who helped invaluably in the final preparation of the manuscript. At Routledge, Vicky Peters helped guide my thinking over many years about this and an associated project. More recently, the support of Michael Strang and Laura Mothersole was also extraordinarily helpful.

As always I am hugely indebted to the ideas and inspiration of many colleagues and friends, whether on the occasions listed above, or in the form of discussions and running conversation, critical readings and other kinds of input, or simply the continuity of intellectual friendship and collaboration. To Lauren Berlant I owe the original urging to make my thinking about Nazism more widely available as an argument about fascism. Whatever clarity I have achieved on the subject owes an enormous amount to Jane Caplan in conversations covering most of an intellectual lifetime. By their invitations, Erica Carter, Vinayak Chaturvedi, Malachi Hacohen, Eric Kurlander, Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, Katie Trumpener, Chris Szejnmann, and Maiken Umbach provided especially good occasions for venturing my ideas.

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ORIGINS, POST-CONSERVATISM, AND 1933

Nazism as a Breach

In finding longer-term explanations for Nazism, historians remained fixated for many years on the search for origins, on the uncovering of some peculiarly German pattern of cultural and intellectual history that was, in turn, usually linked to a belief in the weakness of German liberalism and the failings of the German bourgeoisie. Associated during the 1960s most prominently with George Mosse and Fritz Stern, that approach drew gratefully on the comparative knowledge of the postwar social sciences, where key figures such as Ralf Dahrendorf and Barrington Moore, Jr., treated German history as a site of pathology or "misdevelopment," a case of normal history badly gone wrong. German vulnerability to Nazism became identified with certain deep-seated and long-lasting socio-cultural traits, which included the absence of civility, exaggerated respect for authority, commitment to a spiritual ideal of national belonging, and the affirming of nonpolitical values inside a general culture of "illiberalism."[1] The main thrust was to assert Germany's profound differences from "the West." From city elites down to petty hometown notables, the prevailing "apoliticism" signified an absence of civil courage and civic-mindedness, a culture of passivity and deference which worked disastrously against the chances for any vigorous liberalism on the model of what emerged in Britain. Such attitudes were imposed by the political system, sharpened by class antagonisms, stiffened by the revered army, and taught by schools and universities. The Germans of the *Kaiserreich* became stunted and disabled in their exercise of citizenship, looking instead to the state for guidance. Further grounded by the so-called "milieu thesis" propounded by the sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius in a couple of essays at the turn of the 1970s, and imposingly codified by the writings of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and his West German co-thinkers, this *Sonderweg* thesis stabilized for a while into a reigning orthodoxy among German historians.[2]

Although by now the intervening critiques have laid that approach to rest, parts of its appeal remain disconcertingly active. In particular, the underlying argument

about political culture – that a fateful gap had opened between the German Bürger's social standing in his local domain and the lodgment of political authority in the state, which could then stifle the civic-mindedness necessary for liberalism – continues to appeal to many German historians. If the steady growth of ideals and practices of self-government characterized social and political history in "the West," such historians believe, then the citizen's relation to the state in Germany went unmediated by the liberalism of representative institutions or the public performance of civic duties. Instead, nationalism functioned as a kind of compensation, a flight forward and upward to the "supreme value of the nation-state," without any intermediary mechanisms of participatory citizenship in between. Works such as Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair* also presented this as an obsessive disavowal of the "modern world" *per se*. The political values of liberalism ("tolerance, dissent, debate, openness") became rejected in favor of an aggressively "Germanic" philosophy.[3] German differences from Britain and France became elaborated into a nationalism based on "racial thought, Germanic Christianity, and Volkish (*völkisch*) nature mysticism," which then doubled as a generalized "anti-modern" cultural critique, a posture of cultural pessimism that became increasingly appealing to widening circles of the educated public.[4] The same outlook also became rooted in romanticist celebrations of local identity, focused on landscape, folkways, and "blood and soil," yet simultaneously joined upward to hypertrophied love of nation.

