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Reactionary Modernism Reconsidered: Modernity, the West and the Nazis

In the following remarks, I want to reconsider, in light of subsequent works on modernity and antimodernity in German history and in National Socialism, my argument for the existence of a 'reactionary modernist' tradition in Germany, as expressed in my book *Reactionary Modernism*. I will reconstruct the problem and the book's central thesis, and then touch briefly upon four related issues that have been the focus of discussion in the literature about National Socialism: the historical validity of the idea of a German *Sonderweg* and its explanatory importance; the significance and explanatory importance of World War I; the link between assertions of the autonomous role of technology and the intellectual assault on liberal democracy; and the reactionary modernist view of technology, capitalism and the Jews.

The attempt to identify the modern elements of National Socialism without losing sight of the German dictatorship's radical and pervasive rejection not just of modernity, but of the predominant traditions of the West, has turned out to be an elusive quest. I want to argue that one task of intellectual history should be to bring back to the discussion of modernity and antimodernity a moral perspective that has been lacking in the language of social science, historical determinism and philosophical reflections on modernity.

Reactionary Modernism: The Thesis Restated

The reactionary modernism thesis filled a lacuna left by the classic studies of Fritz Stern and George Mosse¹ in the study of the ideological origins of National Socialism. The key question was how, if at all, German intellectuals of the antidemocratic right reconciled their

¹ F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1961 (reprinted 1974); G. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York 1964.

'politics of cultural despair' and 'volkisch ideology' with modernity. In addition to Stern and Mosse, Talcott Parsons in the 1930s and Henry A. Turner, Jr., in the 1970s looked at Nazi ideology as 'utopian antimodernism,' directed against the symbols, practices, and peoples thought to represent modernity: liberalism, socialism, Marxism, science, parliamentary democracy, internationalism, the metropolis, money and the Jews.² These analysts viewed Hitler's *Lebensraum* visions, the war against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust as parts of this all-encompassing rejection of modernity. Yet how could a movement and regime driven by a full-scale rejection of modernity generate enough power in the twentieth century to attain its goals?³

In the 1960s, Ralf Dahrendorf and David Schonbaum focused scholarly attention on what they saw as a contradiction between the antimodernist core of Nazi ideology and the manifestly modernizing practices of the Nazi regime. Schonbaum wrote that the Nazis used bourgeois and industrial society to carry out their antimodern programme. Nazism, a home for true believers, also had plenty of room for cynics, opportunists and people who had no regard for ideological consistency.⁴ As Dahrendorf put it in *Society and Democracy in Germany*, because the 'strong push to modernity' was National Socialism's decisive feature, there was a striking contrast between Nazi ideology and practice. 'The veil of ideology,' he wrote, 'should not deceive us,' for the gap between ideology and practice was so striking that 'one is almost tempted to believe that the ideology was simply an effort to mislead people deliberately.'⁵

But if ideology and practice were so at odds, how do we account for their terrible unity during the war and the Holocaust? Perhaps the 'strong push to modernity' did not, after all, come at the expense of ideological coherence. Could it be, as Karl Bracher has suggested,

2 See G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, Darmstadt 1962; H. Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation*, Frankfurt a/M 1974; T. Parsons, 'Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany,' in *Essays in Sociological Theory*, New York 1964, p. 123; and H.J. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization,' in *Reappraisals in Fascism*, New York 1975, pp. 117-139.

3 Reinhard Bendix in his comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan summarizes the dilemmas of nationalist 'men of letters' as follows: 'Perceptions of advances abroad are reminders of backwardness or dangers and weaknesses at home. Men of letters must try to cope with the dilemmas of this recurrent situation: whether to adopt an advanced model and invite its attendant corruptions, or fall back on native traditions and risk their inappropriateness to world power and progress' (*Kings or People*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1978, p. 603).

4 D. Schonbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution*, New York 1967, p. 276.

5 R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, New York 1966, pp. 381-386.

that the 'underestimation of Hitler' in the 1930s, the failure to take him and the National Socialist ideology seriously, found an echo in the rationalistic bias of postwar scholarship?⁶ With such questions in mind, I took another look at the ideology of the right-wing intellectuals and the Nazis.

In *Reactionary Modernism*,⁷ I made the following claim. Before and after the Nazi seizure of power, an important current within German conservative and subsequently Nazi ideology was a reconciliation between, on the one hand, the antimodernist, romantic and irrationalist ideas present in German nationalism, and, on the other, the most obvious manifestation of a rationality of means and ends: modern technology. I called this tradition 'reactionary modernism' in order to draw attention to its paradoxical interweaving of backward- and forward-looking ideas. Its major exponents were leading anti-democratic, right-wing intellectuals of the Weimar Republic such as Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer and Werner Sombart, leading figures of the Nazi party such as Goebbels and Hitler, and a small number of German engineers and professors of engineering who interested themselves in cultural questions related to technology.

'Reactionary modernism' was a construct, an ideal type. None of the authors I interpreted used the term to describe themselves. It was an amalgam of shared metaphors, familiar words and emotionally laden expressions which had the effect of converting technology from a component of alien, Western *Zivilisation* into an organic part of German *Kultur*. The reactionary modernists were thinkers and ideologues who rejected liberal democracy and the legacy of the Enlightenment, yet simultaneously embraced the modern technology of the second industrial revolution. Where German conservatives had spoken of technology *or* culture, the reactionary modernists taught the German Right to speak of technology *with* culture. Reactionary modernist ideology was not primarily a pragmatic or tactical orientation, although it did transform military-industrial necessities into cultural virtues. Rather, it incorporated modern technology into the cultural system of German nationalism, without diminishing its romantic,

6 K.D. Bracher, 'Tradition und Revolution in Nationalsozialismus,' in *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen: Um Faschismus, Totalitarismus, Demokratie*, Munich 1984, pp. 63-79; Walther Hofer, 'Fifty Years On: Historians and the Third Reich,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXI (1986), pp. 225-251; and T. Nipperdey, 'Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland,' in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 1986, pp. 58-59.

7 J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, New York 1984.

irrationalist and anti-Western components. The reactionary modernists were German nationalists who turned the revolt against capitalism and materialism away from a backward-looking pastoralism. They pointed to the outlines of a beautiful new order, replacing the formless chaos of bourgeois society with the clear forms of a technologically advanced authoritarian regime.

The reactionary modernists confronted a dilemma faced by all nationalist intellectuals, namely: can the nation be both technologically modern and true to its soul? The anti-Western and antimodernist legacy of German nationalism suggested that such a reconciliation between soul and technology was out of the question. But the reactionary modernists understood that Luddism was a formula for national impotence. The *Kultur* nation could, they argued, be both strong and good, powerful and true to its soul. This cultural aspiration was most clearly articulated after World War I. It contributed to the persistence of Nazi ideology after 1933, facilitating a blend of technical advance and ideological commitment.

The reactionary modernists understood how to embrace one aspect of modernity — technology — yet remain loyal to long-standing illiberal, antimodern and, often, antisemitic political traditions. They separated technology from the realm of *Zivilisation* and placed it in the realm of *Kultur*. They saw in technology a thing of beauty, a product of German creativity rather than of Jewish commercialism and internationalism, a phenomenon in tune with totalitarianism rather than with liberal democracy, an expression of the will-to-power and a reminder of the masculine *Gemeinschaft* of 1914–1918 — as well as an indispensable tool for the realization of political ends. They depicted a distinctively German path to modernity, which had much room for technological advance but none for liberal democracy.

