

Appendix 4: Quotations on German militarism

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): “War itself, if it is carried on with order and with a sacred respect for the rights of citizens, has something sublime in it, and makes the disposition of the people who carry it on thus only the more sublime, the more numerous are the dangers to which they are exposed and in respect of which they behave with courage. On the other hand, a long peace generally brings about a predominant commercial spirit and, along with it, low selfishness, cowardice, and effeminacy, and debases the disposition of the people.”²⁰²

Kant: “Thus, at the stage of culture at which the human race still stands, war is an indispensable means for bringing it to a still higher stage.”²⁰³

G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) on World-historical individuals, those whom the march of history has selected to advance its ends: “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 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.”²⁰⁴

Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), professor of history at Berlin and the most influential German historian of the nineteenth century. Ranke was deeply religious and a strong

²⁰² Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790]. Translated by J. H. Bernard (Haffner Press, 1951), § 28.

²⁰³ Kant, “Speculative Beginning of Human History” [1786]. In *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, translated by Ted Humphrey (Hackett, 1983), 58/121.

²⁰⁴ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree (Prometheus, 1991), p. 32.

believer in the divine mission of the German monarchical state. “[P]ositive religion, which resists the vague flight into liberalism, accords with my beliefs.” “I know nothing since the psalms where the idea of a religious monarchy has been expressed more powerfully and more nobly. It has great passages of historical truth.” As historian A. J. P. Taylor put it, speaking of Ranke and his followers, “they regarded the state, whoever conducted it, as part of the divine order of things; and they felt it their duty to acquiesce in that divine order. They never opposed; they rarely protested.”²⁰⁵

Heinrich Heine (1797–1856, German poet and essayist): “Not only Alsace-Lorraine but all France and all Europe as well as the whole world will belong to us.”²⁰⁶

Max Stirner (1806–1856), a Young Hegelian philosopher. While at university at Berlin, he was inspired by Hegel’s lectures and was a member of “The Free,” a discussion group that included Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ludwig Feuerbach as members. “What does right matter to me? I have no need of it . . . I have the right to do what I have the power to do.”²⁰⁷

Franz Felix Kuhn (1812–1881), philologist and folklorist: “Must culture build its cathedrals upon hills of corpses, seas of

²⁰⁵ Ranke, quoted in A. J. P. Taylor, “Ranke: The Dedicated Historian.” *The Course of German History, A Survey of the Development of Germany since 1815* (Hamish Hamilton, 1945), p. 265.

²⁰⁶ Heine, quoted in Darwin P. Kingsley, “Woodrow Wilson and the Doctrine of Sovereignty,” *Addresses of the Empire Club of Canada*. Delivered October 17, 1918. Also posted at http://www.archive.org/stream/letushavepeaceot00king/letushavepeaceot00king_djvu.txt, viewed November 1, 2009.

²⁰⁷ Stirner, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

tears, and the death rattle of the vanquished? Yes, it must.”²⁰⁸

Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), in a now-famous 1862 speech: “The great questions of our time will not be settled by resolutions and by majority votes—that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by blood and iron.”

Frederick III (1831–1888), German emperor and eighth king of Prussia: “All written Constitutions are scraps of paper.”²⁰⁹

Otto Von Gottberg (1831–1913), writing in the newspaper *Jungdeutschland-Post* in January 1913: “War is the most august and sacred of human activities.” “Let us laugh with all our lungs at the old women in trousers who are afraid of war, and therefore complain that it is cruel and hideous. No! War is beautiful.”²¹⁰

Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), an influential professor of history at Humboldt University in Berlin from 1874 to 1896 and member of the Reichstag from 1871, was a rabid nationalist and saw war as Germany’s destiny which, guided by a benevolent God, would purge the nation of its sins and make it possible for Germany’s superiority to shine forth.

Otto Liebmann (1840–1912), philosopher at the newly-created University of Strassburg after the Franco-Prussian war. Strassburg was intended as a “fortress of the German spirit against France.” From the records of the Reichstag debates over the founding of the University of Strassburg:

“The German universities, resting on the foundation of freedom, are so peculiarly

²⁰⁸ Kuhn, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²⁰⁹ Frederick III, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²¹⁰ Gottberg, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

German an institution that no other nation, not even one racially akin, has risen to this institution, and it is for just this reason that a German university is one of the mightiest of all means of again reconciling with the motherland German racial comrades who have long been separated from her ... You may believe, *meine Herren*, that Bonn university has done as much to defend the German Rhineland as have the German fortresses on the Rhein. (Hear hear! On the left).’’²¹¹

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): “I welcome all signs that a more manly, a warlike, age is about to begin, an age which, above all, will give honor to valor once again. For this age shall prepare the way for one yet higher, and it shall gather the strength which this higher age will need one day—this age which is to carry heroism into the pursuit of knowledge and *wage wars* for the sake of thoughts and their consequences.”²¹²

Nietzsche: “*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,

²¹¹ Liebmann, quoted in Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 204.