This gesturing toward a deep cultural sociology of backwardness was always the least adequately theorized or documented part of the *Sonderweg* thesis; yet it remains for many writers as seductive as ever. Even as they disavow any such implication, for example, George Williamson, Dominic Boyer, Kevin Cramer, Isabel Hull, and Helmut Smith have all recently reached for a version of the argument.[5] The same is now true of Thomas Rohkrämer. His latest book sets out to ground an explanation for Nazism in what he thinks was the deeply embedded longing of the German people for national community, "the desire for a *single communal nationalist faith*" (his italics) stretching back to the early nineteenth century (p6).[6] Repeating this phrase throughout the book like a mantra, he argues that "the call for a nation united in a single faith" began with romanticism in the ideas of "individual artists and thinkers in the realm of high culture" before passing into a phase of "highly effective populist mass mobilization" toward the turn of the century (p249). As aversion against "the plurality of modern society" became more and more pronounced and widespread, "the desire for a second, spiritual unification gained unprecedented force in individuals and movements ranging from the veterans' and reservists' associations promoting social militarism as a unifying ideology, the many life-reform movements calling for an authentically German culture, and the Pan-Germans advocating an authoritarian regime which would lead the German people into a struggle for world power" (pp248, 249). As a result of World War I and the divisiveness of Weimar, such desires then underwent a disastrous radicalization in the form first of the Conservative Revolution and later of the more ruthlessly decisive Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP). More than simply another authoritarian regime or one "primarily based

on force and fear," Rohkrämer argues, the Nazi state finally realized the long-standing popular longings in a "totalitarian" form moved by powerful "utopian" elements. In those terms, the Third Reich seemed "a wholly new phenomenon: a populist right-wing or fascist rule providing at least symbolic forms of political participation and finding majority support through integrative visions of a powerful, rich, and harmonious national future" (p250). But more fundamentally, it was the monstrous apotheosis of that much deeper, historically formed longing for national wholeness.

Most of this is familiar fare. While, in general, Rohkrämer's book rehearses matter already available in the author's earlier works, the nineteenth-century chapters seem especially predictable, taking us from Friedrich Nietzsche, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Eugen Diederichs through Richard Wagner to Paul de Lagarde, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, Hermann Wagener, and Friedrich Julius Stahl. After dithering over the difficulties of distinguishing between "civic" and "ethnic or cultural" nationalism (pp10–11), moreover, Rohkrämer then hitches his assertions about the peculiar character of German nationalism to the most wooden version of the latter. That culturalist approach has always taken its cue from the counter-reaction of the German Romantics against the French Revolution and the Napoleonic occupation, leading into the patriotic upsurge surrounding the Wars of Liberation. The very process of casting off French domination – and of turning away from "French" ideals – already imparted an anti-democratic quality to German nationalism, it is commonly argued, enabling an ethnically centered and organicist conception of the nation to substitute for the strong associations with citizenship and popular sovereignty forged earlier in France. The belief that nations were defined each by a unique cultural individuality, made manifest in language, customs, religion, institutions, and history, could then serve the purpose of constituting the nation into the new subject of history, forcefully subsuming individual freedoms into the superordinate ideal of national self-realization. Continually invoking the "close emotional ties of communal solidarity," Rohkrämer serves up a slightly warmed-over version of this approach. Thus, the pioneer German nationalists constructed an idealized "picture of a communal past, of eternal ethnic traits, and of a common destiny for the German people or Volk" (p9). They also honed their understanding of what it meant to be German via passionately adversarial commentaries about the French.