Reactionary Modernism and the Sonderweg

In contrast to the thesis of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno that a dialectic of Enlightenment and of modernity in general was at the root of Nazism and the Holocaust,⁸ *Reactionary Modernism* placed the interpenetration of myth and rationality back into the context of German history. I argued, somewhat conventionally, that Germany suffered from a deficiency rather than an excess of reason and enlightenment. So, via this critique of the thesis of the dialectic

8 M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York 1972, p. 3.

of Enlightenment, I stated a newer version of the thesis of an illiberal, authoritarian German *Sonderweg* at a time when that thesis was subject to critical scrutiny. As Stephen Aschheim subsequently noted, I presented a new version of the German *Sonderweg* which focused on how the Germans responded to the challenge of rapid modernization.⁹

I want to assess reactionary modernism in the light of criticisms of the *Sonderweg* thesis by the historians Geoffrey Eley and David Blackbourn, on the left, and Thomas Nipperdey on the centre to centre right. Blackbourn and Eley have rejected the view that there was a peculiarly illiberal, anti-Western path to modernity in nineteenth-century Germany that could explain the rise of Nazism. They argue that the British and French bourgeoisie were not as heroic and free of feudal mentalities or anticapitalist sentiments as German historians have supposed.¹⁰ Blackbourn refers to Germany's 'successful bourgeois revolution' in the nineteenth century, pointing to the country's astonishing economic development, the creation of a national market, provisions for social welfare, and the emergence of parliaments and a public sphere of debate.¹¹ The marriage of iron and rye, rather than representing German backwardness, was a normal marriage of convenience by elites seeking allies in a fight with a socialist working class. Eley has gone further, attacking intellectual historians for 'pedigree hunting' and selective reading of texts by 'a few maverick thinkers,' and neglecting what in his view was the more important populist, mass-based nationalism of the *Kaiserreich* era.¹² The key, he asserts, was 'a profound metamorphosis in the character of the German right between the 1870s and the 1920s, involving a massive expansion of its social base and a drastic radicalization of its ideology and general political style.'¹³

Yet it was a cultural and intellectual historian, George Mosse, whose book, *Crisis of German Ideology* (1964) had first stressed the links between *Geistesgeschichte* and popular culture. Eley is on stronger ground when he criticizes 'a kind of inevitabilism — a long-range socio-cultural determinism of pre-industrial traditions,' and instead takes the view

9 S. Aschheim, 'Nazism, Normalcy and the German Sonderweg,' *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, IV (1988), pp. 276–292.

10 D. Blackbourn & G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, New York 1984.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

12 G. Eley, 'The German Right, 1860–1945,' in *idem*, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past*, Boston 1986, p. 234.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

that German nationalism was not only a matter of 'pre-industrial traditions' or a feudalized bourgeoisie, but also had fully modern components.¹⁴ But here, too, both Eley and Blackbourn are vulnerable to the same criticism which they make of conventional advocates of the *Sonderweg* thesis. Assuming for a moment that the German Right did change in significant ways before World War I, and even before 1900, the causal chain towards National Socialism still had twenty to thirty years to go before 1933. Were the events of those years so unimportant that there were no developments or contingencies that could conceivably have made German Fascism impossible? If so, how can we integrate a search for the origins and roots of events in the past with a consideration of the undetermined acts that also comprise human history? Surely Eley cannot take cultural historians to task for 'inevitabilism' and then restore a new version of the same kind of argument by implying that the transformation of the German right before World War I led inexorably to Nazism. If Eley wants us abandon the litany of a straight, or, for that matter, crooked line from Luther to Hitler, he ought not suggest a new line leading from 'unification to Nazism.'¹⁵

This problem has preoccupied the German historian Thomas Nipperdey, who has urged a renewed focus on the multiplicity of contingencies and continuities in German history, and accordingly rejects the idea of a single *Sonderweg* or line of development.¹⁶ Instead, he points to a 'network of prehistories,' with options for alternative paths at every moment.¹⁷ As we saw in the *Historikersstreit*, this idea of

14 G. Eley, 'What Produces Fascism,' in *From Unification to Nazism*, p. 261. Despite his comment about 'selective reading,' Eley does not present an alternative or contrasting reading of the right-wing ideologues of the late nineteenth century from that which appears in Stern's and Mosse's earlier studies of the politics of cultural despair and *volkisch* ideology.

15 Eley's focus on mass mobilization fills out an agenda Mosse articulated in the 1960s — that is, one which grasped Fascism and National Socialism as mass movements with their own liturgies, ideologies and cultural articulations — and it did so at a time when Marxist historians were still entangled in analyzing the links between 'Fascism and capitalism.' For a clear and spirited discussion of long-standing but often overlooked links between intellectual and social history and historians see G. Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

16 See T. Nipperdey, 'Wehler's Kaiserreich: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung,' in idem, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*, Göttingen 1976, pp. 360–389, first published in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, I (1975), pp. 539–560.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 544. 'History,' Nipperdey writes, 'must give back to the past what the future now possesses (and what the past which was once the future once possessed), namely, the uncertainty which inheres in it even though scholarship must try as much as possible to work out the elements of relative necessity.'

multiple prehistories became an asset in the hands of certain scholars, laden with resentment and a desire to forget the dark continuities in the German past, in their apologetic efforts to present a less uniformly depressing picture. But Nipperdey is both a fine historian and a man of good will. His primary intent is not to forget the dark times but to enhance our understanding of how they came to pass, by restoring aspects of human freedom and choice that are eliminated by historical determinisms. In a 1975 review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Kaiserreich*, Nipperdey appealed for a return to the drama and contingency of history. 'We have had enough history of the victors. One must lend a voice to the dead opponents. This is a piece of justice which inheres in historicism and is worlds apart from the "critical" school.'¹⁸ Nipperdey's plea was not for an apologetic history, but for a history of Germany which could view 1933 as only one of a number of possibilities emerging from previous developments.¹⁹

Among the 'dead opponents,' lost causes, and 'other Germanies' that Nipperdey mentions are the following: a developed educational system from gymnasium to technical universities, and humanistic universities which became a world model; students devoted to social reform, alongside the beer-drinking, duelling fraternities; *Kathedersozialisten*, Protestant-liberal theologians and liberal-conservative critics such as Otto Hintze, Hans Delbrück, Friedrich Meinecke, Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber; and liberal critics of Wilhelminian conventions in education, art, urban design and architecture both before and after World War I. Luther and the Reformation, in addition to generating the apolitical tradition, a revival of antisemitism, and the trend towards slavish subordination to the state, also made contributions to European modernity by fostering a pluralism of states, cities and universities, a scholarly based theology, and eventually the secularized Protestantism of Kant, Hegel and the Enlightenment. The bureaucracy was not all bad, either. In contrast to particularistic local traditions, it was well educated and oriented towards rationality, expertise and national concerns, becoming a propeller of later modernization, absolutist reform, economic growth, the welfare state and the educational system.

Just as there were elements of modernity in pre-nineteenth century German history, so Nipperdey saw elements of further modernization

18 *Ibid.*, p. 547.

