

## Chapter Four

# The Climate of Collectivism

### *From postmodern epistemology to postmodern politics*

There is a problem with making epistemology fundamental to any explanation of postmodernism. The problem is the postmodernists' politics.

If a deep skepticism about reason and the consequent subjectivism and relativism were the most important parts of the story of postmodernism, then we would expect to find that postmodernists represent a roughly random distribution of commitments across the political spectrum. If values and politics are primarily a matter of a subjective leap into whatever fits one's preferences, then we should find people making leaps into all sorts of political programs.

This is not what we find in the case of postmodernism. Postmodernists are not individuals who have reached relativistic conclusions about epistemology and then found comfort in a wide variety of political persuasions. Postmodernists are monolithically far Left-wing in their politics.

Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty are all far Left. And so are Jacques Lacan, Stanley Fish, Catharine MacKinnon, Andreas Huyssen, and Frank Lentricchia. Of the major names in the postmodernist movement, there is not a single figure who is not Left-wing in a serious way.

So there is something else going on besides epistemology.

Part of that something else is that postmodernists have taken to heart Fredric Jameson's remark that "everything is 'in the last analysis' political."<sup>1</sup> The spirit of Jameson's remark lies behind the persistent postmodernist charge that epistemology is merely a tool of power, that all claims of objectivity and rationality mask oppressive political agendas. It stands to reason, then, that postmodern appeals to subjectivity and irrationality can also be in the service of political ends. But why?

Another part of that something else is that Leftist thought has dominated political thought among twentieth-century intellectuals, particularly among academic intellectuals. But even given that fact, the dominance of Left thought among postmodernists is still a puzzle—since for most of socialism's intellectual history it has almost always been defended on the modernist grounds of reason and science. Marx's socialism has been the most widespread form of far-Left thought, and "scientific socialism" was the Marxist self-descriptive phrase.<sup>2</sup>

A related puzzle is explaining why postmodernists—particularly among those postmodernists most involved with the practical applications of postmodernist ideas or with putting postmodernist ideas into actual practice in their classrooms and in faculty meetings—are the most likely to be hostile to dissent and debate, the most likely to engage in *ad hominem* argument and name-calling, the most likely to enact "politically correct" authoritarian measures, and the most likely to use anger and rage

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<sup>1</sup> Jameson 1981, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Engels 1875, 123.

as argumentative tactics. Whether it is Stanley Fish calling all opponents of affirmative action bigots and lumping them in with the Ku Klux Klan,<sup>3</sup> or whether it is Andrea Dworkin's male-bashing in the form of calling all heterosexual males rapists,<sup>4</sup> the rhetoric is very often harsh and bitter. So the puzzling question is: Why is it that among the far Left—which has traditionally promoted itself as the only true champion of civility, tolerance, and fair play—that we find those habits least practiced and even denounced?

Evidence, reason, logic, tolerance, and civility were all integral parts of the modernist package of principles. Socialism in its modern form began, in part, by accepting that package.

### *The argument of the next three chapters*

As modernists, the socialists argued that socialism could be proved by evidence and rational analysis, and that once the evidence was in socialism's moral and economic superiority to capitalism would be clear to anyone with an open mind.

This is significant, because so-conceived socialism committed itself to a series of propositions that could be empirically, rationally, and scientifically scrutinized. The end result of that scrutiny provides another key to explaining postmodernism.

Classical Marxist socialism made four major claims:

1. Capitalism is exploitative: The rich enslave the poor; it is brutally competitive domestically and imperialistic internationally.
2. Socialism, by contrast, is humane and peaceful: People share, are equal, and cooperative.
3. Capitalism is ultimately less productive than socialism: The rich get richer, the poor get poorer; and the ensuing class conflict will cause capitalism's collapse in the end.

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<sup>3</sup> Fish 1994, 68-69.

<sup>4</sup> Dworkin 1987, 123, 126.

4. Socialist economies, by contrast, will be more productive and usher in a new era of prosperity.

These propositions were first enunciated by socialists in the nineteenth century, and repeated often into the twentieth before disaster struck. The disaster was that all four of socialism's claims were refuted both in theory and in practice.

In theory, the free-market economists have won the debate. Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman have shown how markets are efficient, and they have shown, conversely, how socialist top-down command economies necessarily must fail. Distinguished Left-wing economists such as Robert Heilbroner have conceded in print that the debate is over and that the capitalists have won.<sup>5</sup>

In theory, the moral and political debate is more up for grabs, but the leading thesis is that some form of liberalism in the broadest sense is essential to protecting civil rights and civil society in general—and the liveliest debates are about whether a conservative version of liberalism, a libertarian one, or a modified welfarist one is best. Many Leftists are re-packaging themselves as more moderate communitarians, but that repackaging itself shows how far the debate has shifted toward liberalism.

The empirical evidence has been much harder on socialism. Economically, in practice the capitalist nations are increasingly productive and prosperous, with no end in sight. Not only are the rich getting fantastically richer, the poor in those countries are getting richer too. And by direct and brutal contrast, every socialist experiment has ended in dismal economic failure—from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, to North Korea and Vietnam, to Cuba, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.

Morally and politically, in practice every liberal capitalist country has a solid record for being humane, for by and large respecting rights and freedoms, and for making it possible for

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<sup>5</sup> Heilbroner 1990; see also Heilbroner 1993, 163.

people to put together fruitful and meaningful lives. Socialist practice has time and time again proved itself more brutal than the worst dictatorships in history prior to the twentieth century. Each socialist regime has collapsed into dictatorship and begun killing people on a huge scale. Each has produced dissident writers such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Nien Cheng who have documented what those regimes are capable of.

These points are well known, and I dwell upon them in order to project the depth of the crisis that this meant for Left-socialist intellectuals. By the 1950s, the crisis was being felt deeply.

Instead of having collapsed in the Great Depression of the 1930s, as both the collectivist Right and the Left had hoped, the liberal capitalist countries had recovered after World War II and by the 1950s were enjoying peace, liberty, and new levels of prosperity. World War II had wiped out the collectivist Right—the National Socialists and the Fascists—leaving the Left alone in the field against a triumphant and full-of-itself liberal capitalism. Yet while the liberal West's recovery and its rising political and economic prominence were distressing to the far Left intellectuals of the West, hope was still offered by the existence of the Soviet Union, the "noble experiment," and to a lesser extent by communist China.

Even that hope was brutally crushed in 1956. Before a world-wide audience, the Soviets sent tanks into Hungary to stifle demonstrations by students and workers—thus demonstrating just how strong was their commitment to humanity. And, more devastatingly, Nikita Khrushchev acknowledged publicly what many in the West had long charged—that Joseph Stalin's regime had slaughtered tens of millions of human beings, staggering numbers that made the National Socialists' efforts seem amateurish in comparison.

***Responding to socialism's crisis of theory and evidence***

From *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848 to the revelations of 1956 was over a century of theory and evidence. The crisis for the far Left was that the logic and evidence were going against socialism. Put yourselves in the shoes of an intelligent, informed socialist confronted with all this data. How would you react? You have a deep commitment to socialism: You *feel* that socialism is true; you *want* it to be true; upon socialism you have pinned all your dreams of a peaceful and prosperous future society and all your hopes for solving the ills of our current society.

This is a moment of truth for anyone who has experienced the agony of a deeply cherished hypothesis run aground on the rocks of reality. What do you do? Do you abandon your theory and go with the facts—or do you try to find a way to maintain your belief in your theory?

Here, then, is my second hypothesis about post-modernism: *Postmodernism is the academic far Left's epistemological strategy for responding to the crisis caused by the failures of socialism in theory and in practice.*

A historically parallel example may help here. In the 1950s and 60s, the Left faced the same dilemma that religious thinkers faced in the late 1700s. In both cases, the evidence was against them. During the Enlightenment, religion's natural theology arguments were widely seen as being full of holes, and science was rapidly giving naturalistic and opposed explanations for the things that religion had traditionally explained. Religion was in danger of being shut out of intellectual life. By the 1950s and 60s, the Left's arguments for the fruitfulness and decency of socialism were failing in theory and practice, and liberal capitalism was rapidly increasing everyone's standard of living and showing itself respectful of human freedoms. By the late 1700s, religious thinkers had a choice—accept evidence and logic as the ultimate court of appeal and thereby reject their

deeply-cherished religious ideals—or stick by their ideals and attack the whole idea that evidence and logic matter. “I had to deny knowledge,” wrote Kant in the Preface to the first *Critique*, “in order to make room for faith.” “Faith,” wrote Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*, “requires the crucifixion of reason”; so he proceeded to crucify reason and glorify the irrational.

The Left thinkers of the 1950s and 60s faced the same choice. As I will argue over the course of the next two chapters, the far Left faced a dilemma. Confronted by the continued flourishing of capitalism and the continued poverty and brutality of socialism, they could either go with the evidence and reject their deeply cherished ideals—or stick by their ideals and attack the whole idea that evidence and logic matter. Some, like Kant and Kierkegaard, decided to limit reason—to crucify it. And for that purpose, Heidegger’s exalting feeling over reason came as a godsend. And so did Kuhn’s theory-laden paradigms and Quine’s pragmatic and internalist account of language and logic.

That the leading postmodern intellectuals—from Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida to Rorty and Fish—came of age in the 1950s and 60s then is not a coincidence.

Postmodernism is born of the marriage of Left politics and skeptical epistemology. As socialist political thought was reaching a crisis in the 1950s, academic epistemology had, in Europe, come to take seriously Nietzsche and Heidegger and, in the Anglo-American world, it had seen the decline of Logical Positivism into Quine and Kuhn. The dominance of subjectivist and relativistic epistemologies in academic philosophy thus provided the academic Left with a new tactic. Confronted by harsh evidence and ruthless logic, the far Left had a reply: That is only logic and evidence; logic and evidence are subjective; you cannot really prove anything; feelings are deeper than logic; and our feelings say socialism.