It is unclear what might be new about any of this. The central argument remains fuzzy and confused. Having called the opposition between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism into question, Rohkrämer implements it nonetheless. He doubts the usefulness of the concept of "political religion" only to adopt it anyway, merely substituting the coinage of "communal faith" (pp13–15). He criticizes Jeffrey Herf's concept of "reactionary modernism" while re-inscribing its terms into the body of his account (p12). The ideology of "a single communal faith" cannot be called "a utopia," Rohkrämer thinks, because "the traditional and pragmatic elements are too important in right-wing thought"; yet the Nazis achieved their unprecedented popular success "because they played on deeply engrained anxieties, desires,

prejudices, and utopian dreams" (pp13, 3). So which is it to be? In the end, the fantasy structure of Nazi appeals to popular desires for wholeness can only be properly worked out by theorizing a term such as utopia rather than simply invoking the word. But Rohkrämer's ability to tackle that need is preemptively undermined by the deep narrative structure of his account. He concedes Nazism's shockingly decisive breach with the past, only to smooth the force of that difference continuously away. If the devastating novelty of the Nazis is given explanatory priority, then the overarching interpretation works to diminish the clarity of any such recognition. The same applies to Rohkrämer's emphasis on the crises of war and revolution and the vital populist mobilizations of the late *Kaiserreich*. The reader becomes drawn back ever deeper into the nineteenth century instead.

Most tellingly, Rohkrämer recurs time and again to those "deeply engrained" peculiarly German cultural traits that occupy privileged place in his narrative. It seems that something exceptional, a fateful difference from "the West" – namely, that baleful continuity of "fundamentalist desire for a single communal faith" (as the book's blurb describes it) – did provide the distinctive mark of German history after all. The *Sonderweg* thesis "has been rightly criticized for reducing the multifacetedness and openness of history," while demoting the importance of the immediate crises of World War I and Weimar. Yet, at the same time, "many important aspects of the Nazi appeal can be understood adequately only within the context of a longer-term national culture" (p3). Despite Rohkrämer's disclaimer, this straightforward privileging of "longer-term cultural trends and convictions for understanding the fatal attraction of National Socialism" can only be tantamount to bringing the *Sonderweg* back in (p3). In each of the preceding paragraphs' instances, it is less the paradoxes and aporias themselves – the abiding conundrum of the relations between change and continuity, contingency and structure, conjunctural impact and the cultural *longue durée* – that constitute the problem than Rohkrämer's facile manner of presenting them. He states difficulties only in order to roll them over.

To a degree, Rohkrämer offers a useful résumé of arguments about the bases of conformity and ideological cohesion under the Third Reich. The final chapter begins with Walter Benjamin's idea of the "aestheticization of politics" and a glancing reference to political religion, while moving into more detailed explication of the ideas of Alfred Rosenberg, Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler himself, and Josef Goebbels. It continues with the Nazi use of rituals and the "reconciliation of nature and technology," before ending with the *Volksgemeinschaft* (*The Vision of a Harmonious Community of the People*), which for Rohkrämer forms the culmination of the desire for his "single communal faith." But as a general treatment of Nazi ideology, this leaves a huge amount out. The preceding discussions of the Right during Weimar and World War I likewise bring nothing to the given understanding. If potted accounts of the ideas of Oswald Spengler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, and Martin Heidegger carry the burden of the one, the latter rests on the usual account of the "ideas of 1914." It is here that the confusion becomes acute. If, as the chapter title suggests, the war was a

"watershed," and "what happened in Germany after 1918 is unimaginable" without it (p141), then what exactly is the valency of the argument from deep-cultural continuity?