19 When Sartre offered a far more ahistorical argument in the 1940s, he became a leading spokesperson of the left. It is strange that in recent years, Nipperdey's far more historically grounded appeal to freedom and his insistence on the role of contingency in history and politics should appear as a conservative approach.

during the *Kaiserreich*: nationalism, imperialism and militarism had modernizing components; the interventionist state required legal clarity and enhanced the power of the *Reichstag*; the ideology of negative integration directed against the Social Democrats in 1870 and 1880 diminished with time; and the *Zentrum* and the left-liberals became respected parties on which governments rested. Conversely, revisionism and reformism within Social Democracy came to comprise the dominant voice in the SPD. How, asks Nipperdey, can one explain the rise of Social Democratic revisionism if the German *Sonderweg* was so uniformly authoritarian? How is the picture painted by Eduard Bernstein in his *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899) — one of diminishing class antagonisms, declining disparities of income and property, and rising living standards within the working class — explicable in a system whose only continuity lay in an unregenerate and authoritarian character? And how can one explain the integration of the previous *Reichsfeinde* (enemies of the Reich) in 1914, including not only Catholics and left-liberals, but also Social Democrats and Jews? How can one account for the political coalition that gave its support, however unenthusiastically, to the Weimar Republic before it collapsed?²⁰ For Nipperdey, Wilhelminian society was indeed characterized by authoritarianism, militarism, imperialism and a want of liberal political culture, but it was also 'a society of reforms, of a farewell to the nineteenth century, and ... above all, it was a society of criticism. It was becoming more bourgeois and liberal, and it developed the potential for a democracy to come.'²¹

But, why, despite this network of multiple continuities, did one particular set win out in 1933? Was the burden of German history so indeterminate that 1933 eludes historical explanation and becomes simply an unfortunate case of bad luck and bad timing? Nipperdey, the historian of multiple contingencies in German history, is not willing to go that far. He, too, points to an intense crisis of modernization in nineteenth-century Germany. In the same vein, the German social historian Jurgen Kocka has brought modernization theory to bear on the timing of German history to account for the *deutschen Sonderweg*.²²

20 See T. Nipperdey, 'Die wilhelminische Gesellschaft,' in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 1986.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

22 See J. Kocka, 'German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German *Sonderweg*,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXIII (1988), pp. 3-16. Kocka's more recent comments on the *Sonderweg* debate, which also focus on the 'burdensome, overdemanding simultaneity of three fundamental problems' — the formation of the

For Kocka, the most important peculiarity of German history in the nineteenth century, that which most clearly distinguished Germany from Britain and France, was that the formation of national identity occurred simultaneously with the development of modern political institutions and of capitalism:

In short, in Germany, a series of processes overlapped one another, a series of problems were almost simultaneously posed which elsewhere took place one after the other: industrialization, socialism, mass democracy, economic-social pluralism, formation of the national state and the nation, and then the political-participatory modernization, the dissolution or pushing back of old elites. Or in the concepts of modernization theory: Crises of identity, legitimacy, participation, distribution, and integration were simultaneously to be solved. It was this simultaneous emergence of problems of modernization which hindered and prevented political modernization.²³

With these issues of simultaneity in mind, Nipperdey also pointed to a crisis of modernization, in which a weak liberal tradition, an anxious political class, the loss of World War I, the burdens that hampered the newly founded Weimar Republic, the economic crises of inflation and then depression, and the real or imagined threat of Communist revolution accounted for the emergent possibility of National Socialism.²⁴ He rejected the Frankfurt school's critical theory, which placed the blame on bourgeois-liberal rationality, as a 'very German hypostasization of German history into world history.'²⁵

For intellectual and cultural historians, the key dimension of German particularity thus lies not only, and in many cases not at all, in the particular character of the ideas advocated by leading German intellectuals. Social Darwinism, militarism, the romantic celebration of violence, hostility to bourgeois flabbiness, racism and hyper-nationalism were not peculiar to Germany. Even if we stress the

nation, industrialization and class conflicts, and the development of parliamentary institutions — give a similar impression.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

24 T. Nipperdey, '1933 und die Kontinuität der deutschen Geschichte,' in *idem*, *Nachdenken* (above, note 20), p. 189.

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Gründlichkeit with which German intellectuals pursued these themes, there were British, French and Italian analogues. But because of the simultaneity of crises in the late nineteenth century — because Germany was, in Helmut Plessner's apt phrase, the belated nation — the emergence of antidemocratic, antirational and illiberal traditions among German intellectuals from 1890 to the 1930s played a decisive role in shaping the national identity of the German Reich. The ideas of French Fascism in many ways echoed those of the German right in this era, but Germany's liberal traditions were far weaker and more peripheral to the national identity than was the embattled but still central tradition of French republicanism. By the twentieth century, antidemocratic intellectuals in Britain and France lived in countries whose national identities — especially in the case of Britain — had been established long ago. In Germany, the issue of national identity was still to be decided — in geographical, political, cultural and social terms. The German fascination with intellectual history and the prominence awarded to *Geistesgeschichte* reflected the political importance of ideas in a society and nation still seeking its centre and identity.

World War I and the *Fronterlebnis* served as a crucible from which a national socialist vision of the German national identity emerged, and in which German nationalism learned to reconcile itself to modern technology. The intellectual assault on liberal democracy and the reconciliation of modern and antimodern elements both gained ground in the trenches of World War I. Neither made National Socialism inevitable — the network of continuities in the period of the Weimar Republic was too complex for that. But without World War I, the emergence of National Socialism as a fully developed ideology and political practice would have been inconceivable.

Reactionary Modernism and World War I

World War I was the decisive event for the full articulation of a reactionary modernist tradition, and for the intellectual radicalization of an already anti-Western, illiberal nationalist tradition. Important ideological elements — nationalism, antisemitism, *Lebensphilosophie*, Nietzscheanism, modernist aesthetics, a yearning for *Gemeinschaft* — had existed before the war, but it was in the trenches that the right-wing intellectuals first — as they thought — experienced a post-bourgeois, illiberal community. National Socialism was, in one sense, an attempt to make permanent these 'best days of their lives,' to turn the *Gemeinschaft* of the trenches into a *Volks-gemeinschaft*. The entire leadership of the

Nazi party and all of the leading figures of the Nazi regime were soldiers in World War I. No German author captured the transformative impact of the Great War on this generation of illiberal Germans more effectively than Ernst Jünger. And no critic of the time captured Jünger's importance more quickly and clearly than Walter Benjamin.

In his 1930 essay on Ernst Jünger's *Krieg und Krieger*, a collection of writings about the *Fronterlebnis*, Walter Benjamin referred to a 'new theory of war' in the writings of the postwar, antidemocratic right-wing intelligentsia. Benjamin argued that the real purpose of this theory was compensatory: it was to transform Germany's humiliating defeat into a victory of aesthetic form and beauty over the formless and chaotic materialism of liberal democracy.²⁶ Benjamin's observations shed some light on a curious dimension of the reactionary modernist and National Socialist ideology of the 1920s. A pervasive theme in this ideological complex was the notion that liberal democracies were weak, incapable of decisive action, hopelessly divided and bereft of strong leadership. But why should democracies appear weak and irresolute after they had vanquished the Germans on the field of battle? Why was there no flood of books and articles in Germany about the fragility of authoritarian governments in an era of total war? We know — and the German generals knew in 1918 — that Germany had lost the war on the battlefield, and that continuing the war after the American entry would have brought the fighting back to Germany itself. It was also apparent to some German strategists that Germany could not win hegemony in Europe without defeating Britain, and that goal could not be achieved without bringing the United States into the war.