That is my second hypothesis: Postmodernism is a response to the crisis of faith of the academic far Left. Its epistemology justifies

the leap of faith necessary to continue believing in socialism, and that same epistemology justifies using language not as a vehicle for seeking truth but as a rhetorical weapon in the continuing battle against capitalism.

***Back to Rousseau***

The justification of that hypothesis requires an explanation of why the crisis of socialist thought was felt so deeply by the 1950s and why to a significant number of Left intellectuals the postmodern epistemological strategy seemed to be the only one available. The key part of that explanation requires showing why classical liberalism, despite its flourishing culturally, had become a dead issue in the minds of most intellectuals, especially European intellectuals. No matter what troubles the anti-liberal Left and Right ran into, a serious reconsideration of liberalism was not going to happen.

Again, the story has its modern roots in the battle of the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment. This time the battle is over the Enlightenment's individualism and liberalism, best represented by the Lockean, and the anti-individualism and anti-liberalism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his followers.

Rousseau is the most significant figure in the political Counter-Enlightenment. His moral and political philosophy was inspirational to Immanuel Kant, Johann Herder, Johann Fichte, and G. W. F. Hegel, and from them transmitted to the collectivist Right. It was perhaps more inspirational to the collectivist Left: Rousseau's writings were the Bible of the Jacobin leaders of the French Revolution, absorbed by many of the hopeful Russian revolutionaries of the late nineteenth century, and influential upon the more agrarian socialists of the twentieth century in China and Cambodia. In the theoretical world of academic socialism, Rousseau's version of collectivism was eclipsed by Marx's version for most of the

nineteenth and much of the twentieth century. Yet a large part of the explanation of postmodern thought is a shift toward Rousseauian themes by thinkers who were originally inspired by Marx but who are now increasingly disillusioned.

### *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment*

The first great frontal assault on the Enlightenment was launched by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau has a well-deserved reputation as the bad boy of eighteenth century French philosophy. In the context of Enlightenment intellectual culture, Rousseau's was a major dissenting voice. He was an admirer of all things Spartan—the Sparta of militaristic and feudal communalism—and a despiser of all things Athenian—the classical Athens of commerce, cosmopolitanism, and the high arts.

Civilization is thoroughly corrupting, Rousseau argued—not only the oppressive feudal system of eighteenth-century France with its decadent and parasitical aristocracy, but also its Enlightenment alternative with its exaltation of reason, property, the arts and sciences. Name a dominant feature of the Enlightenment, and Rousseau was against it.

In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau started his attack at the foundation of the Enlightenment project: Reason. The *philosophes* were exactly right that reason is the foundation of civilization. Civilization's rational progress, however, is anything but progress, for civilization is achieved at the expense of morality. There is an inverse relationship between cultural and moral development: Culture does generate much learning, luxury, and sophistication—but learning, luxury, and sophistication all cause moral degradation.

The root of our moral degradation is reason, the original sin of humankind.<sup>6</sup> Before their reason was awakened, humans were

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<sup>6</sup> Rousseau 1755, 37.

simple beings, mostly solitary, satisfying their wants easily by gathering from their immediate environment. That happy state was the ideal: “this author should have said that since the state of nature is the state in which the concern for our self-preservation is the least prejudicial to that of others, that state was consequently the most appropriate for peace and the best suited for the human race.”<sup>7</sup>

But by some unexplainable, unfortunate occurrence, reason was awakened<sup>8</sup>; and once awakened it disgorged a Pandora’s Box of problems upon the world, transforming human nature to the point that we can no longer return to our happy, original state. As the *philosophes* were heralding the triumph of reason in the world, Rousseau wanted to demonstrate that “all the subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decay of the species.”<sup>9</sup> Once their reasoning power was awakened, humans realized their primitive condition, and this led them to feel dissatisfied. So they started to make improvements, those improvements culminating most strikingly in the agricultural and metallurgical revolutions. Undeniably, those revolutions improved mankind’s material lot—but that improvement has in fact destroyed the species: “it is iron and wheat that have civilized men and ruined the human race.”<sup>10</sup>

The ruin took many forms. Economically, agriculture and technology led to surplus wealth. Surplus wealth in turn led to the need for property rights.<sup>11</sup> Property, however, made humans competitive and led them to see each other as enemies.

Physically, as humans became wealthier they enjoyed more comforts and luxuries. But those comforts and luxuries caused physical degradation. They began to eat too much food and to eat

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<sup>7</sup> Rousseau 1755, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau 1755, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau 1755, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau 1755, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Rousseau 1755, 44, 52.

decadent food, and thus became less healthy. They came increasingly to use tools and technologies, and thus became physically less strong. What was once a physically hardy species thus became dependent upon doctors and gadgets.<sup>12</sup>

Socially, with luxuries came an awakening of aesthetic standards for beauty, and those standards transformed their sex lives. What was once a straightforward act of copulation became tied to love, and love is messy and exclusive and preferential. Love, accordingly, awakened jealousy, envy, and rivalry<sup>13</sup>—more things that set human beings against each other.

Thus reason led to the development of all of civilization's features—agriculture, technology, property, and aesthetics—and these made mankind soft, lazy, and in economic and social conflict with itself.<sup>14</sup>

But the story gets worse, for the ongoing social conflicts generated a few winners at the top of the social heap and many oppressed losers beneath them. Inequality became a prominent and damning consequence of civilization. Such inequalities are damning because all inequalities “such as being richer, more honored, more powerful” are “privileges enjoyed by some at the expense of others.”<sup>15</sup>

Civilization, accordingly, became a zero-sum game along many social dimensions, the winners gaining and enjoying more and more while the losers suffered and were left increasingly far behind.

But civilization's pathologies became even worse, for the reason that made civilization's inequalities possible also made the better-off uncaring about the suffering of the less fortunate. Reason, according to Rousseau, is opposed to compassion: Reason generates

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<sup>12</sup> Rousseau 1755, 20, 22, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Rousseau 1755, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau 1755, 54-55.

<sup>15</sup> Rousseau 1755, 16.

civilization, which is the ultimate cause of the sufferings of the victims of inequality, but reason also then creates rationales for ignoring that suffering. "Reason is what engenders egocentrism," wrote Rousseau,

and reflection strengthens it. Reason is what turns man in upon himself. Reason is what separates him from all that troubles him and afflicts him. Philosophy is what isolates him and what moves him to say in secret, at the sight of a suffering man, 'Perish if you will; I am safe and sound.'<sup>16</sup>

In contemporary civilization, this lack of compassion becomes more than a sin of omission. Rousseau argues that, having succeeded in the competitions of civilized life, the winners now have a vested interest in preserving the system. Civilization's advocates—especially those who are living at the top of the heap and therefore insulated from the worst of the harms—go out of their way to praise civilization's advances in technology, art, and science. But these advances themselves and the praise heaped upon them serve only to mask the harms civilization does. Fore-shadowing Herbert Marcuse and Foucault, Rousseau wrote in the essay that made him famous, the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*: "Princes always view with pleasure the spread, among their subjects, of the taste for arts of amusement and superfluities." Such acquired tastes within a people "are so many chains binding it." "The sciences, letters, and arts"—far from freeing and elevating mankind—

spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rousseau 1755, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Rousseau 1749, 36.

So corrupt, accordingly, is the whole edifice of civilization that no reform is possible. Against the timid moderates who want to achieve the good society in piecemeal fashion, Rousseau called for revolution. "People were continually patching it [the state] up, whereas they should have begun by clearing the air and putting aside all the old materials, as Lycurgus did in Sparta, in order to raise a good edifice later."<sup>18</sup>

### *Rousseau's collectivism and statism*

Once the corruption is totally swept away, the project of building a moral society can commence. Naturally, the good edifice to be raised must start from a good foundation. The primitive state of nature was good, but unfortunately we cannot return it. Reason, once awakened, cannot be dulled entirely. But neither can we tolerate anything that would lead us back to contemporary advanced civilization. Fortunately, history provides us with good models, for looking back upon most tribal cultures we find that their societies,

maintaining a middle position between the indolence of our primitive state and the petulant activity of our egocentrism, must have been the happiest and most durable epoch. The more one reflects on it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to upheavals and the best for man.<sup>19</sup>

The best we can do, accordingly, is to try to recreate in modern form a society on that model.

The re-creation must begin from a proper understanding of human nature. Contrary to the claims of the Enlightenment *philosophes*, man is naturally a passionate animal, not a rational one.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rousseau 1755, 58-9.

<sup>19</sup> Rousseau 1755, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau 1755, 14.

Man's deepest passions should set the direction of his life, and reason should always give way before them.

Passions are an appropriate foundation for society, since one of the deepest desires is to believe in religion, and, Rousseau believes, religion is essential to social stability. That desire to believe can and must override all Enlightenment objections. "I believe therefore that the world is governed by a powerful and wise will. I see it or, rather, I sense it."<sup>21</sup> Rousseau's feeling that God exists, however, did not provide him with much detailed information about the nature of God. God "is hidden equally from my senses and from my understanding," so his feeling gave him only the sense that a powerful, intelligent, and good being created the world. The arguments of the philosophers about God not only did not clarify matters, they made things worse: "The more I think about it," Rousseau wrote, "the more I am confused."<sup>22</sup> So he resolved to ignore the philosophers—"suffused with the sense of my inadequacy, I shall never reason about the nature of God"<sup>23</sup>—and to let his feelings guide his religious beliefs, holding that feelings are a more reliable guide than reason. "I took another guide, and I said to myself, 'Let us consult the inner light; it will lead me astray less than they lead me astray.'<sup>24</sup> Rousseau's inner light revealed to him an unshakeable feeling that God's existence is the basis for all explanations, and that feeling was to him immune to revision and counter-argument: "One may very well argue with me about this; but I sense it, and this sentiment that speaks to me is stronger than the reason combating it."<sup>25</sup>

This feeling was not to be merely one of Rousseau's personal whims. At the foundation of all civil societies, Rousseau argued,

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<sup>21</sup> Rousseau 1762a, 276.