My point is not that the explanatory importance of the war and the cultural *longue durée* cannot be argued together, but that Rohrkrämer makes no attempt seriously to do so. As the Grand Idea of the Single Communal Faith marches through history, any attentiveness to specific causalities or specific effects, to the practical realizing of ideas in particular contexts, or to the concretely contextualized efficacy of intellectual influences in politics falls entirely by the wayside. To gather all of the German Right's history into the terms of this single master-formula entails a truly massive amount of conflation. For one thing, it ignores Germany's well-known regional differences and the extraordinary convolutions of those intervening processes of nation-forming – both before and after the 1860s – which any generalizations about German culture under the *Kaiserreich* must surely have to presume. It also effaces the subtle and burgeoning diversity of philosophical traditions, political ideologies, cultural outlooks, intellectual networks, and circuits of thought that composed the world of ideas that the educated citizenry of the new national state would actually find themselves encountering after 1871. It flattens the heterogeneous and contradictory possibilities of the discursive landscape that enlivened the public culture in that rapidly expanding and transforming society that Germany became by the turn of the century. Still more, it homogenizes the entire nineteenth century extremely reductively into a single overarching narrative. Above all, Rohrkrämer's exposition suggests that under the *Kaiserreich*, German society was always already the incubator for a set of cultural traits that, under conditions of crisis, would dispose its bourgeois citizenry toward irrationalist, mystical, authoritarian, anti-democratic, and other kinds of "illiberal" behavior less likely to be embraced in Britain, France, and other countries further to "the West." Against this relentless causal centering of "the single communal faith," any acknowledgment of either contested agency or historical contingency becomes merely rhetorical.

In welcome contrast, Stefan Breuer's study of the *völkisch* Right under the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic offers a carefully differentiated intellectual and political account of its subject. The latest of its author's many writings on the German Right, this book brings some much needed clarity and focus to a topic whose treatments have been notoriously diffuse.[7] German historians have never known quite what to do with the *völkisch* sector of right-wing politics and thought under the *Kaiserreich*. Most see it as an exotic and marginal fringe without influence on the mainstream of legitimate party politics and government policy, whose significance arrives only retrospectively in light of what happens after 1918. In those terms, historians from George Mosse to Roger Chickering have simultaneously dismissed the *völkisch* Right and valorized it, arguing its crankiness and marginality before 1914 while necessarily upholding its significance as an origin. Along with other extreme segments, such as the Pan-Germans and the various tendencies of anti-Semites, *völkisch* thinkers and activists become assimilated into an amorphously defined reservoir of dangerous right-wing ideas whose efficacy only the later

radicalizations will eventually allow to be tapped. The young Adolf Hitler's relationship to this earlier *völkisch* heritage is presented in exactly this kind of way. In contrast, the more concrete relationship of *völkisch* ideology to the Right's transformations before 1914 seldom gets posed.

This is where Breuer makes a valuable contribution. He builds on the recent research of Uwe Puschner and his collaborators while going beyond their essentially compilatory methodology.[8] In keeping with his earlier works, Breuer concentrates on the drawing of ideological distinctions, taking pains to separate *völkisch* nationalism not only from the already formed conservative and liberal outlooks, but also from the subsequent nationalist departures associated in the 1920s with Jünger and the Conservative Revolution. He also distinguishes it from the various strands of race theory as they materialized between the 1890s and the aftermath of World War I. On the other hand, he draws a far stronger set of positive linkages to the political anti-Semitism of the late 1870s and 1880s than some of the latter's historians are now inclined to do, showing how the one feeds directly into the other. Indeed, the indifferent success of the anti-Semitic parties in electoral and parliamentary terms precisely encouraged a turn toward the associational networks, discussion circles, and intellectual societies, which for Breuer became the characteristic modalities of specifically *völkisch* political action, marking the passage "from discourse to movement." For Breuer – in contrast with Puschner's excessively eclectic definitional emphasis on religious and philosophical styles of thought – the distinctively *völkisch* politics inhered in a field of practice oriented toward the associational world of the pressure groups and parties enabled links, in particular, with the Pan-Germans and other radical nationalists, the colonial movement, the movement for "race hygiene," and many aspects of *Lebensreform* (life reform). Substantively speaking, a *völkisch* outlook implied belief in the social value of the *Mittelstand*, an emergent radical nationalist ideology, and a complex relationship to Germany's rapidly transforming urban–industrial modernity.