Rather than face this uncomfortable truth about the limits of German power, Germany's traditional and radical right developed the *Dolchstosslegende*, the idea that the war was lost in Berlin rather than by the military in France.²⁷ According to the *Dolchstosslegende*, it was the November Revolution of 1918, and wartime dissent in general, led by Communists and Social Democrats, which had sapped the will of the home front when victory was at hand. An excess of democracy in Germany had brought about military defeat. Jünger's writings also suggested that an inadequate technological mobilization for the war had contributed to the defeat, and that only technological progress offered hope for German nationalists.

26 W. Benjamin, 'Theories of German Fascism,' *New German Critique*, XVII (1979), p. 125.

27 U. Heinemann, 'Die Last der Vergangenheit: Zur politischen Bedeutung der Kriegsschuld- und Dolchstossdiskussion,' in K.D. Bracher, M. Funke & H.-A. Jacobson (eds.), *Die Weimarer Republik, 1918–1933*, Düsseldorf 1987, pp. 371–386.

As Benjamin noted, Jünger saw the war as a redemptive and transformative process. He sought to reorient the views of right-wing German intellectuals towards technology by evoking a special generational experience. 'Ours is the first generation to begin to reconcile itself with the machine and to see in it not only the useful but the beautiful as well.'²⁸ Paralleling Marxist dialectics, Jünger viewed the war as the source of a new man; the defeat itself bore within it the promise of future victories. In *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922), he called the war:

the father of all things ... and our father as well. It hammered, chiseled, and hardened us into what we are. ... As long as life's oscillating wheel rotates inside us, this war will remain the axle around which it hums.²⁹

Rather than speak out of the experience of national defeat, Jünger welcomed the cultural renewal brought by the war.

The tender cult of the brain collapsed in a rattling rebirth of barbarism. Other gods have been raised to the throne of the day: power, Faust, and manly courage.³⁰

War and battle were a relief from the boredom entrenched by a middle class obsessed with security.

Jünger sang the praises of the masculine community of the trenches, which, in his view, offered a tangible utopia, a real alternative to liberal, bourgeois society. Individual soldiers, despite 'small conflicts,' became new men 'with granite faces that rattled order,' smooth, hardened bodies, chiseled features, 'a wholly new race, intelligent, strong and full of will.'³¹ The image of the 'steel form' as the axis around which life would revolve in the future remained a central theme in Jünger's work. The war had not been in vain, for it had burned away bourgeois and feminine refinement, revealing an image of the new man. The masculine community of the trenches and the resulting new man were rediscovered treasures of the reactionary tradition. War was the source of a new era:

The glowing dusk of a sinking era is at the same time a dawn, by arming us for new, harder fighting. ... The war is not the end but

28 E. Jünger, *Feuer und Blut*, Berlin 1929 (reprinted Stuttgart 1960), p. 81.

29 *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1922 (reprinted Stuttgart 1960), p. 13.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

rather the emergence of violence. It is the forge in which the world will be hammered into new limits and new communities. New forms filled with blood and power will be packed with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will be taken from our race.³²

Jünger embraced technology as a crucial aspect of this transformative experience, while at the same time rejecting a more all-encompassing modernity — liberal democracy, Marxism, socialism or individual liberty. On the contrary, his essays of the 1920s depict individuals subject to a technology they do not control, yet which is also an expression of their 'innermost will.' As he put it in a 1927 essay on 'Progress, Freedom and Necessity,'

If it is not our intention, so it is certainly our innermost will to sacrifice our freedom, to give up our existence as individuals and to melt into a large life circle, in which the individual has as little self-sufficiency as a cell which must die when separated from the body.³³

Rather than seek a liberation of individuals from these forces beyond their control, Jünger sought a 'heroic' resignation to this new technological world.

Ernst Jünger found hope in technological advance. The idea of total mobilization, of 'the transformation of life into energy,' was part of Jünger's explanation of why Germany lost World War I. Germany had lacked adequate technological and economic mobilization.³⁴ The Right had to remove barriers to such mobilization — such as lingering hostility to technology in its own ranks, as well as liberal democratic institutions, which raised obstacles to rearmament.³⁵ In *Der Arbeiter* (1932), his best-known work of the Weimar years, Jünger argued that liberal democracy and bourgeois culture were ill-suited to the demands of a nation in the midst of total mobilization.³⁶ In his *Gestalt* of the worker-soldier, Jünger found the centrepiece of a post-bourgeois, advanced industrial dictatorship, in which the chaos of

32 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

33 E. Jünger, 'Fortschritt, Freiheit und Notwendigkeit,' *Arminius*, VIII (1926), pp. 8–20.

34 Idem, 'Die totale Mobilmachung,' in *Ernst Jünger Werke*, Stuttgart 1960–1965, V: *Essays*, pp. 125–147.

35 Idem, *Feuer und Bewegung*, in *Werke* (above, note 34), I, pp. 113–114.

36 Idem, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Berlin 1932, reprinted in *Werke* (above, note 34), VI: *Essays II*, p. 48.

parliamentary debate gave way to the 'greater cleanliness and definition of ... technical will toward form.' In place of the compromises and confusions of liberal politics, technology offered a model of clear form. True modernity was neither liberal nor Marxist. Technology, for Jünger, was not a neutral force but one inherently in conflict with democracy. Authoritarian technology called for an authoritarian state. While authoritarian and totalitarian political institutions had about them a beautiful clarity, parliamentary institutions were, by comparison, a political and aesthetic mess. It was this mess, this chaos, and the individuals that flourished within it that were obsolete. Rather than attack liberal democracy as an aspect of modernity that threatened tradition, Jünger denounced it as a relic of the past.

This view of liberal democracy as out of date and indecisive, rather than as excessively modern, was evident as well in the essays of two figures who contributed to the reactionary modernist tradition, Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer. In his 1919 essay, *Politische Romantik*, Schmitt, like Jünger, scorned the search for security. Because, in his view, the German political romantics of the nineteenth century had never wanted to do anything, the 'endless' talk of parliaments was their natural home, a home where feminine passivity and lack of aesthetic form were the norm.³⁷ Like Jünger and Oswald Spengler, Schmitt evoked a masculine cult of action. A constant theme in the reactionary modernist — and Nazi, and Fascist — ideologies of the period is the association of liberal democracy with the feminine, which, in turn, was associated with weakness.

A further motive for Schmitt's rejection of liberal democracy was his cult of decisiveness, his view that making decisions was a value in itself. Liberalism, he wrote, was a negation of the political. Liberal individualism undermined the creation of a militant, national, political community. Worst of all, liberalism eroded the primacy of politics with 'ethical pathos and materialist-economic sobriety.'³⁸ It domesticated political struggle by turning it into economic competition; it emasculated real intellectual conflicts by turning them into parliamentary discussions; and it sought to submerge the autonomy of the state in a welter of conflicting yet self-interested publics. Liberalism sought to subordinate the state to society. Marxism, for Schmitt and for Weimar's antidemocratic right in general, was

37 C. Schmitt, *Politische Romantik*, Munich–Leipzig 1919, p. 28.

38 Idem, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 56.

not an alternative to liberal materialism but a continuation of it. Both denied the primacy of politics.