<sup>22</sup> Rousseau 1762a, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Rousseau 1762a, 277.

<sup>24</sup> Rousseau 1762a, 269.

<sup>25</sup> Rousseau 1762a, 280.

one finds a religious sanction for what its leaders do. The society's founding leaders may not always genuinely believe in the religious sanctions they invoke, but their invoking them is nonetheless essential. If the people believe that their leaders are acting out the will of the gods, they will obey more freely and "bear with docility the yoke of the public good."<sup>26</sup> Enlightenment reason, by contrast, leads to disbelief; disbelief leads to disobedience; and disobedience leads to anarchy. This is a further reason why, according to Rousseau, "the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature and the man who meditates is a depraved animal."<sup>27</sup> Reason, accordingly, is destructive to society, and should be limited and replaced with natural passion.<sup>28</sup>

So important is religion to a society, wrote Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, that the state cannot be indifferent to religious matters. It cannot pursue a policy of toleration for disbelievers, or even view religion as a matter of individual conscience. It absolutely must, therefore, reject the Enlightenment's dangerous notions of religious toleration and the separation of church and state. Further: so fundamentally important is religion that the ultimate penalty is appropriate for disbelievers:

While the state can compel no one to believe it can banish not for impiety, but as an antisocial being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, if needed, his life to his duty. If, after having publicly

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<sup>26</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 2:7.

<sup>27</sup> Rousseau 1755, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Rousseau extended the limiting of reason to limiting its tools of expression: "Considering the awful disorders printing has already caused in Europe, and judging the future by the progress that this evil makes day by day, one can easily predict that sovereigns will not delay in taking as many pains to banish this terrible art from their States as they once took to establish it" (1749, 61). And following the examples of Cato the Elder and Fabricius, Rousseau urged: "hasten to tear down these amphitheatres, break these marble statues, burn these paintings, chase out these slaves who subjugate you and whose fatal arts corrupt you" (1749, 46).

recognized these dogmas, a person acts as if he does not believe them, he should be put to death.<sup>29</sup>

A society properly founded on natural passion and religion will override the self-centered individualism that reason leads to, making it possible for individuals to form a new, collectivized social organism. When individuals come together to form the new society, "the individual particularity of each contracting party is surrendered to a new moral and collective body which has its own self, life, body, and will." The will of each individual is no longer that individual's own, but becomes common or general, and under the direction of the spokesmen for the whole. In moral society, one "coalesces with all, [and] in this each of us puts in common his person and his whole power under the supreme direction of society's leaders."<sup>30</sup>

In the new society, the leadership expresses the "general will" and enacts policies that are best for the whole, thus enabling all individuals to achieve their true interests and their true freedom. The requirements of the "general will" absolutely override all other considerations, so a "citizen should render to the state all the services he can as soon as the sovereign demands them."<sup>31</sup>

Yet there is something about human nature, corrupted as it is now by reason and individualism, that militates and always will militate against the general will. Individuals rarely see their individual wills as being in harmony with the general will; consequently "the private will acts constantly against the general will."<sup>32</sup> And so to counteract these socially destructive individualistic tendencies, the state is justified in using compulsion: "whoever refuses to obey the general will will be forced to do so by the entire

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<sup>29</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 4:8.

<sup>30</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 1:6.

<sup>31</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 2:4.

<sup>32</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 3:10.

body; this means merely that he will be forced to be free.”<sup>33</sup> The power of the general will over the individual will is total. “The state ... ought to have a universal compulsory force to move and arrange each part in the manner best suited to the whole.”<sup>34</sup> And if the leaders of the state say to the citizen, “‘it is expedient for the state that you should die,’ he should die.”<sup>35</sup>

We thus find in Rousseau an explicitly Counter-Enlightenment set of themes, attacking the Enlightenment’s themes of reason, the arts and sciences, and ethical and political individualism and liberalism. Rousseau was a contemporary of the American revolutionaries of the 1770s, and there is an instructive contrast between the Lockean themes of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness in the Americans’ Declaration of Independence and Rousseau’s social contract oath for his projected constitution for Corsica: “I join myself—body, goods, will and all my powers—to the Corsican nation, granting to her the full ownership of me—myself and all that depends upon me.”<sup>36</sup>

Lockean Enlightenment politics and Rousseauian Counter-Enlightenment politics will lead to opposite practical applications.

### *Rousseau and the French Revolution*

Rousseau died in 1778 when France was at the height of its Enlightenment. At the time of his death, Rousseau’s writings were well known in France, though he had not exerted the influence that he would when France entered its revolution. It was Rousseau’s followers who prevailed in the French Revolution, especially in its destructive third phase.

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<sup>33</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 1:7.

<sup>34</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 2:4.

<sup>35</sup> Rousseau 1762b, 2:5.

<sup>36</sup> Rousseau 1765, 297, 350. See also 1762b, 1:9.

The revolution had started with the nobility. Spotting the weakness of the French monarchy, the nobles had succeeded in 1789 in forcing a meeting of the Estates-General, an institution that they usually controlled. Some of the nobles had hoped to enhance the power of the nobility at the expense of the monarchy, and some had hoped to institute Enlightenment reforms.

The nobles, however, were unable to form a unified coalition, and they were no match for the vigor of the liberal and radical delegates. Control of events slipped out of the hands of the nobles, and the Revolution entered a second, more liberal phase. The second phase was dominated by broadly Lockean liberals, and it was they who produced the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

The liberals, however, were in their turn no match for the vigor of the most radical members of the Revolution. As the members of the Girondin and Jacobin parties assumed greater power, the Revolution entered its third phase.

The Jacobin leaders were explicitly disciples of Rousseau. Jean-Paul Marat, who took on a disheveled and un-bathed appearance, explained that he did so in order "to live simply and according to the precepts of Rousseau." Louis de Saint-Just, perhaps the most bloodthirsty of the Jacobins, made his devotion to Rousseau clear in speeches to the National Convention. And speaking for the most radical of the revolutionaries, Maximilien Robespierre expressed the prevailing adoring opinion of the great man: "Rousseau is the one man who, through the loftiness of his soul and the grandeur of his character, showed himself worthy of the role of teacher of mankind."

Under the Jacobins, the Revolution became more radical and more violent. Now the spokesmen for the general will, and having at their disposal plenty of the "universal compulsory force" that Rousseau had dreamed about with which to combat recalcitrant private wills, the Jacobins found it expedient that many die. The

guillotine was busy as the radicals ruthlessly killed nobles, priests, and just about anyone whose politics was suspect. "We must not only punish traitors," urged Saint-Just, "but all people who are not enthusiastic." The nation had plunged into a brutal civil war, and in an enormously symbolic act, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were executed in 1793. That only made things worse, and all of France declined into the Reign of Terror.

The Terror ended with the arrest and execution of Robespierre in 1794, but it was too late for France. Its energies were dissipated, the nation was exhausted, and a power vacuum emerged that Napoleon Bonaparte would fill.

The story of the Counter-Enlightenment then shifts to the German states. Among German intellectuals, there had been some early sympathy for the French Revolution. German intellectuals were not ignorant of the Enlightenment in England and France. Several were attracted by Enlightenment themes, and in the mid-1700s Frederick the Great had attracted to Berlin several Enlightenment-minded scientists and other intellectuals. Berlin for a while was a hotbed of French and English influences.

For the most part, however, the Enlightenment had made a few inroads among intellectuals in the German states. Politically and economically, Germany was a set of feudal states. Serfdom would not be abolished until the nineteenth century. The majority of the population was uneducated and agrarian. Most were deeply religious, dominantly Lutheran. Unthinking obedience to God and to one's feudal lord had been ingrained for centuries. This was especially true in Prussia, whose people Gotthold Lessing called "the most servile in Europe."

So among the Germans the reports of the Terror of the French Revolution caused horror: They killed their *king* and *queen*. They hunted down *priests*, cut off their heads, and paraded up and down the streets of Paris with the heads stuck on the ends of pikes.

Yet the lesson most German intellectuals took from the Revolution was *not* that Rousseauian philosophy was the culprit. To most, the culprit was clearly the Enlightenment philosophy. The Enlightenment was anti-feudal, they noted, and the Revolution was a practical demonstration of what that means—the wholesale slaughtering of one’s sovereign lords and ladies. The Enlightenment was anti-religion, they noted, and the Revolution is a practical demonstration of what that means—killing holy men and burning down churches.

But from the German perspective, the situation became worse, for out of the power vacuum in France arose Napoleon.

Napoleon was also provided an opportunity by a weakened feudal Europe. Europe’s hundreds of small dynastic units were no match for Napoleon’s new military tactics and his sheer audacity. Napoleon ran roughshod over old feudal Europe, swept into the German states, defeated the Prussians in 1806, and proceeded to change everything.

From the perspective of the Germans, Napoleon was not only a foreign conqueror, he was a product of the Enlightenment. Where he conquered and ruled, he extended equality before the law, opened government offices to the middle class, and guaranteed private property. On matters of religion, he destroyed the ghettos, gave Jews freedom of religion, and gave them the right to own land and practice all trades. He opened secular public schools, and modernized Europe’s transportation network.