Breuer's exhaustive explication of right-wing thought in his earlier *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit* (*Orders of Inequality*) supplies a much fuller context for this argumentation. There he describes the various tendencies of the Right as inhabiting a common intellectual space defined by an elaborately differentiated array of themes. Ever the strict Weberian, he arranges the key conceptual distinctions around a set of ideal-typical standpoints, whose recurring combinations provided the trajectory that carried the Right forward from the Bismarckian period down to the Third Reich. The pertinent keywords were soil, blood, people/nation, political rule both in its domestic and imperialist guise, economy and the social, population and family, culture and civilization, religion, and anti-Semitism. On the basis of this schema, Breuer argues that the *Kaiserreich* brought a crucial historic break from an earlier traditionalist master discourse of conservatism, because, during the passage to industrial modernity, the values of family, religion, and rootedness that grounded that older conservatism decisively lost their purchase. Though recuperated into the new forms of right-wing politics, those ideas became necessarily infused with radically new content, thereby making the emergent repertoire of the

Right's thought specifically post-conservative. The motivating urgency for that post-conservatism came from an intensely ambivalent interaction with modernity.[9]

The new core was a commitment to inequality, whose particular meanings could be conceived in a variety of ways. The most salient version derived its principle of societal order from belief in the naturally unequal endowment of human populations, linked to a theory of elites and the attendant hierarchical ethic of social practice. That became combined more and more with a scientistic approach to the measurement and valuation of human capacities and entitlements, which likewise sustained a generalized philosophy of human nature commonly characterized as social Darwinist. Already a powerful explanation for the social topography of class, the distribution of wealth and attainment, and the perpetuation of poverty, such ideas were then worked into proposals for organizing access to power and participation in the polity, too. They also connected with theories of sovereignty, imperialism, and antagonistic relations among states. Given such thought, a range of more specific ideologies now coalesced, taking the master concept of inequality for common orientation. These included various types of nationalism, movements of the arts and aesthetics, bio-political and eugenicist programs, visions of prosperity linked to the national economy and its world-political expansion, geopolitical programs, diverse anti-Semitisms, and varieties of *völkisch* thought, all invariably revolving around ideas of race.

Of course, the unifying thread of this world of right-wing ideas, its political hardwiring, was the shared enmity against liberal and democratic calls for individual freedom and equality, not to speak of the still more radical hatred of socialism. It was against these progressivist ideals that the Right's redeployed hierarchical prescriptions for social and political order became so vehemently counter-posed. In the minds of many right-wing commentators, those hated ideals also inhered in the experience of the West, and to that extent the desire to validate a German *Sonderweg* — the idea that Germany could avoid the social divisiveness and class conflict accompanying the victory of liberalism in Britain and France — was certainly in play. But the German Right's hostility to democracy was not by that virtue anti-modern in any analytically sensible use of the term. Its commitment to inequality implied no across-the-board or straightforward refusal of what by 1900 were understood to be the main features of the arriving social world of modernity.

Indeed, some of this emergent Right's most fervent beliefs — in the new technologies of industrial expansion and the imperialist entailments of a powerful economy, for instance, or in the challenges of the new conditions of mass-political action — now presumed that modernity had definitely arrived to stay.[10] As Breuer argues, it was the Right's unavoidable location inside the very processes of industrial society's creation before 1914 that made sense of its distinctive political outlook, whether ideologically in terms of its salient attitudes and commitments, or "objectively" in terms of its sociological profile. The Right's most vigorous organizers and activists as it emerged into the 1900s — including the Pan-German ideologues such as Alfred Hugenberg and Heinrich Claß, leading personalities of the nationalist pressure groups such as August Keim or Eduard von Liebert, *völkisch*

impresarios such as Theodor Fritsch and Friedrich Lange, journalists and pamphle-
teers such as Heinrich Oberwinder and Ernst von Reventlow, and countless minor
figures and functionaries – lived and worked inside the distinctively modern insti-
tutional worlds of the professions and the public sphere. Authentically "modern"
forces, including the dynamism of the industrial economy, the romance of science
and technology, the drive for imperialist expansion, and the harnessing of national
resources, including all aspects of the available reservoir of human population,
inspired them to grandiose projects of foreign and domestic policy. If superficially
the national fantasy of harmonious community harked back to a chimerical lost
age, moreover, that discourse was also necessarily shaped by the terms and con-
sequences of Germany's unfolding societal transformation. The post-conservative
Right's critique of modernity itself presumed the continuing and inescapable per-
vasiveness of "the modern." It subsisted on the given and unfolding actuality of
modern times.