The source of the 'spiritlessness' of modern society, wrote Schmitt, did not lie in modern technology. Technology had a 'spirit' guided by an 'activist metaphysic,' a belief in limitless power and domination over nature.³⁹ Hope for the future lay in a new elite which would grasp this activist metaphysic that had been ignored by the exponents of cultural pessimism. This *Geist* of technology was something other than positivism. It was linked, rather, to an ethic of will power, combat and struggle, and it had an inherent affinity with authoritarian politics. For Carl Schmitt, a fully modern politics would dispense with parliamentary discussion, and would liberate technology from the fetters of liberal democracy.

Hans Freyer, too, sought an illiberal national community in which individuals would be completely integrated, rather than left to be isolated from one another as a result of the economic structures of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Nationalism, he hoped, would become a secular religion capable of leading the Germans out of fragmentation and materialism. This program called for a *Revolution von Rechts*, a revolution from the right — the title of an essay Freyer published in 1931. He urged German nationalists to rid themselves of anti-technological sentiments. 'Contemporaneity,' he said, 'is no longer compromise.'⁴¹ After the failure of the Communist revolutions of 1918–1923, liberalism and Marxism had lost their revolutionary élan. A revolution from the right, led by the *Volk*, would create a national community under the leadership of the state. For Hans Freyer, a renewed primacy of politics would reconcile the people with technology, a technology no longer guided primarily by commercial interests. For both Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer, liberal democracy was a part of the obsolete nineteenth century. It had become old-fashioned and out of step with a technology whose essence seemed to demand authoritarian and totalitarian politics.

Martin Heidegger, whose persistent philosophical and political commitment to National Socialism up through 1945 is now beyond

39 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

40 H. Freyer, *Die Bewertung des Wirtschaft: im philosophischen Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1921 (reprinted Hildesheim 1966), pp. 159–160. On Freyer see Jerry Z. Muller's important study, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1988; and see my *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 121–129.

41 H. Freyer, *Revolution von Rechts*, Jena 1931, p. 72.

doubt,⁴² was not a contributor to the reactionary modernist tradition. His attraction to National Socialism, however, was linked to his views on technology. In his *Rektoradesrede* and his other addresses of 1933/34, delivered while he was Rector of the University of Freiburg, he spoke of sacrifice and service to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and looked to the National Socialist revolution to bring a 'complete transformation of our German being.'⁴³ Heidegger's attraction to Nazism was linked to an antimodernist lament over the isolated and angst-filled individual, and to the hope that the Germans would be able to save themselves from the devastations wrought by two thousand years of soulless technological progress. His complaint extended much further back than the processes set in motion by the French and industrial revolutions. It encompassed Western rationality since the Greeks, with their aspiration to dominate nature. In 1935, Heidegger wrote:

Our *Volk* feels it is in the middle of a sharp pincer movement between America and Russia. We are the people with the most neighbours, and thus the most endangered people. But we are also the most metaphysical people.⁴⁴

National Socialism promised to save the German *Dasein* (existence) from this pincer movement, but Heidegger concluded that the Nazis in power were not realizing this goal. Two thousand years of forgetfulness of true being and technical advance still continued under the Nazis.

If Heidegger made a distinctive contribution to the intellectual assault on liberal democracy from 1880 to 1945 — and after 1945 as well — it lay in a corollary of his technological pessimism: namely, that political differences between Marxist totalitarian dictatorship and liberal democracy pale into insignificance compared to the fallen state, under both, of technological advance.⁴⁵ From his standpoint, the Americans and the Russians were identical in that both fostered a 'wild and endless race of unleashed technology and rootless organization of average individuals.'⁴⁶ Only Germany, the nation in the middle, stood

42 On this issue see V. Farias, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a/M 1989. On Heidegger's ontology and his politics see Winfried Franzen, *Von der Existenzialontologie zur Seinsgeschichte: Eine Untersuchung über die Entwicklung der Philosophie der Martin Heideggers*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975.

43 See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 109–111.

44 M. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen 1963, p. 29.

45 For a most insightful and revealing discussion of Heidegger's wartime and postwar writings on technology and politics see M. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Bloomington, Ind., 1990, especially Chaps. 3–6.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

a chance of developing a new historical, spiritual force, and, by so doing, of saving Europe from destruction. In 1944, Heidegger wrote:

He who has ears to hear ... can already for two decades hear the word of Lenin: Bolshevism is Soviet power + electrification. This means: Bolshevism is the 'organic,' i.e., calculatively organized (and as +) thrusting together of the unconditioned power of the party with fully realized technologization.⁴⁷

In 1942 he had written:

Bolshevism is only a variety of Americanism. The latter is the genuinely dangerous form of the measureless, because it arises in the form of bourgeois democracy and is mixed with Christendom, and all this in an atmosphere of a decisive absence of history.⁴⁸

What we may call 'the great equation' between the United States and the Soviet Union became a recurrent theme of the twentieth-century intellectual assault on liberal democracy. In Weimar and in Nazi Germany it was a staple of right-wing thinking. During the Cold War it became a recurrent theme of neutralist sentiment in Europe. The intellectual and political history of this great equation remains to be written.

Heidegger's insistence on this equation, his refusal or inability to make distinctions between democracy and dictatorship, did not end in 1945. After the war, he concluded that the war and its outcome had not decided anything.⁴⁹ The two technological giants, having vanquished the Germans, now fought for total control of the earth. Postwar Europe had to make decisions about the future of being, yet it was being forced 'into politico-social and moral categories that are in all respects too narrow and faint-hearted, and thus will be deprived of the possibility of due consideration and reflection.'⁵⁰ It was still in the grip of the technological will to power, which, he argued, was responsible for starting both wars. Somehow, he hoped for deliverance by a new elite which could lead humanity out of the technological desert.

47 M. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, ed. M. Frings (1982), cited in Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation* (above, note 45), p. 90.

48 M. Heidegger, *Hölderlein's Hymne 'Der Ister'* (Summer Semester 1942), ed. Walter Biemel, Ochwaldt 1982, cited in Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation* (above, note 45), p. 90.

49 M. Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* Tübingen 1954.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–67.

In Germany, the great equation of East and West found echoes in the reactionary modernist tradition. Some of the cultural politicians of the German engineering profession, whose work I examined in *Reactionary Modernism*, wrote that both Russia and America were materialistic and lacked a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of technology, and that it was therefore up to Germany to combine *Geist* and *Technik*.⁵¹ Heinrich Hardensett was one of the most prolific contributors to the journal *Technik und Kultur*, a journal of cultural politics written for engineers in the Weimar and early Nazi years. He was the author of *Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch* (1932), a work which drew in equal measure upon German social theory and upon the indigenous traditions of German professors of engineering and men of letters in order to pose a favourable comparison between creative and productive 'technical man' and commercial and unproductive 'capitalist man'.⁵² In a 1935 essay on 'Technical Civilization in the USA and the USSR,' Hardensett argued that neither country grasped the deeper cultural meanings of technology or the ethos of the master builder.⁵³ The reactionary modernists saw Germany as the *Kulturnation*, the nation of the geographical and cultural middle, a nation of synthesis which would be an alternative to a materialistic world.