Napoleon outraged many powerful forces in doing so. He abolished guilds. He angered the clergy by abolishing church courts, tithes, monasteries, convents, ecclesiastical states, and he seized much church property. He angered the nobles by abolishing feudal estates and feudal dues, by breaking up large estates, and generally by lessening the power of the nobles over the peasantry. He functioned, in effect from the Enlightenment perspective, as a

benevolent dictator, as one who embraced many of the modern ideals but who used the full force of government to impose them.

His dictatorial impositions went further. He enacted censorship wherever he went, conscripted subjugated peoples to fight foreign battles, and taxed subjugated peoples to finance France.

So now most German intellectuals faced a serious crisis. The Enlightenment, as they saw it, was not merely a foreign disaster across the Rhine—it was a dictatorial presence ruling Germany in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte. How, wondered every German, did Napoleon win? What did the Germans do wrong? What was to be done?

The poet Johann Hölderlin, Hegel's roommate in college, declared: "Kant is the Moses of our nation." For the story of how the now-dead Kant was to lead Germany out of bondage, we return to Königsberg.

### *Counter-Enlightenment politics: Right and Left collectivism*

After Rousseau, collectivist political thinking divided into Left and Right versions, both versions drawing inspiration from Rousseau. The story of the Left version is the subject of Chapter Five, so my purpose in this chapter is to highlight developments in collectivist Right thinking and to show that in its essentials the collectivist Right was pursuing the same broadly anti-liberal-capitalist themes that the collectivist Left was.

What links the Right and the Left is a core set of themes: anti-individualism, the need for strong government, the view that religion is a state matter (whether to promote or suppress it), the view that education is a process of socialization, ambivalence about science and technology, and strong themes of group conflict, violence, and war. Left and Right have often divided bitterly over which themes have priority and over how they should be applied. Yet for all of their differences, both the collectivist Left and the

collectivist Right have consistently recognized a common enemy: liberal capitalism, with its individualism, its limited government, its separation of church and state, its fairly constant view that education is not primarily a matter of political socialization, and its persistent Whiggish optimism about prospects for peaceful trade and cooperation between members of all nations and groups.

Rousseau, for example, is often seen as being a man of the Left, and he has influenced generations of Left thinkers. But he was also inspirational to Kant, Fichte, and Hegel—all men of the Right. Fichte in turn was used regularly as a model for Right thinkers—but he was also an inspiration for Left socialists such as Friedrich Ebert, president of the Weimar Republic after World War I. Hegel's legacy, as is well known, took both a Right and a Left form.

While the details are messy the broad point is clear: the collectivist Right and the collectivist Left are united in their major goals and in identifying their major opposition. None of these thinkers, for example, ever has a kind word for the politics of John Locke. In the twentieth century, the same trend continued. Scholars debated whether George Sorel is Left or Right; and that makes sense given that he inspired and admired both Lenin and Mussolini. And to give just one more example, Heidegger and the thinkers of the Frankfurt School have much more in common politically than either does with, say, John Stuart Mill. This in turn explains why thinkers from Herbert Marcuse to Alexandre Kojève to Maurice Merleau-Ponty all argued that Marx and Heidegger are compatible, but none ever dreamed of connecting either to Locke or Mill.

The point will be that liberalism did not penetrate deeply into the main lines of political thinking in Germany. As was the case with metaphysics and epistemology, the most vigorous developments in social and political philosophy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century occurred in Germany, and German socio-political philosophy was dominated by Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Nietz-

sche, and Heidegger. By the early twentieth century, accordingly, the dominant issues for most Continental political thinkers were not whether liberal capitalism was a viable option—but rather exactly when it would collapse—and whether Left or Right collectivism had the best claim to being the socialism of the future. The defeat of the collectivist Right in World War II then meant that the Left was on its own to carry the socialist mantle forward. Accordingly, when the Left ran into its own major disasters as the twentieth century progressed, understanding its fundamental commonality with the collectivist Right helps to explain why in its desperation the Left has often adopted “fascistic” tactics.

### *Kant on collectivism and war*

Of the major figures in German philosophy in the modern era, Kant is perhaps the one most influenced by Enlightenment social thought.

There is a clear intellectual connection between Rousseau and Kant. Biographers often repeat Heinrich Heine’s anecdote about how Kant always took his afternoon walk at a set time, a time so regular that neighbors could set their clocks by his appearance—except on one occasion he was late for his walk because he had been so caught up in reading Rousseau’s *Emile* that he lost track of time. Kant had been raised as a Pietist, a version of Lutheranism that emphasized simplicity and eschewed external decoration. Kant therefore had no pictures or paintings hanging anywhere on the walls of his house—with one exception: over his desk in his study hung a picture of Rousseau.<sup>37</sup> Wrote Kant, “I learned to honor mankind from reading Rousseau.”<sup>38</sup>

Neo-Enlightenment thinkers attack Kant for two things: his skeptical and subjectivist epistemology and his ethic of selfless

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<sup>37</sup> Höffe 1994, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Beiser 1992, 43.

duty. Kant's account of reason divorces it from cognitive contact with reality, thus destroying knowledge; and his account of ethics divorces morality from happiness, thus destroying the purpose of life. As discussed in Chapter Two, Kant's powerful arguments were a mighty blow to the Enlightenment.

Politically, however, Kant is sometimes considered to be a liberal, and in the context of eighteenth-century Prussia there is some truth to that. In the context of Enlightenment liberalism, however, Kant diverged from liberalism in two major respects: his collectivism and his advocacy of war as a means to collectivist ends.

In a 1784 essay, "Idea for a Universal History With Cosmopolitan Intent," Kant asserted that there is a necessary destiny for the human species. Nature has a plan. It is, however, "a hidden plan of nature,"<sup>39</sup> and as such it is one that requires special discernment by philosophers. That destiny is the full development of all of man's natural capacities, especially man's reason.<sup>40</sup>

By "man" here, Kant did not mean the individual. Nature's goal is a collectivist one: the development of the species. Man's capacities, Kant explained, are "to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual."<sup>41</sup> The individual is merely fodder for nature's goal, as Kant put it in his "Review of Herder": "nature allows us to see nothing else than that it abandons individuals to complete destruction and only maintains the type."<sup>42</sup> And again, in his 1786 "Speculative Beginning of Human History," Kant argued that the "path that for the species leads to *progress* from the worse to the better does not do so for the individual."<sup>43</sup> The development of the individual is in conflict with the development of the species, and only the development of the species counts.

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<sup>39</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 27/36.

<sup>40</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 18/30 and 27/36.

<sup>41</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 18/30.

<sup>42</sup> Kant 1785/1963, 53/37.

<sup>43</sup> Kant 1786/1983, 115/53.

But it is also not the case that the species' development is about happiness or fulfillment. "Nature is utterly unconcerned that man live well."<sup>44</sup> The individual and even all existing individuals collectively now living are merely a stage in a process, and their suffering is of no account in the light of nature's ultimate end. In fact, Kant argued, man should suffer, and deservedly so. Man is a sinful creature, a creature that is inclined to follow its own desires and not the demands of duty. Echoing Rousseau, Kant blamed mankind for having chosen to use reason when our instincts could have served us perfectly well.<sup>45</sup> And now that reason has awakened it has combined with self-interest to pursue all sorts of unnecessary and depraved desires. Thus the source of our vaunted freedom, Kant wrote, is also our original sin: "the history of *freedom* begins with badness, for it is *man's* work."<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, Kant admonished us, "we are a long way from being able to regard ourselves as *moral*."<sup>47</sup> Man is a creature made of "warped wood."<sup>48</sup> Powerful forces are therefore needed in order to attempt to straighten our warped natures.

One of those forces is morality, a morality of strict and uncompromising duty that opposes man's animal inclinations. A moral life is one that no rational person would "wish that it should be longer than it actually is,"<sup>49</sup> but one has a duty to live and develop oneself<sup>50</sup> and thereby the species. Inculcating this morality in man is one of nature's forces.

Another force to straighten the warped wood is political. Man is "*an animal that, if he lives among other members of his species, has need of a master.*" And that is because "his selfish animal

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<sup>44</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 20/31.

<sup>45</sup> Kant 1786/1983, 111/50.

<sup>46</sup> Kant 1786/1983, 115/54.

<sup>47</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 26/36.

<sup>48</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 23/33.

<sup>49</sup> Kant 1786/1983, 122/58.

<sup>50</sup> Kant 1785/1964, 398/65.

propensities induce him to except himself from [moral rules] wherever he can." Kant then introduced his version of Rousseau's general will. Politically, man "thus requires a *master* who will break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will."<sup>51</sup>

However, strict duty and political masters are not enough. Nature has devised an additional strategy for bringing the species man to higher development. That strategy is war. As Kant wrote in his "Idea for a Universal History": "*The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man's capacities is the **antagonism** among them in society.*"<sup>52</sup> Thus, conflict, antagonism, and war are good. They destroy many lives, but they are nature's way of bringing forth the higher development of man's capacities. "At the stage of culture at which the human race still stands," Kant stated bluntly in "Speculative Beginning," "war is an indispensable means for bringing it to a still higher stage."<sup>53</sup> Peace would be a moral disaster, so we are duty-bound not to shrink from war.<sup>54</sup>

Out of this self-sacrifice of individuals and the war of nations, Kant hoped, the species would become fully developed, and an international and cosmopolitan federation of states would live peacefully and harmoniously, making possible within themselves the complete moral development of their members.<sup>55</sup> Then, as Kant concluded in a 1794 essay entitled "The End of All Things," men would finally be in a position to prepare themselves for the day of "judgment of forgiveness or damnation by the judge of the world."<sup>56</sup> This is the hidden plan of nature; it is destined to happen; so we know what we have to look forward to.

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<sup>51</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 23/33, italics in original.

<sup>52</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 20/31.

<sup>53</sup> Kant 1786/1983, 121/58; see also 1795/1983, 363/121.