   As intellectual history, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit* offers a sophisticated and
extraordinarily nuanced explication of the full range of right-wing ideas before
1914. It is hard to imagine a more exhaustive mapping of that ideological land-
scape. Yet, in the end, Breuer's approach displays two drawbacks, which become
more visible in the more focused thematics of *Die Völkischen in Deutschland*. First, it
shows too little interest in gauging the forms of practicable influence for this or that
particular body of right-wing ideas. Indeed, no idea circulating in the most
recondite corner of the Right's fringe publications seems outlandish enough to
escape his gaze. It is very illuminating to have such ideas situated inside the various
discursive fields Breuer sets out to distinguish, with all their complex overlappings
and important inter-articulations. But he devotes scant attention to the problem of
reception, to the place of those ideas inside the organized political histories of the
pressure groups and parties, to their impact upon public debate, or to their mean-
ings for the major episodes of advocacy and contestation through which the
Right's politics moved forward. By concentrating specifically on the *völkisch*
movement, the new book does more to focus the argument concretely in that
regard, but a more extensive analysis of the practical impact of *völkisch* ideas in the
polity is still badly needed.

   The second drawback is a problematic account of the social tensions resulting
from industrialization. To the extent that Breuer grounds his arguments in a parti-
cular social history, he resorts to a modernization-derived sociology of the status
anxieties of those groups less able – structurally and statistically – to benefit from
Germany's capitalist transformation or who experienced its goods mainly as a tense,
ambiguous, and elusive set of prospective opportunities. These included small farmers
and the traditional petty bourgeoisie of the towns (craftsmen, carters, merchants,
shopkeepers, retailers, small independent producers, and traders of all kinds), but
also the educated middling strata of teachers, clergy, journalists, white-collar person-
nel, and lower layers of the professions.[11] Interestingly, there is little trace here of
Lepsius's old milieu thesis. Rather than any long-lasting persistence of traditional
affiliations, Breuer finds mainly the instabilities resulting from the rapid mobility of

the new social relations. He also highlights the "dissonance" between the new educational and professional opportunities offered to "the educated segment of the urban Mittelstand" and their actual experience of subordinated status, alienating bureaucracy, and rationalization of social life, which under the Empire's societal norms still compromised the benefits of upward mobility. Thwarted in the promise of the greatly vaunted "neo-humanist ideals," while denied the more traditional forms of cultural capital, this educated middle class, Breuer argues, reached for a wide variety of restorative philosophies – for the ideal of a reintegrated life, or "retotalization" in the search for "meaningful forms of wholeness" (*Ganzheiten*), as Breuer calls them – from *Lebensreform*, *Freikörperkultur* (nudism), natural therapies, environmentalism, theosophy, monism, and versions of the occult to the burgeoning repertoire of the new *völkisch* social and political outlook.[12]

This was a discomfort with modernity, a nervous disquiet attaching to the consequences of the *Kaiserreich*'s unfolding dynamism, rather than any anti-modernism *per se*.[13] Yet if Breuer takes some pains to situate this unease explicitly inside the structures of Germany's modernity, his argument is still constructed around an idea of the "winners and losers" of the modernization process.[14] The discursive shifts leading to a new politics of the Right before 1914 are still referred primarily to the destabilizing effects of changes occurring in the social structure. The translation from this sociology of occupational change to a narrative of political innovation then occurs by correspondence and correlation, with no mechanisms of concrete causality, no place for particular forms of agency, and no relationship to any particular events. We are back once again to a presumption of social determination based on a set of theoretical claims about the cultural proclivities of certain sections of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. His sociology may possess far more nuance, but no less than his predecessors, Breuer makes it into the underlying referent for his argument about the specificities of *völkisch* thought.[15]