Sombart on Technology, Capitalism and the Jews

Antisemitism, the assault on liberal democracy, and antimodernity were not all of a piece in Germany in this period. Jew-hatred was compatible with a selective embrace of aspects of modernity. As the following recapitulation of Werner Sombart's views makes clear, hostility to the role of the Jews in German history was a key component in the attitude of German illiberalism towards capitalism. Sombart's contribution to the reactionary modernist tradition, from *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911) to *Deutscher Sozialismus* (1934), was to translate social, economic and historical categories into racial categories. More even than the younger members of Weimar's conservative revolution, he translated the right-wing lament over money, abstraction

51 See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), p. 185, especially the discussion of Hardensett.

52 H. Hardensett, *Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch*, Munich 1932; and see also *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 182–185.

53 H. Hardensett, 'Technische Gesittung in USA and UdSSR,' *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, VII (1933/34), pp. 479–503; and see also *Reactionary Modernism*, pp. 181–186.

and commercialism into an attack on *der jüdische Geist* and a defence of supposedly German virtues such as productive labour and technical creativity. He reconciled himself to technological progress by defending what he called the realm of the concrete and the productive against the spread of abstraction and unproductive circulation.

Sombart's cultural strategy for this reconciliation was simple but effective, as is clear from an examination of *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*. He divided the capitalist spirit into two parts. On the one hand, there was the adventurous, entrepreneurial element, infused with Nietzschean will. This was the German side of capitalism. On the other hand, there was a calculating, commercial, bourgeois spirit, which he identified with outsiders, especially the Jews, but also with the 'spirit of Manchester.' Hence, it was not via World War I, but via an older antisemitic tradition in which the Jews were associated with the development of the least attractive aspects of capitalism that Sombart fashioned a suitable marriage between Germans and modern technology. By identifying despicable capitalism, or, later, the despised aspects of modern capitalism with the Jews, Sombart could reconcile himself with German socialism or with aspects of modern capitalism linked to traditional German virtues.⁵⁴

The Sombartian version of the development of capitalism in Europe was as follows.⁵⁵ Jewish *Gesellschaft* had replaced Christian *Gemeinschaft*. It was the Jews who had introduced the spirit of acquisition and calculation into a medieval Europe organized around respect for honest labour and the just price. The special contribution of the *jüdische Geist* lay in its establishment of the primacy of economics over politics, culture, religion and morality. Three factors were critical to this unique Jewish contribution to capitalist development: Jewish

54 Sombart's thesis places Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in an interesting perspective which is far too infrequently considered: namely, as a theory of the development of capitalism which was a direct challenge to the antisemitic arguments of the time. This dimension of Weber's life and work has yet to receive adequate attention from Weber's biographers and commentators. For a very good beginning see J. Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism*, London 1978; D. Landes, 'The Jewish Merchant — Typology and Stereotypology in Germany,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1974); T. Oelsner, 'The Place of the Jews in Economic History as Viewed by German Scholars,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1962), pp. 183–212; P. Mendes-Flohr, 'Werner Sombart's "The Jews and Modern Capitalism": An Analysis of Its Ideological Premises,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1976); and W. Mosse, 'Weber, Sombart, and Beyond,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1979), pp. 3–15.

55 The following discussion is based on W. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, Leipzig 1911; see also *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 136–151.

social history, religion and psychology. From a social-historical point of view, the Jews were dispersed and had international contacts. As outsiders, they had to be attentive to economic rationality rather than local customs, a situation conducive to a *Fremdenmoral*, a double standard for Jews and non-Jews. Because the Jews were denied the rights of citizenship, they turned their energies from national politics to international economics. Finally, Sombart stressed the importance of Jewish banking in the development of capitalism. In short, European Jewry represented all that was universal, rootless, international and abstract, in contrast to all that was local, rooted, nationalist and concrete. Hostility towards capitalism had found a living target in the Jews.

For Sombart, the Jewish psychology was also highly suited to the development of capitalism. The Jewish religion, claimed Sombart, was a *Verstandeswerk*; it lacked feeling and emotion, while rationalism and intellectualism were its fundamental features. Hence, it had an inherent affinity to capitalism, while posing a direct threat to everything 'irrational and mysterious ... sensuous, artistic and creative.' Not Protestant asceticism but Judaism was the driving force behind the rationalization of the world. 'The whole religious system is basically nothing more than a contract between God and the chosen people.'⁵⁶ Rationalistic, nature-dominating, ascetic Judaism was the source of acquisition, calculation and rationalization. As Sombart put it, 'Puritanism is Judaism.'⁵⁷

The Jews, according to Sombart, were 'born representatives of the liberal worldview of the abstract citizen.' They always tried to grasp the world 'with reason, rather than with cold blood.' In Jewish collective psychology, 'paper stands against blood, reason against instinct, concept against perception, abstraction against sensuousness.'⁵⁸ For Sombart, the Jews and liberalism were both threats to a well-grounded national identity, because both, in his mind, stood for a universalistic rationalism. But then, so did capitalism. Its spirit was the 'exact counterpart to the Jewish spirit.' In both, 'all qualities are dissolved through a purely quantitative exchange value,' and merchants replace 'multi-colored technical activity.' Both capitalism and Judaism, Sombart wrote, 'express their innermost essence in money.'⁵⁹

With such formulations, Sombart transformed a Marxist theoretical vocabulary of use and exchange value into metaphors of race and

⁵⁶ Sombart, *Die Juden* (above, note 55), pp. 244–245.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 313–319.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

nationality. Instead of proletarians confronting capitalists, Sombart presented German defenders of particularity and concreteness arrayed against Jewish advocates of universality and abstraction. Sombart's identification of the Jews with universalism and abstract reason was evident in his account of the development of European capitalism. The wandering Jews, accustomed to the desert and a nomadic existence, brought the bright light of rationalism to the deep, mysterious, emotive forests of Europe. Capitalism was a product of the 'endless desert' rather than the rooted forest. Desert versus forest, exchange-value versus use-value, merchants versus entrepreneurs, Jews versus Germans, banking versus heavy industry and large landowners, Rathenau versus Krupp — all these were juxtapositions that made plausible a German reconciliation with a capitalism shorn of its Jewish, liberal and rationalist components. If capitalism in the past had stood for the domination of commerce over technology, German anticapitalism was a programme for the ascendancy of technology over commerce, and thus of the integration of technology into a German national revival.

In his wartime tract *Handler und Helden*, Sombart juxtaposed German anticapitalism with British capitalism, and spoke positively of technological progress in terms similar to Spengler's affirmation of a Faustian spirit. In *Deutscher Sozialismus* (1934), Sombart wrote with relief of the passing of the 'economic era,' marked by such misfortunes as *Vergeistung* and *Entseelung*.⁶⁰ The outstanding characteristic of this fortunately bygone era was the subordination of politics to economics. At last, things were changing for the better. The new spirit of German socialism was 'nothing other than the renunciation of the economic era as a whole.'⁶¹ In contrast to Marxism, which denied national distinctiveness and merely promoted the domination of economic thinking over politics, Sombart welcomed a German socialism that would fulfill a special German mission in the face of the 'monotony of the East and the West.'⁶² Here again, Sombart invoked the image of the desert and the forest. The Germans were now to be delivered from the 'desert of the economic age' by bringing to an end its 'exaggerated intellectualization.' After a century of wandering in the desert of that horrible, soulless time, the Germans would return to the complex — not primitive — forest.⁶³ They would find plenty of room among those trees for *deutschen technik*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *Deutscher Sozialismus*, Berlin 1934, pp. 17–20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 160 and 165.