<sup>54</sup> Kant notes a fundamental opposition between human desire and nature's goals: "Man wills concord; but nature better knows what is good for the species: she wills discord" (1784/1983, 21/32).

<sup>55</sup> Kant 1784/1983, 28/38.

<sup>56</sup> Kant 1794/1983, 328/93.

***Herder on multicultural relativism***

Johann Herder believed that our future will not be so cheery. Sometimes called the “German Rousseau,”<sup>57</sup> Herder had studied philosophy and theology at Königsberg University. Kant was his professor of philosophy; and while at Königsberg Herder also became a disciple of Johann Hamann.

Herder is Kantian in his disdain for the intellect, though unlike the static and rigid Kant he adds a Hamannian activist and emotionalist component “I am not here to think,” Herder wrote, “but to be, feel, live!”<sup>58</sup>

Herder’s distinctiveness lies not in his epistemology but in his analysis of history and the destiny of humankind. What meaning, he asks, can we discern in history? Is there a plan or is it merely a random happening of chance events?

There is a plan.<sup>59</sup> History, Herder argues, is moved by a necessary dynamic development that pushes man progressively toward victory over nature. This necessary development culminates in the achievements of science, arts, and freedom. So far Herder is not original. Christianity held that God’s plan for the world gives a necessary dynamic to the development of history, that history is going somewhere. And the Enlightenment thinkers projected the victory of civilization over the brutish forces of nature.

But the Enlightenment thinkers had posited a universal human nature, and they had held that human reason could develop equally in all cultures. From this they inferred that all cultures eventually could achieve the same degree of progress, and that when that happened humans would eliminate all of the irrational superstitions and prejudices that had driven them apart, and that

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<sup>57</sup> Barnard 1965, 18.

<sup>58</sup> In Berlin 1980, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Herder 1774, 188.

mankind would then achieve a cosmopolitan and peaceful liberal social order.<sup>60</sup>

Not so, says Herder. Instead, each *Volk* is a unique “family writ large.”<sup>61</sup> Each possesses a distinctive culture and is itself an organic community stretching backward and forward in time. Each has its own genius, its own special traits. And, necessarily, these cultures are opposed to each other. As each fulfills its own destiny, its unique developmental path will conflict with other cultures’ developmental paths.

Is this conflict wrong or bad? No. According to Herder, one cannot make such judgments. Judgments of good and bad are defined culturally and internally, in terms of each culture’s own goals and aspirations. Each culture’s standards originate and develop from its particular needs and circumstances, not from a universal set of principles; so, Herder concluded, “let us have no more generalizations about improvement.”<sup>62</sup> Herder thus insisted “on a strictly relativist interpretation of progress and human perfectibility.”<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, each culture can be judged only by its own standards. One cannot judge one culture from the perspective of another; one can only sympathetically immerse oneself in the other’s cultural manifestations and judge them on their own terms.

However, according to Herder, attempting to understand other cultures is not really a good idea. And attempting to incorporate other cultures’ elements into one’s own leads to the decay of one’s own culture: “The moment men start dwelling in wishful dreams of foreign lands from whence they seek hope and salvation they reveal the first symptoms of disease, of flatulence, of unhealthy opulence, of approaching death!”<sup>64</sup> To be vigorous, creative, and alive, Herder

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<sup>60</sup> Herder 1774, 187.

<sup>61</sup> In Barnard 1965, 54.

<sup>62</sup> Herder 1774, 205.

<sup>63</sup> Barnard 1965, 136.

<sup>64</sup> Herder 1774, 187.

argued, one must avoid mixing one's own culture with those of others, and instead steep oneself in one's own culture and absorb it into oneself.

For the Germans, accordingly, given their cultural traditions, attempting to graft Enlightenment branches onto German stock has been and would always be a disaster. "Voltaire's philosophy has spread, but mainly to the detriment of the world."<sup>65</sup> The German is not suited for sophistication, liberalism, science, and so on, and so the German should stick to his local traditions, language, and sentiments. For the German, low culture is better than high culture; being unspoiled by books and learning is best. Scientific knowledge is artificial; instead Germans should be natural and rooted in the soil. For the German, the parable of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden is true: Don't eat of that tree! Live! Don't think! Don't analyze!

Herder did not argue that the German way is the best and that it is justifiable for the Germans to become imperialistic and impose their culture upon others—that step was taken by his followers. He argued simply as a German in favor of the German people and urged them to go their own way, as opposed to following the Enlightenment.

Herder is relevant because of his enormous influence on the nationalist movements that were shortly to take off all over central and eastern Europe. He is also relevant to understanding how far from Enlightenment thinking the German Counter-Enlightenment was. If Kant is partially attracted to Enlightenment themes, Herder rejects those elements of Kant's philosophy. While Herder is broadly Kantian epistemologically, he rejects Kant's universalism: for Herder, how reason shapes and structures is culturally relative. And in contrast to Kant's vision of an ultimately peaceful, cosmopolitan future, Herder projects a future of multicultural conflict. Thus, in the context of the German intellectual debate, one was

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<sup>65</sup> Herder 1769, 95; see also 102.

offered a choice—Kant at the semi-Enlightenment end of the spectrum and Herder at the other.

### ***Fichte on education as socialization***

Johann Fichte was a disciple of Kant. Born in 1762, he studied theology and philosophy at Jena, Wittenberg, and Leipzig. In 1788 he read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, and that reading changed Fichte's life. He traveled to Königsberg in order to meet Kant, then the ruling philosopher of Germany. But the great man was initially distant, so Fichte worked as a tutor at Königsberg while writing his moral treatise, *Critique of All Revelation*. When it was finished, Fichte dedicated it to Kant. Kant read it, admired it, and urged that it be published. It was published anonymously in 1792, and this made Fichte famous in intellectual circles: It was so Kantian in style and content that it was taken by many to have been written by Kant himself and to be his fourth Critique. Kant disclaimed authorship but praised the young author, thus launching Fichte's academic career.

The major breakthrough, however—the event that launched Fichte permanently onto the German landscape as not only a leading philosopher but also as a cultural leader—came in 1807. A year after Napoleon's defeat of the Prussians, Fichte stepped onto the public stage and delivered his ringing call to arms, his *Addresses to the German Nation*.

In the *Addresses*, Fichte spoke as a philosopher who had descended from abstractions to connect with practical affairs, in order to situate those practical affairs within the context of the most metaphysical.<sup>66</sup> He addressed the defeated Germans, calling for a renewal of their spirit and character. The Germans had lost the

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<sup>66</sup> Fichte once said to Madame de Staël: "Grasp my metaphysics, Madame; you will then understand my ethics."

physical battle, Fichte argued, but now more was at stake: the real battle now was a battle of character.

Why had Germany come under the dominion of Napoleon? Fichte granted that many factors were responsible, most of them having to do with the infiltration of softening, Enlightenment beliefs—"all the evils which have now brought us to ruin are of foreign origin"<sup>67</sup>—and that many reforms were needed in the military, religion, and the administration of government.

But the fundamental problem was clear: the educational system had failed Germany. Only with a total revision of the method of educating children could Germany hope to become immune from the Napoleons of the future. "In a word, it is a total change of the existing system of education that I propose as the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation."<sup>68</sup> In Fichte's educational philosophy, themes from Rousseau, Hamann, Kant, and Schleiermacher are integrated into a package that would be influential for more than one hundred years.

In the *Addresses*, there is no question in Fichte's mind about what abstract system is the right one. With Kant, "the problem has been completely solved among us, and philosophy has been perfected."<sup>69</sup> But Kant's philosophy had not yet been applied systematically to the education of children.

Fichte started by looking back to see how Germany got into its current sorry state. Germany used to be great. In the Middle Ages, "the German burghers were the civilized people," and "this period is the only one in German history in which this nation is famous and brilliant." What was great about the burghers was their "spirit of piety, of honour, of modesty, and of the sense of community." They were great because they were not individualistic. "Seldom does the name of an individual stand out or distinguish itself, for

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<sup>67</sup> Fichte 1807, 84.

<sup>68</sup> Fichte 1807, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Fichte 1807, 101.

they were all of like mind and alike in sacrifice for the common weal."<sup>70</sup>

Fichte was, however, not a conservative apologist for the good old days. In the context of feudal Germany, Fichte was a reformer who believed that it was the corrupt upper classes that had ruined Germany: "its bloom [was] destroyed by the avarice and tyranny of princes."<sup>71</sup> The Germans had become further corrupted by the modern world, which led to their impotence in the face of Napoleon. What about the modern world, essentially, caused the corruption? *Self-seeking*: "self-seeking has destroyed itself by its own complete development," and "[a] people can be completely corrupted, *i.e.*, self-seeking—for self-seeking is the root of all other corruption."<sup>72</sup>

And this, echoing Rousseau, was because men became rational, under the guise of Enlightenment. This undermined religion and its moral force. "The enlightenment of the understanding, with its purely material calculations, was the force which destroyed the connection established by religion between some future life and the present." Consequently, government became liberal and morally lax: "the weakness of governments" frequently allowed "neglect of duty to go unpunished."<sup>73</sup>

So now the German has sold his soul, lost his true self, his identity. "It follows, then, that the means of salvation which I promise to indicate consists in the fashioning of an entirely new self, which may have existed before perhaps in individuals as an exception, but never as a universal and national self, and in the education of the nation." Echoing Rousseau again: "By means of the new education we want to mould the Germans into a corporate

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<sup>70</sup> Fichte 1807, 104-105.

<sup>71</sup> Fichte 1807, pp. 104-5.

<sup>72</sup> Fichte 1807, 8-9.