Despite these difficulties, Breuer's account offers a sophisticated proposal for relating the emergence of new types of politics to the sociologies of German industrialization and the social histories of cultural modernity at the turn of the twentieth century – which, regardless of whether fully acknowledged, remains one of the abiding challenges for most German historians interested in this period. Breuer's specific analysis of the *völkisch* political presence is perhaps more valuable for the pre-1914 years than for the Weimar Republic, where the available historiography is both more extensive and more securely integrated within the overall political history of the period. While Breuer's account of the Wilhelmine *völkisch* groups succeeds by the very concreteness of the bearings it provides, much of that work for the later period has already been done. Instead, we need carefully constructed monographic explorations that show how the *völkisch* outlook was translated into political practices on the ground – in the kaleidoscopic local affiliations of the Right, in the everydayness of its political action, in the transactional dynamics of local coalition-building, and in the adversarial mobilizations that produced the coalescence of right-wing energies after 1930. In that regard, Breuer provides less of an advance on the much older literatures, for which Uwe Lohalm's superb

account of the Deutsch *völkischer Schutz- und Trutz-Bund* still provides the gold standard.[16] Far more seriously, while Breuer upholds the vital enabling impact of World War I for the wider resonance of *völkisch* ideas, any substantive discussion of the war years themselves is omitted.

So these two books make an extremely revealing contrast. Breuer's *Die Völkischen in Deutschland* shows how an apparently well-worked topic can deliver valuable new knowledge about a particular sector of the German Right's development in the early twentieth century. While guided analytically by a larger conception of the Right's history in the period, its treatment of *völkisch* politics is linked theoretically in its turn to macro-historical arguments about Germany's capitalist transformation (or modernization, as Breuer prefers). Breuer also models the gains to be made by taking a controlled longer perspective that spans the conventional period break between *Kaiserreich* and Weimar Republic. Rohkrämer's *A Single Communal Faith?*, on the other hand, subordinates the particularities of periods and their processes of change to an overarching thesis about the dilemmas of modernity stretching across one and a half centuries. "How could the Right transform itself from a politics of the nobility to a fatally attractive option for people from all parts of society?" he asks. His answer, which sees "the fundamentalist desire for a single communal faith" as a constantly evolving dominant trope of German public life between 1800 and 1945, is so vague and malleable as to sacrifice any specificity of insight. The "searching for a sense of identity and belonging" *per se* has conventionally been taken to characterize the European experience of modernity more generally, after all. But Rohkrämer clearly thinks there was something peculiarly German about that need to satisfy "metaphysical security" by fashioning "a mental map for the modern world" out of nationalism. If that is so, then we are certainly back on the *Sonderweg*. Now more than ever, unfortunately, that leads only into a dead end.

Notes

1 See F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961; G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1964; R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968, p404.

2 See M. R. Lepsius, "Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur. Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft," in G. A. Ritter (ed.) *Die deutschen Parteien vor 1918*, Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1973, pp56–80; and "Demokratie in Deutschland als historisch-soziologisches Problem," in T. W. Adorno (ed.) *Spatkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft. Im Auftrage der Deutschen Gesellschaft fur Soziologie*, Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1969, 197–213. Both essays were republished in M. R. Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland. Soziologisch-historische Konstellationsanalysen. Ausgewahlte Aufsatze*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, pp25–50, 11–24; H.-U. Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973, translated as *The German Empire 1871–1918*, Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985.

3 F. Stern, "Introduction," in *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972, px.

4 Mosse, *Crisis of German Ideology*, p1.