Sombart denied that he was a biological racist, but he saw formidable problems ahead before German socialism could be implemented. The Jewish *Geist* had already infused modern Germany and would continue to exist 'even if every last Jew and Jewish family were to be annihilated.' It was 'sedimented and objectified in a thousand organizations ... above all in our economy.'⁶⁴ Somehow, German institutions had to be transformed so that they would no longer be strongholds of the Jewish *Geist*. For Sombart, restoration of a primacy of politics blended an antimaterialist cultural revolution from the right with antisemitism. The authoritarian state, not a proletarian revolution, would carry out this work of redeeming Germany from the liberal, materialist, bourgeois, Jewish era. Sombart's integration of technology into German culture can be epitomized by a reversal of conventional dichotomies that runs through his work. He associated the Jewish *Geist* with exchange value, gold, circulation, abstraction, reason, the desert, intellect, merchants, international socialism, international capitalism and *Zivilisation*. German technology, on the other hand, was bound up with use value, blood, production, concrete immediacy, instinct, forest, soul, *Kultur*, entrepreneurship — and National Socialism.⁶⁵

Sombart's ideas call attention to an important theme expounded by Jacob Talmon: that of the conflict between universalist and particularist elements in European intellectual and cultural history. For Sombart and those who agreed with him, the intellectual assault on liberal democracy was inseparable from hostility to the Jewish *Geist*. This was so because in his mind certain aspects of capitalism, and all aspects of liberal democracy and the Jewish *Geist*, comprised an inseparable whole of universalist, rationalist principles. In coming to the defense of German particularity in the way he did, Werner Sombart demonstrated that rejection of these principles was compatible with a partial embrace of technological modernity. Such an attitude was not restricted to the intellectuals of the antidemocratic right. It was also part of Hitler's legacy.

Reactionary Modernism and Hitler

Hitler, too, belongs to the reactionary modernist tradition. Recent scholarship, and particularly Rainer Zitelmann's *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs* (1987), has offered further evidence

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶⁵ See *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), p. 151.

of the degree to which Hitler embraced modern technology.⁶⁶ Zitelmann's Hitler is an unabashed modernizer, a critic of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism and an admirer of Soviet central planning and of American economic and technological productivity, mass production and consumerism. In one of his *Tischgespräche* during the war, Hitler envisaged a postwar Germany in which millions of homes would be built, technology would liberate the housewife, meals would be delivered, the alarm clock would also boil water, and the household would be automated.⁶⁷

Zitelmann also stresses Hitler the military modernizer, supporter of General Guderian and the advocates of the *Blitzkrieg*. For Zitelmann, Hitler's aspiration to conquer *Lebensraum* in the East was not the result of a 'utopian antimodernism,' or of a mystical rejection of industrial society and a desire to return to agrarian simplicity.⁶⁸ Rather, it was part of a very risky but not antimodernist geopolitical strategy aimed at achieving continental hegemony in Eurasia. In this context, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were viewed as areas whose raw material resources would enable the establishment of an autarchic continental empire under German domination, while the food sources of the Ukraine would eliminate German vulnerability to British — and possibly American — naval power. Expansion eastward would avoid war with England, open up space for Germany's expanding population, and lay the groundwork for a successful blow for world domination.⁶⁹ It would also open up new markets which could be insulated from external competition as the world became more industrialized and competition for markets grew. *Lebensraum* was a continental German analogue to British and French overseas colonies.

For Zitelmann, 'Hitler's determination of goals did not in any way possess an "antimodernist" character, as research has previously assumed.'⁷⁰ Social Darwinism, the rejection of majority rule, and the supposedly scientific justification of racism all belonged to modern ideological currents. Hitler's belief that the liberal democracies — that

⁶⁶ R. Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Hamburg–New York 1987. Zitelmann's work is now the most extensive study of Hitler's views on modernity, drawing on all of his speeches, essays and private conversations from 1920 to 1945.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁶⁸ On this see H.A. Turner, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus in Deutschland. Studien zum Verhältnis zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Wirtschaft*, Göttingen 1980.

⁶⁹ See, for example, A. Hitler, *Samtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, Stuttgart 1980, cited in Zitelmann, *Hitler* (above, note 66), pp. 276–277.

⁷⁰ Zitelmann, *Hitler* (above, note 66), p. 343.

is, England and France — were weak and decadent merely brought him into line with the right-wing intellectuals of the Weimar Republic.⁷¹

Hitler did not write or speak publicly at great length about technology. In *Mein Kampf*, he divided humankind into three categories: founders, bearers and destroyers of culture, and he assigned these historical roles to the Aryans, the Japanese and the Jews respectively. He defined Aryan culture as a synthesis of 'the Greek spirit and Germanic technology.'⁷² He also acknowledged a debt to Gottfried Feder's ideas on 'breaking slavery to interest.' Hitler claimed that this notion was:

... a theoretical truth which would inevitably be of immense importance for the future of the German people. The sharp separation of stock-exchange capital from the national economy offered the possibility of opposing the internationalization of the German economy without at the same time menacing the foundations of national self-sufficiency by a struggle against capital.⁷³

Where Sombart had attacked the Jewish *Geist*, Hitler turned this cultural revolution into an attack on the Jewish people.

In 1939, Joseph Goebbels, speaking at a Berlin auto show with Hitler on one side and a Volkswagen on the other, offered a succinct summary of the significance of reactionary modernism for Nazism.

We live in an era of technology. The racing tempo of our century affects all areas of our life. There is scarcely an endeavour that can escape its powerful influence. Therefore, the danger unquestionably arises that modern technology will make men soulless. National Socialism never rejected or struggled against modern technology. Rather, one of its main tasks was to consciously affirm it, to fill it inwardly with soul, to discipline it and to place it in the service of our people and their cultural level. National Socialist statements used to refer to the steely romanticism of our century. Today this phrase has attained its full meaning. We live in an age that is both romantic and steellike, that has not lost its depth of feeling. On the contrary, it has discovered a new romanticism in the results of modern inventions and technology. While

71 *Ibid.*, pp. 358–359.

72 A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Boston 1939, p. 318.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

bourgeois reaction was alien to and filled with incomprehension, if not outright hostility, to technology, and while modern sceptics believed the deepest roots of the collapse of European culture lay in it, *National Socialism understood how to take the soulless framework of technology and fill it with the rhythm and hot impulses of our time* (emphasis added).⁷⁴

Here, in the words of the master propagandist, technology was lifted from the world of Western *Zivilisation* and set into that of German *Kultur*. The Fatherland could become both strong and good, soulful and effective, powerful and authentic. A full discussion of the interaction of ideology and power politics in the Third Reich lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, the perception of a reactionary modernist tradition within the Nazi party and government contributes to an explanation of the persistence of ideology and ideologically driven policy within the German dictatorship as it pushed ahead with technological advances.⁷⁵

Hitler, along with the reactionary modernist intellectuals, often spoke of technology as an autonomous force. This conception was evident in Oswald Spengler's application of *Lebensphilosophie* to technology. Technology, wrote Spengler in *Der Mensch und die Technik* (1931), was the outward manifestation of 'an acting, struggling life infused with soul.'⁷⁶ The conviction that technology was best understood 'philosophically,' rather than through scientific and technical study, was a recurrent theme among the reactionary modernists. It showed itself in Jünger's depiction of the *Gestalt* of the worker-soldier; in Heidegger's gloom about a Western productivist metaphysic; in Schmitt's enthusiasm about that very same drive towards domination; in Freyer's belief in an inherent technical logic compatible with an authoritarian national community; and in Sombart's argument that technology was the expression of distinctively German rather than Jewish qualities.