<sup>73</sup> Fichte 1807, 11.

body, which shall be stimulated and animated in all its individual members by the same interest."<sup>74</sup>

To start with, education must be egalitarian and universal, unlike previous education, which was feudal and elitist: "So there is nothing left for us but just to apply the new system to every German without exception, so that it is not the education of a single class, but the education of the nation." Such education will aid in the creation of a classless society: "All distinctions of classes ... will be completely removed and vanish. In this way there will grow up among us, not popular education, but real German national education."<sup>75</sup>

Real education must start by getting to the source of human nature. Education must exert "an influence penetrating to the roots of vital impulse and action." Here was a great failing of traditional education, for it had relied upon and appealed to the student's free will. "I should reply that that very recognition of, and reliance upon, free will in the pupil is the first mistake of the old system." Compulsion, not freedom, is best for students:

On the other hand, the new education must consist essentially in this, that it completely destroys freedom of will in the soil which it undertakes to cultivate, and produces on the contrary strict necessity in the decisions of the will, the opposite being impossible. Such a will can henceforth be relied upon with confidence and certainty.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, it is difficult to do this under contemporary living arrangements, in which children go to school and then return to corrupting influences in their homes and their neighborhoods at the end of the day. "It is essential," Fichte then urged, "that from the very beginning the pupil should be continuously and completely under the influence of this education, and should be

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<sup>74</sup> Fichte 1807, 12-13, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Fichte 1807, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Fichte 1807, 14, 20.

separated altogether from the community, and kept from all contact with it."<sup>77</sup>

Once the children are separated, educators can turn their attention to internal matters. In his essay on education, Kant had of course argued that "above all things, obedience is an essential feature in the character of a child, especially of a school boy or girl."<sup>78</sup> However, Fichte pointed out, children are children and as such they do not naturally impose duties upon themselves. So the school's authorities must firmly impose the duties upon them:

[T]he legislation should consequently maintain a high standard of severity, and should prohibit the doing of many things. Such prohibitions, which simply must exist and on which the existence of the community depends, are to be enforced in case of necessity by fear of immediate punishment, and this penal law must be administered absolutely without indulgence or exception.<sup>79</sup>

One of the duties to be inculcated is the obligation of the student who is more able to help the more needy students. Yet "he is to expect neither reward for it, for under this system of government all are quite equal in regard to work and pleasure, nor even praise, for the attitude of mind prevailing in the community is that it is just everyone's duty to act thus." Anticipating Marx, Fichte believed that the school should be a microcosm of what the ideal society would be like: "Under this system of government, therefore, the acquirement of greater skill and the effort spent therein will result only in fresh effort and work, and it will be the very pupil who is abler than the rest who must often watch while the others sleep, and reflect while others play."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Fichte 1807, 31.

<sup>78</sup> Kant 1960, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Fichte 1807, 33.

<sup>80</sup> Fichte 1807, 34-5.

More broadly, the new education will eliminate all self interest and inculcate the pure love of duty for its own sake that Rousseau and Kant had prized:

in place of that love of self, with which nothing for our good can be connected any longer, we must set up and establish in the hearts of all those whom we wish to reckon among our nation that other kind of love, which is concerned directly with the good, simply as such and for its own sake.<sup>81</sup>

If the system is successful, its fruit will be as follows: "Its pupil goes forth at the proper time as a fixed and unchangeable machine."<sup>82</sup>

But this moral education is not enough. Drawing upon Hamann and Schleiermacher, Fichte next turned to religion.

The pupil of this education is not merely a member of human society here on this earth and for the short span of life which is permitted to him. He is also, and is undoubtedly acknowledged by education to be, a link in the eternal chain of spiritual life in a higher social order. A training which has undertaken to include the whole of his being should undoubtedly lead him to a knowledge of this higher order also.<sup>83</sup>

Despite being seen as soft on religion by the Lutheran orthodoxy, Fichte argued that education must also be intensely religious. "Under proper guidance," the student will "find at the end that nothing really exists but life, the spiritual life which lives in thought, and that everything else does not really exist, but only appears to exist." He will find that "Only in immediate contact with God and the direct emanation of his life from him will he find life, light, and happiness, but in any separation from that immediate

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<sup>81</sup> Fichte 1807, 23.

<sup>82</sup> Fichte 1807, 36.

<sup>83</sup> Fichte 1807, 37.

contact, death, darkness, and misery." "Education to true religion is, therefore, the final task of the new education."<sup>84</sup>

So far Fichte's program of education includes the communal separation of children, severe authoritarian top-down training, strict moral duty and selflessness, and total religious immersion. Not quite the Enlightenment model of liberal education.

But Fichte's program did not end there. For now we add the importance of ethnicity. Only the German is capable of true education. The German is the best that the world has to offer and is the hope for the future progress of mankind. The German "alone, above all other European nations, [has] the capacity of responding to such an education."<sup>85</sup> But as goes Germany, so goes the rest of Europe and, ultimately, all of humankind. Either the Germans will respond to Fichte's call and reform themselves—or they will sink into oblivion. "But, as Germany sinks, the rest of Europe is seen to sink with it."<sup>86</sup>

Thus Fichte, with his passionate style and force of personality, spurred the Germans to action. The Germans listened admiringly and with approval. In 1810, three years after the delivery of his *Addresses*, Fichte was appointed dean of the philosophy faculty at the newly-founded University of Berlin. (Schleiermacher was appointed head of the faculty of theology.) In the following year Fichte became rector of the whole university, and so was in a position to put his educational program into practice.

Nor was Fichte a flash in the pan. One spark appears over a century later in 1919, in Friedrich Ebert's speech at the opening of the National Assembly at Weimar. Germany had once again been defeated by foreign powers, and the nation was demoralized, resentful, and starting over. Elected first president of the German

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<sup>84</sup> Fichte 1807, 37, 38.

<sup>85</sup> Fichte 1807, 52.

<sup>86</sup> Fichte 1807, 105.

Republic in 1919, Ebert made a point in his opening address of stressing the relevance of Fichte to Germany's situation:

In this way we will set to work, our great aim before us: to maintain the right of the German nation, to lay the foundation in Germany for a strong democracy, and to bring it to achievement with the true social spirit and in the socialistic way. Thus shall we realize that which Fichte has given to the German nation as its task.<sup>87</sup>

### *Hegel on worshipping the state*

While a student at Tübingen, Hegel's favorite reading had been Rousseau. "The principle of freedom dawned on the world in Rousseau, and gave infinite strength to man."<sup>88</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, Hegel was also engaged deeply with the latest developments of Kantian and Fichtean metaphysics and epistemology and their implications for social and political thought.

The political battle lines were clearly drawn for Hegel: If Rousseau's account of human freedom is the correct one, then the Enlightenment account of freedom must be a fraud. Disappointed by the outcome of the Revolution in France, where it seemed like the Rousseauians had had their world-historical chance, Hegel also had nothing but disdain for England, then arguably the most developed nation of the Enlightenment: "of institutions characterized by real freedom there are nowhere fewer than in England." The so-called liberalism of the so-called Enlightenment nations actually represented an "incredible deficiency" of rights and freedom. Only by updating the Rousseauian model dialectically and applying it to the German context could we find "real freedom."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> In Fichte 1807, xxii.

<sup>88</sup> Hegel, in Rousseau 1755, xv.

<sup>89</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 454; see also 1821, §236.

So what is real freedom to Hegel?

"It must further be understood that all the worth which the human being possesses—all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State."<sup>90</sup>

In the broader context of Hegel's philosophy, human history is governed by the necessary working out of the Absolute. The Absolute—or God, or Universal Reason, or the Divine Idea—is the actual substance of the universe, and its developmental processes are everything that is. "God governs the world; the actual working of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World."<sup>91</sup>

The State, to the extent that it participates in the Absolute, is God's instrument for achieving his purposes. "The State," accordingly, "is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth."<sup>92</sup>

Given that the individual's ultimate purpose in life should be to achieve union with ultimate reality, it follows that the "state in and by itself is the ethical whole, the actualization of freedom."<sup>93</sup> The consequence of this, morally, is that the individual is of less significance than the state. The individual's empirical, day-to-day interests are of a lower moral order than the state's universal, world-historical interests. The state has as its final end the self-realization of the Absolute, and "this final end has supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state."<sup>94</sup> Duty, as we have learned from Kant and Fichte, always trumps personal interests and inclinations.

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<sup>90</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 35-36.

<sup>92</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 39; also 1821, Add., 152, para. 258; p. 279.

<sup>93</sup> Hegel 1821, Add., 152, para. 258; p. 279.

<sup>94</sup> Hegel 1821, §258.

Yet mere membership as a matter of duty is not enough for Hegel, given the grandeur of the state's divine historical purpose: "One must worship the state as a terrestrial divinity."<sup>95</sup>

In such worship, Hegel believed, we find our real freedom. For ultimately, we individuals are but aspects of the Absolute Spirit, and in so relating to it we are relating to ourselves. "For Law is the objectivity of Spirit; volition in its true form. Only that will which obeys law, is free; for it obeys itself—it is independent and so free."<sup>96</sup> Freedom is thus the individual's absolute submission to and worship of the state.

There is of course the problem of explaining all of this to the average individual. The average individual, in the course of living day-to-day life, often finds that the laws and other manifestations of the state do not seem like real freedom. In most cases, Hegel stated, that is because the average person is ignorant of what true freedom is,<sup>97</sup> and no amount of explaining the higher dialectic to that person will make the laws seem like less of an infringement upon freedom.

Yet it is also true, Hegel granted, that in many cases the individual's freedoms and interests will genuinely be set aside, overridden, and even smashed. One reason for this is that the state's general principles are *universal* and *necessary*, and so they cannot be expected to apply perfectly to the *particular* and *contingent*. As Hegel explained, "*universal* law is not designed for

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<sup>95</sup> Hegel 1821, §272. Otto Braun, age 19, a volunteer who died in WW I, wrote in a letter to his parents: "My inmost yearning, my purest, though most secret flame, my deepest faith and my highest hope—they are still the same as ever, and they all bear one name: the State. One day to build the state like a temple, rising up pure and strong, resting in its own weight, severe and sublime, but also serene like the gods and with bright halls glistening in the dancing brilliance of the sun—this, at bottom, is the end and goal of my aspirations" (in H. Kuhn 1963, 313).

