

is our strongest, most assertive unconscious instinct that we should let rule our lives: “‘instinct’ is of all the kinds of intelligence that have been discovered so far—the most intelligent.”¹²⁴

And on this score, Nietzsche and the Nazis are in agreement: Both are fundamentally irrationalists—they do not think much of the power of reason, and they urge themselves and others to let their strongest passions and instincts well up within them and be released upon the world.

37. *Conquest and war*

Now put the above three points together: collectivism, conflict, and irrationalism. What will the social results be?

If you believe wholeheartedly and passionately that your identity is found by merging yourself with your group—and that your group is locked in a mortal, zero-sum conflict with other groups—and that reason is superficial and that passion and instinct drive the world—then how will you assert yourself in that conflict?

For much of the nineteenth century, Western liberal capitalists had begun to wonder, hopefully, whether war was a thing of the past. In their judgment, progress had been made: During the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, much of the West had embraced the idea of individual rights—the idea that each individual has rights to life, liberty, property, the pursuit of happiness. In the nineteenth century, those rights had been extended in practice to women and slavery had been eliminated. Also in the nineteenth century came the full real-



“Smash the Enemies of Greater Germany!”

¹²⁴ BGE 218.

ization of the power of the Industrial Revolution and the idea that through technology and capitalism, economic production could be increased dramatically.

As a result, the liberal capitalists of the nineteenth century came to believe that we could solve the problem of poverty and eliminate most of our conflicts over wealth. They believed that with rising wealth and education, rational people could learn to respect each others' rights, that there was more to be gained from trade than from war, and that peace was a natural state that mankind could achieve. The horrors of war could become a thing of the past.¹²⁵

We know from tragic twentieth-century history the National Socialists' eagerness to use war as their primary tool for achieving their international goals. We know their praising as fundamental the martial spirit and the beauty of the warrior soul. We know of their total recasting of education of children to achieve, as Hitler wanted "a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes."¹²⁶

¹²⁵Richard Cobden in 1835: "The middle and industrious classes of England can have no interest apart from the preservation of peace. The honours, the fame, the emoluments of war belong not to them; the battle-plain is the harvest-field of the aristocracy, watered with the blood of the people." Also John Stuart Mill: "It is commerce which is rapidly rendering war obsolete, by strengthening and multiplying the personal interests which are in natural opposition to it" (1909). Again Mill: "Finally, commerce first taught nations to see with good will the wealth and prosperity of one another. Before, the patriot, unless sufficiently advanced in culture to feel the world his country, wished all countries weak, poor, and ill-governed, but his own: he now sees in their wealth and progress a direct source of wealth and progress to his own country. It is commerce which is rapidly rendering war obsolete, by strengthening and multiplying the personal interests which are in natural opposition to it. And it may be said without exaggeration that the great extent and rapid increase of international trade, in being the principal guarantee of the peace of the world, is the great permanent security for the uninterrupted progress of the ideas, the institutions, and the character of the human race" (1909, Book III, Chapter XVII, Section 14).

¹²⁶Hitler, 1933.

The “beast of prey” phrase is again rhetoric inspired directly by Nietzsche. On the importance and nobility of war, Nietzsche and the Nazis were in almost full agreement. Nietzsche praised war and urged its coming. He wished for a great purge that would wipe out most humans whose lives he thought worthless and an embarrassment to the human species. “All-too-many live, and all-too-long they hang on their branches. Would that a storm came to shake all this worm-eaten rot from the tree!”¹²⁷

But he also longed for war as a means to inspire those humans who have potential to advance us toward the overman. To that end, Nietzsche believed that war is absolutely indispensable:

*“War essential. It is vain rhapsodizing and sentimentality to continue to expect much (even more, to expect a very great deal) from mankind, once it has learned not to wage war. For the time being, we know of no other means to imbue exhausted peoples, as strongly and surely as every great war does, with that raw energy of the battleground, that deep impersonal hatred, that murderous coldbloodedness with a good conscience, that communal, organized ardor in destroying the enemy, that proud indifference to great losses, to one’s own existence and to that of one’s friends, that muted, earthquake-like convulsion of the soul.”*¹²⁸

And against those who believe that we have entered a more peaceful era and that perhaps war is no longer necessary, Nietzsche reminds us, in an especially chilling quotation: “The beginnings of everything great on earth [are] soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Z, First Part, “On Free Death”

¹²⁸ HAH 477.

¹²⁹ GM II, 6.

On this score, the Nazis were thoroughly Nietzschean. Rather than pushing for a recognition of the mutuality of human interests, as Western liberal capitalists had been doing for much of the nineteenth century—and rather than seeking reasonable and peaceful diplomatic solutions to the normal collisions of international politics—the Nazis committed fundamentally to war as their primary means of self-regeneration and dominance over the rest of the world.

38. *Authoritarianism*

A fifth and final set of themes link Nietzsche with the Nazis. Both were anti-democratic, anti-capitalistic, and anti-liberal.

The Nazis were not friends of democracy, but they were extremely effective players of democracy. They announced from the beginning, in their 1920 founding Party Program, their authoritarian principles. Nonetheless, finding themselves in the democratic system that was the Weimar republic, they played mostly by the rules and out-democracied the other political parties. They used democracy to achieve anti-democratic ends.

Nietzsche's political views are less developed and more ambiguous, but it is clear he favors some sort of aristocracy. "What is serious for me," Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is "the 'European problem' as I understand it, the cultivation of a new caste that will rule Europe."¹³⁰ Again, while Nietzsche is unspecific, he does not necessarily mean an official political aristocracy—he more likely means the *de facto* rule by an exceptional few, whatever the formal and official political



"Be true to the Führer"

¹³⁰ BGE 251.