Where liberal democracy presupposes a conviction that political events are the product of human agency, this common lament — and after 1945, this common apology — offered a ready alternative explanation for the crimes of the Nazi regime: 'the machine did it.' The swing from enthusiasm to pessimism about technology, accompanied by its continued reification, is a theme in postwar German conservatism

74 J. Goebbels, *Deutsche Technik*, 1939 (speech at the opening of the Berlin Auto Show, February 17, 1939).

75 For comments on reactionary modernism and on ideology and politics in the war years see *Reactionary Modernism* (above, note 7), pp. 202–216.

76 O. Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, Munich 1931, p. 6.

that deserves more attention.⁷⁷ Indeed, we need more research into the question of whether German conservatism's turn towards a world-weary pessimism with regard to technology was more common after the Second than after the First World War.

Conclusion: The Significance of the Problem of Modernity in National Socialism

Explication of National Socialism's ideological reconciliation between, on the one hand, its cultural and political rejection of key aspects of modernity — political liberalism, cosmopolitanism, racial and religious tolerance — and, on the other, its enthusiasm for modern technology has filled an important lacuna in the historiography of the movement. The introduction of the idea of reactionary modernism into the historical literature has enhanced our understanding of how the Nazi leaders could harmonize their ideological beliefs with the industrialization of Germany after 1933, and thus has contributed to our understanding of the primacy of ideology in the years of war and Holocaust. It serves to clarify differences between German conservatism before 1914 and National Socialism after the First World War. Reactionary modernism offered a sense of élan and purpose to its advocates, who thought they were riding the wave of the future by replacing obsolete, old-fashioned, no-longer-modern liberalism.

Furthermore, the reactionary modernist tradition, taken as a whole — though not throughout all of its dimensions and themes — was unique in the range and depth of its contributions to ideology, and in the number and prominence of the contributors. Unlike similar currents of thought in Britain and France, it was part of an effort to define the German national identity, which was still uncertain owing to the simultaneity of the problems facing the 'belated nation' from the late nineteenth century onwards. The apparently coherent and powerful metaphors employed by this ideology played an important role in the political battles that raged at the end of the Weimar period over which strand of Germany's network of continuities would win out.

Recognizing the mixture of unreason and technology in Nazi ideology also draws our attention to the significance of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for Hitler's strategy of attempting to achieve continental autarchy and liberation from British and American sea

⁷⁷ See Muller, *The Other God* (above, note 40); and O. Ulrich, *Technik und Herrschaft*, Frankfurt a/M 1977.

power. The 'wild East' was to be the location for playing out anti-industrial fantasies and racist policies of extermination, but it was also part of a truly modern strategic plan.

National Socialism, in short, was not primarily a revolt against modernity. It was much more and much worse than that. Jacob Talmon kept a proper perspective on the issue when he noted that National Socialism's assault on the Jews and its celebration of an Aryan racial elite were pagan rejections of a central idea of Western civilization which originated in Jerusalem with the appearance of monotheism: not, as Heidegger suggested, the domination of reason over nature, but the idea of one humanity comprised of individuals, each of whom has rights and dignity by virtue of being human. At times, the debate about modernity and antimodernity in National Socialism has lost sight of this point. National Socialism did not just reject modernity as it developed in the wake of the French and industrial revolutions. The victory of National Socialism would have meant the end of five thousand years of Western civilization, begun in Jerusalem and secularized in Athens. Nazism, of course, was also a product of Western civilization and its long-standing traditions of Christian antisemitism. No less than German history, Western history is also a network of continuities. The Nazis, heirs and modernizers of one strand in that network, sought to destroy all the others.

The reactionary modernist tradition and the intellectual assault on liberal democracy in Germany claimed that technology, not human beings, determined the history of the Third Reich. It was a false but potent self-fulfilling prophecy. To have made liberal democracy appear obsolete, to have reconciled German nationalism to modern technology, to have given the Nazis the conviction that they could be both powerful and men of soul — in short, to have claimed to represent modernity while turning against the dominant values of the Western tradition — this was the truly disgraceful accomplishment of the reactionary modernists and of the ideologists and practitioners of Nazism. Compared with this profound rejection of the West, the matter of technology was an important but clearly secondary issue. But as a cultural-political factor in the practical struggle for power in the closing days of the Weimar Republic and during the years of preparation for renewed war, reactionary modernism was not unimportant. In the moments of decision, reactionary modernist ideology and ideologues played a role in advancing the continuities in German history which culminated in the German dictatorship of 1933 to 1945. It is one of the distinctive and sometimes unappreciated contributions of intellectual

historians like Jacob Talmon to have reminded us of the eminently practical and politically consequential impact of ideas on history.

Nazism was partly a movement of reactionary modernism. It found many ways of reconciling itself to modern technology, but never to the idea of a common humanity. The Nazis were heirs to a powerful Western tradition of Christian antisemitism, and in this sense their appearance was possible only in the context of Western and German history. The radicalization of this long-standing tradition, and not hostility to industrialism or liberalism alone, was the core of Nazi ideology and practice. Just as the Nazis developed certain themes in the network of continuities in German and Western history, they could be defeated, after 1933, only by other states where the idea of a common humanity had not succumbed to the German revolt against the continuities that won out in the West.

Steven E. Aschheim

Nietzsche and the German Radical Right 1914–1933

For the German radical right of 1918–1933 — a few dissenting voices notwithstanding — Nietzsche was the most authoritative and inspirational source. We need waste little time establishing this centrality. As its sympathetic chronicler Armin Mohler put it, the 'conservative revolution' would have been 'unthinkable' without Nietzsche.¹ In his protean works the new right discovered a remarkably plastic, almost inexhaustible source for enunciating a radical rather than traditional right-wing view of the world, and for locating both its enemies and its positive ideals. In 1931 Friedrich Hielscher, an active publicist on the radical right, summed up Nietzsche's multiple functions for this political universe: 'Nietzsche,' he wrote, 'stands as questioner, as fighter, as the solitary one. He stands for the Reich as protector of the past, as crusher of the present, as transformer of the future.'²

This link between the right and Nietzsche was by no means historically or politically obvious. Prior to 1914, Nietzsche was generally anathema to conservatives, ruling elites and nationalists alike.³ Despite the frenetic efforts of Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth (and the Nietzsche Archives, which were under her control) to endow Nietzsche with a patriotic pedigree,⁴ most establishment circles continued to regard

1 A. Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932 — Ein Handbuch*, Darmstadt 1972, pp. 29 and 87.

2 F. Hielscher, *Das Reich*, Berlin 1931, p. 200.

3 A. J. Mayer (in *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, New York 1981, Chap. 5) presents Nietzsche as a chief prop of Europe's ruling aristocratic elite in its need to bolster a shaky old order in the face of democratizing threats. There is, in fact, almost no documentary evidence to support this assertion. Before 1914 Nietzsche was, above all, the voice of radical anti-establishmentarianism of all kinds, and certainly not a tool of the ruling elites. Mayer's argument is given a semblance of credibility only by the total absence of documentary footnotes!

4 For an account of these efforts see H.F. Peters, *Zarathustra's Sister: The Case of Elisabeth and Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York 1985.