<sup>96</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 39.

<sup>97</sup> Hegel 1821, §301.

the units of the mass. These as such may, in fact, find their interests decidedly thrust into the background."<sup>98</sup>

But the problem is not merely one of applying the universal to the particular. Individuals must recognize that, from the moral perspective, they are not ends in themselves; they are tools for the achievement of higher goals.

But though we might tolerate the idea that individuals, their desires and the gratification of them, are thus sacrificed, and their happiness given up to the empire of chance, to which it belongs; and that as a general rule, individuals come under the category of means to an ulterior end.<sup>99</sup>

And again, just in case we have missed Hegel's point: "A single person, I need hardly say, is something subordinate, and as such he must dedicate himself to the ethical whole." And again echoing Rousseau: "Hence, if the state claims life, the individual must surrender it."<sup>100</sup>

Individual life is surrendered rather a lot when very special human beings come along to really shake things up and move God's plan for the world forward. "World-historical individuals," as Hegel called them, are those who, usually without knowing so themselves, are agents of the Absolute's development. Such individuals are energetic and focused, and they are able to amass power and direct social forces in such a way as to achieve something of historical significance. Their achievements, however, exact a high human cost.

A World-historical individual is not so unwise as to indulge a variety of wishes to divide his regards. He is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else. It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even sacred

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<sup>98</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Hegel 1821, Add., 45, para. 70; p. 241.

interests, inconsiderately; conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower—crush to pieces many an object in its path.<sup>101</sup>

The innocent flowers should not object to their destruction. The World-historical individual is acting for the best interests of the whole. In that special individual the state is embodied, and the state is the future of the collective. Even while being destroyed, the innocent flower has worth only through—and so should glory in—his participation in that larger future.

Anticipating Nietzsche, Hegel argued that neither should the innocent flowers raise merely moral objections against the activities of the World-historical individuals. “For the History of the World occupies a higher ground than that on which morality has properly its position.” The needs of historical development are of higher standing than those of morality, and so “the conscience of individuals” should not be an obstacle to the achievement of historical destinies.<sup>102</sup> The trampling of morality is regrettable, but “looked at from this point, moral claims that are irrelevant, must not be brought into collision with world-historical deeds and their accomplishment.”<sup>103</sup>

### *From Hegel to the twentieth century*

One of Auguste Comte’s students studied for a while in Germany and attended Hegel’s lectures. Reporting back to Comte about how Hegel’s doctrines compared to Comte’s socialist ones, the student wrote excitedly that “the identity of results exists even in the

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<sup>101</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 32.

<sup>102</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 66-67.

<sup>103</sup> Hegel 1830-31, 67.

practical principles, as Hegel is a defender of the governments, that is to say, an enemy of the liberals."<sup>104</sup>

In the nineteenth century the question of the true meaning of socialism was a live issue among collectivists of all stripes. Kant, Herder, Fichte, and Hegel were dominant mainstream voices. Yet clearly none was a conservative. Conservatives of the nineteenth century favored returning to or re-invigorating feudal institutions. Our four figures, by contrast, all favored significant reforms and a jettisoning of traditional feudalism. Yet none was an Enlightenment liberal. Enlightenment liberals were individualistic, the center of their political and economic gravity tending toward limited governments and free markets. Our four figures, by contrast, voiced themes of strong collectivism in ethics and politics with calls for individuals to sacrifice for society, whether society was defined as the species, the ethnic group, or the state. We find in the case of Kant a call for individuals to be willing to do their duty to sacrifice for the species; we find in the case of Herder a call for individuals to find their identity in their ethnicity; we find in the case of Fichte a call for education to be process of total socialization; and we find in the case of Hegel a call for total government to which the individual will surrender everything. For a school of thinkers who advocated total socialization, "socialism" seemed an appropriate label. Accordingly, many thinkers on the collectivist Right thought of themselves as true socialists.

Yet "socialism" was also being used as the label for Left collectivists, so there was a lively debate between the Left and many on the Right over who had the most right to call themselves "socialist."

The debate was not merely semantics. Both Right and Left were anti-individualist; both advocated government management of the most important aspects of society; both divided human society into groups which they took to be fundamental to individuals'

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<sup>104</sup> In Hayek 1952, 193.

identities; both pitted those groups against each other in inescapable conflict; both favored war and violent revolution to bring about the ideal society. And both sides hated the liberals.

*Right versus Left collectivism in the twentieth century*

The great events of the early twentieth century served as intellectual touchstones in the battle between the Left and the Right for the soul of the socialist.

World War I pitted East against West in the century's first great conflict of incompatible social systems. Leading German intellectuals on the political Right were clear about what they took the onset of war to signify. The war would destroy the decadent liberal spirit, the bland spirit of shopkeepers and traders, and make way for the ascent of social idealism.

Johann Plenge, for example, one of the outstanding authorities on both Hegel and Marx, was also a man of the political Right. His landmark book *Hegel and Marx* reintroduced scholars to the importance of understanding Hegel to understanding Marx.<sup>105</sup> For Plenge, liberalism was a corrupt system, and so socialism had to become the social system of the future. Plenge also believed that socialism would come first to Germany.

Because in the sphere of ideas Germany was the most convinced exponent of all socialist dreams, and in the sphere of reality she was the most powerful architect of the most highly organized economic system.—In us is the twentieth century.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lenin agreed with Plenge: "It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later, none of the Marxists has understood Marx!"

<sup>106</sup> In Hayek 1944, 188.

The Great War, accordingly, was to be celebrated as the catalyst for bringing that future into existence. The war economy that had been created in 1914 in Germany, wrote Plenge, “is the first realization of a socialist society and its spirit the first active, and not merely demanding, appearance of a socialist spirit. The needs of the war have established the socialist idea in German economic life.”<sup>107</sup>

Thus, Germany’s defeat in World War I was devastating to the collectivist Right. Moeller van den Bruck, unquestionably a man of the German Right and an implacable foe of Marxism, summarized the defeat thus: “We have lost the war against the West. Socialism has lost it against Liberalism”<sup>108</sup>

The crushing loss of the war and the psychological defeatism that came with it in Germany contributed to the meteoric success of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*. Spengler was another man of the Right. In *Decline*, written by 1914 but not published until 1918, Spengler offered a pessimistic combination of Herder and Nietzsche, voicing themes of cultural conflict and decline, arguing that the long, slow victory of liberalism in the West was the clearest indication that Western culture was, as all cultures eventually did, slipping into softness, flaccidity, and ultimately insignificance. All of the markers of Western civilization, Spengler argued, from democratic government to capitalism to the developments of technology were symptoms of decay. “The frightful form of soulless, purely mechanical capitalism, which attempts to master all activities and stifles every free independent impulse and all individuality” had prevailed, and virtually nothing could be done about it.<sup>109</sup>

Ludwig Wittgenstein was thunderstruck by his reading of Spengler. Martin Heidegger was moved profoundly. *The Decline of*

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<sup>107</sup> In Hayek 1944, 188-189.

<sup>108</sup> In Hayek 1944, 196.

<sup>109</sup> In Craig 1978, 487.

*the West* catapulted Spengler into the front ranks of German public intellectuals.

Immediately following the success of *Decline*, Spengler brought forth his *Prussianism and Socialism* (1920). Turning from cultural history to political theory, Spengler hoped to wrest the label “socialist” away from the Marxists<sup>110</sup> and to demonstrate that socialism required a national and organic focus. Agreeing with the Marxists, Spengler argued that the ideal state required “the organization of production and communication by the State; everybody to be a servant of the State.” And agreeing with the Marxists and against the soft liberals, Spengler argued that “Socialism means power, power, and more power.”<sup>111</sup> But against the Marxists, who were too rationalistic and too enamored of technology, Spengler argued that real socialism would be organic and rooted in the natural rhythms of life. Marxism, he believed, shared responsibility with capitalism for generating the artificial and materialistic world of the West. “All things organic are dying in the grip of organization,” Spengler wrote later in *Man and Technics*, echoing Rousseau:

An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural. The Civilization itself has become a machine that does, or tries to do, everything in mechanical fashion. We think only in horse-power now; we cannot look at a waterfall without mentally turning it into electric power; we cannot survey a countryside full of pasturing cattle without thinking of its exploitation as a source of meat-supply; we cannot look at the beautiful old handiwork of an unspoiled primitive people without wishing to replace it by a modern technical process.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Spengler 1920, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Spengler 1920, 130.

<sup>112</sup> Spengler 1931, 94.

We cannot recapture our lost connectedness, Spengler believed, so it is too late for socialism. But like the heroes of old, we should face up to our destiny stoically and with no illusions. "Optimism is *cowardice*." All that we can do, as beings of honor in a world of decline, is stick to our duty:

Our duty is to hold on to the lost position, without hope, without rescue, like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a door in Pompeii, who, during the eruption of Vesuvius, died at his post because they forgot to relieve him. That is greatness.<sup>113</sup>

While Spengler was pessimistic, other Right thinkers still saw a chance for true socialism. Ernst Jünger, who had been inspired by Spengler, inspired some of those Right thinkers. Jünger had been wounded three times in the Great War, but he had returned home determined to renew the fight against the decadent West. The war had been a loss—but a loss that could be transcended. We are, wrote Jünger, "a new generation, a race that has been hardened and inwardly transformed by all the darting flames and sledgehammer blows of the greatest war in history."<sup>114</sup>

Another Right thinker who still believed that socialism could come to be was Werner Sombart (1863-1941), best known as an outstanding sociologist and fiery critic of liberal capitalism. A good Marxist for much of his career, Sombart had moved toward the Right early in the twentieth century. To Sombart, that did not involve abandoning socialism but rather strengthening it. It was absolutely essential, Sombart argued, "to free Socialism from the Marxian system."<sup>115</sup> Doing so would make it possible to forge a better form of socialism by focusing it nationally; and by rejecting the pretense of being able to "'prove' the 'necessity' of Socialism by means of 'scientific' arguments," socialism would then regain its

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<sup>113</sup> Spengler 1931, 104, italics in original.

<sup>114</sup> In Herman 1997, 243.

<sup>115</sup> Sombart 1909, 90.

“power of creating new ideals and the possibility of intense feeling.”<sup>116</sup> A new nationalistic focus and rejuvenation of socialism’s idealistic feelings would, he thought, better enable socialists to combat the true enemy, liberal capitalism. Sombart’s next major work, *Merchants and Heroes* (1915), continued his attacks on liberal capitalism by contrasting two opposed types of social being, one decadent and the other noble; and Sombart’s attack on that primary target continued through 1928 when, agreeing in essence with Spengler and Moeller, he said of the socialist ideal:

This thought is destined to preserve mankind from a danger which is much greater than that of bureaucratization, and that is the danger of succumbing to mammonism, to the profit devil, to material interest mongering.<sup>117</sup>

*“Liberalism,”* wrote Moeller, *“is the Death of Nations.”*<sup>118</sup> So socialism *had* to be able to prevail against it. Yet it had to be the correct kind of socialism—and the correct kind of socialism was not Marxist. Marxist internationalism, the Right thinkers from Spengler to Sombart to Moeller argued, ended up being a false or illusory version of socialism. There is no universal culture, so there is no universal set of interests and no universal form that socialism can take. Socialism must be national—it must be rooted in each culture’s distinctive historical context. “Every people has its own socialism,” wrote Moeller, and so “international socialism does not exist.”<sup>119</sup>

And in a remark that was prescient of the coming decade, Moeller wrote:

Socialism begins where Marxism ends. German socialism is called to play a part in the spiritual and intellectual history of mankind by purging itself of every trace of

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<sup>116</sup> Sombart 1909, 91.

<sup>117</sup> In Ringer 1969, 235; see also Spengler 1920, 130.

<sup>118</sup> Moeller 1923, 77; italics in original.

<sup>119</sup> Moeller 1923, 73, 74.

liberalism. ... This New Socialism must be the foundation of Germany's Third Empire.<sup>120</sup>

*The Rise of National Socialism: Who are the real socialists?*

The rise of National Socialism to political prominence during the 1920s brought the abstract debate to particular focus, as the National Socialists, the Communists, and the Social Democrats all argued variations on the same themes and competed for the votes of the same constituencies.

The socialist Social Democrats and the Communists had split over whether socialism would be achieved by evolution or revolution. Hard feelings also existed between the two parties over the Spartacist Revolt of 1919, in which the Communists had risen up violently against an elected socialist regime. Thus the Social Democrats—in point of theory and in order to attract votes—regularly argued that there was no essential difference between the Communists and the National Socialists: both favored violence rather than peaceful and democratic procedures.

The Communists often returned the favor, arguing that the Social Democrats and the National Socialists had both in various ways sold out to capitalism. Ernst Thälmann, for example, in a speech to the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany, argued that the Social Democrats and National Socialists were ideological twins.<sup>121</sup> The Social Democrats were willing to compromise with other parties and share

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<sup>120</sup> Moeller 1923, 76. Adolf Hitler met Moeller in the early 1920s at the June-Club in Berlin, where Hitler gave a talk to a group of conservative intellectuals. After the talk, Hitler said directly to Moeller: "You can create the spiritual framework for Germany's reconstruction. Otto Strasser whose advice I rate highly says that you are the Jean-Jacques Rousseau of the German revolution. A born thinker. I am a street fighter. Join us! If you can become the Jean-Jacques Rousseau of the New Germany, I will be its Napoleon. Let us work together!" (in Lauryssens 1999, 94).

<sup>121</sup> Thälmann 1932.

power with them; only endless bickering and vacillation could result from that, which would serve only to maintain the capitalist *status quo*. The National Socialists, of course, were on the political Right, so by definition they had to be in the pockets of the capitalists.

The National Socialists recognized that they were on the Right and that the Social Democrats and the Communists were on the Left. But they found little practical difficulty wooing voters away from both parties by emphasizing the socialist elements of National Socialism. And they did not find that the theoretical goals of the three parties were that far apart. Hitler, for example, declared that “basically National Socialism and Marxism are the same.”<sup>122</sup> And Josef Goebbels, who had a Ph.D. in philology and perhaps a better claim to understand the theoretical issues, argued the same point.

Goebbels’s social thinking had been influenced strongly by Spengler and by his reading of the major Left socialists. He represented a strong voice within the National Socialist Party for its economically socialist planks. Goebbels’s hatred of capitalism was legendary, as was his hatred of money. Money, he wrote, is “the source of all evil. It’s as if Mammon were the embodiment of the principle of evil in the world. I hate money from the deepest depths of my soul.”<sup>123</sup> Only socialism could oppose the corruption of liberalism and capitalism. “Liberalism means: I believe in Mammon,” wrote Goebbels in his 1929 *Michael*, a novel that went through seventeen editions by 1942. “Socialism means: I believe in work.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> In Pipes 1999, 220.

<sup>123</sup> In Reuth 1990 33-34, 51.

<sup>124</sup> Goebbels 1929, 110. Goebbels prefaced his doctoral dissertation with a quotation from Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*: “Science and Reason have, from the beginning of time, played a secondary and subordinate part in the life of nations; so it will be till the end of time. Nations are built up and moved by another force that sways and dominates them, the origin of which is unknown and inexplicable: that force is the force of an insatiable desire to go on to the end, though at the same time it denies that end.” Goebbels’s *Michael* is semi-autobiographical, and Goebbels gave to his

Thus Goebbels had often been more than willing to make speeches and write conciliatory essays to the Communists, asking them to recognize that the National Socialists' and Communists' major goals of overthrowing capitalism and achieving socialism were the same—and that the only significant difference between the two was that the Communists believed that socialism could be achieved at the international level, while the National Socialists believed that it could and should occur at the national level.<sup>125</sup> The differences between National Socialism and Communism boiled down to a choice between the dictatorship of the *Volk* and the dictatorship of the *proletariat*.<sup>126</sup>

In this intellectual and cultural context, it is understandable that voters who favored the Social Democrats in one election often voted for the Communists or the National Socialists in the next, often switching allegiance again in the next election.

It is also understandable that in such a context the National Socialists would score their first big successes among the university students. "Students in brown shirts and swastika armbands were a normal sight in classes well before 1932."<sup>127</sup> Raised in an intellectual culture in which Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Spengler

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hero his conception of the ideal fate: "Michael/Goebbels the 'Christ-socialist,' sacrifices himself out of love for humanity" (Reuth 1990, 47).

<sup>125</sup> E.g., Goebbels 1925.

<sup>126</sup> The same dilemma of choosing between national and international socialism was a factor in the political thinking of Benito Mussolini and Mao Zedong. Mussolini had been an orthodox Marxist until his middle 30s, at which point he decided that socialism would have much more practical success in Italy if its policies were pitched in nationalist terms. Mao was one of the original members of the Communist Party in China, formed in 1921; but from 1923 to 1927 he was also a member of the Nationalist Party—partly because of theoretical affinity and partly because he and other Communist Party members were following orders from Moscow (Spence 1999, 62-63). In Germany, the dilemma was captured perfectly in the title of Knickerbocker's best-seller of the early 1930s: *Germany—Fascist or Soviet?* (Arthur Koestler, in Crossman 1949, 22).

<sup>127</sup> Herman 1997, 251.

were the dominant voices, National Socialism seemed to many to be a moral ideal, just as it did to many of their professors, who had been schooled in the same works.<sup>128</sup> The students of the 1920s and early 1930s saw themselves as rebelling against a corrupt system imposed upon them by the foreign, liberal capitalist West; they saw themselves as rebelling against their parents' generation, which had failed during the Great War and after; they saw themselves as rebelling against the capitalism that dislocated the worker, that did not give the worker a fair share, and that had caused the Depression; and they saw themselves as idealistically promoting the liberation of the worker and the German spirit.<sup>129</sup>

Speaking of the many bright and talented students from the West who went to Germany to study, Friedrich Hayek has remarked: "Many a university teacher during the 1930's has seen English and American students return from the Continent uncertain whether they were communists or Nazis and certain only that they hated Western liberal civilization."<sup>130</sup>

Western liberal civilization, however, survived both the Great Depression and World War II, emerging stronger than it had been before. During the war and its aftermath, the National Socialists and the collectivist Right were wiped out physically and discredited morally and intellectually. The new battle lines were simplified and starkly clear: liberal capitalism versus Left socialism.

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<sup>128</sup> For example, Professor Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's politically Right views are a combination of themes from Hegel, Nietzsche, Spengler, Sombart, and Moeller. Heidegger's contribution is to weave those political themes into his sophisticated and more fundamental metaphysics and epistemology. See especially Heidegger 1947, 1949, and 1953.

<sup>129</sup> "The old ones don't even want to understand that we young people even exist. They defend their power to the last. But one day they will be defeated after all. Youth finally must be victorious. We young ones, we shall attack. The attacker is always stronger than the defender. If we free ourselves, we can also liberate the whole working class. And the liberated working class will release the Fatherland from its chains" (Goebbels 1929, 111).

<sup>130</sup> Hayek 1944, 34.