²¹² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, § 290.

earthquakelike convulsion of the soul.”²¹³

Max Lehmann (1845–1929), pastor, political historian, professor at Marburg, Leipzig, and Göttingen, and member of the Prussian Academy: “Germany is the centre of God’s plans for the World.”²¹⁴

Friedrich von Bernhardi (1849–1930), general, military historian, author of *Germany and the Next War* (1911): “Might is the supreme right,” and war is a “divine business,” “an indispensable factor of civilization,” and “a biological necessity of the first order.” And contrasting the French emphasis on rights of liberty and equality, Bernhardi writes of the German philosophy of duty:

“While the French people in savage revolt against spiritual and secular despotism had broken their chains and proclaimed their *rights*, another quite different revolution was working in Prussia—the revolution of *duty*. The assertion of the rights of the individual leads ultimately to individual irresponsibility and to a repudiation of the State. Immanuel Kant, the founder of critical philosophy, taught, in opposition to this view, the gospel of moral duty, and Scharnhorst grasped the idea of universal military service. By calling upon each individual to sacrifice property and life for the good of the community, he gave the clearest expression to the idea of the State, and created a sound basis on which the claim to individual rights might rest at the same time Stein laid the foundations of self-employed-government in Prussia.”²¹⁵

²¹³ Nietzsche, *Human, All-too-Human*, § 477.

²¹⁴ Lehmann, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²¹⁵ Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War* [1911], Chapter 3, <http://www>.

Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), English-born German author and propagandist: “He who does not believe in the Divine Mission of Germany had better go hang himself, and rather today than tomorrow.”²¹⁶

Wilhelm II (1859–1941), third German emperor and ninth king of Prussia: “Woe and death to all who shall oppose my will. Woe and death to those who do not believe in my mission.”²¹⁷

Otto Richard Tannenberg, author of *Greater Germany, the Work of the Twentieth Century*, writing in 1911: “War must leave nothing to the vanquished but their eyes to weep with.”²¹⁸

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), theologian and Neo-Kantian professor of philosophy at Heidelberg: Struggle is a test of a culture’s vital forces, in which “the fullness of contending national spirits ... unfold their highest spiritual powers.”²¹⁹

Max Scheler (1874–1928), philosopher at the universities of Jena, Munich, and Cologne, writing on the German ideology: “It would set faith against skepticism, metaphysics against science, the organic whole against atomism, life against mechanism, heroism against calculation, true community against commercialized society, a hierarchically ordered people against the mass leveled down by egalitarianism.”²²⁰

gutenberg.org/files/11352/11352.txt. Viewed October 15, 2009.

²¹⁶ Chamberlain, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²¹⁷ Wilhelm II, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²¹⁸ Tannenberg, quoted in Kingsley 1918.

²¹⁹ Troeltsch, quoted in Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline* (Free Press, 1997), p. 233.

²²⁰ Scheler, quoted in Helmut Kuhn, “German Philosophy and National Socialism,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (MacMillan, 1963), p. 313.

Thomas Mann (1875–1955), novelist and essayist, echoing the desire to eliminate the old world of bourgeois hypocrisy, thought the war would end that “horrible world, which now no longer is, or no longer will be, after the great storm passed by. Did it not crawl with spiritual vermin as with worms?”²²¹

Mann, writing during the war of his pre-war days: “We knew it, this world of peace. We suffered from this horrible world more acutely than anyone else. It stank of the ferments of decomposition. The artist was so sick of this world that he praised God for this purge and this tremendous hope.”²²²

Georg Heym (1887–1912), German Expressionist poet, on the eve of World War I:

“Everything is always the same, so boring, boring, boring. Nothing ever happens, absolutely nothing. ... If someone would only begin a war, it need not be a just one.”²²³

In his diary of 1911: “Most of all I would like to be a lieutenant of the cuirassiers. But the day after I want to be a terrorist.” Later that year: “without my Jacobin hat I cannot envisage myself. Now I hope that there will at least be a war.”²²⁴

Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), author of *Storm of Steel*, after returning from World War I, in which he had been wounded three times, on how defeated Germany was by the war:

We are “a new generation, a race that has been

²²¹ Mann, quoted in Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (A. A. Knopf, 1972), p. 120.

²²² Mann, quoted in Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History, 1918–1933* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974), pp. 115–116.

²²³ Heym, quoted in Herman 1997, p. 235.

²²⁴ Heym, quoted in Laqueur 1974, 115.

hardened and inwardly transformed by all the darting flames and sledgehammer blows of the greatest war in history.”²²⁵

In war, “the true human being makes up in a drunken orgy for everything that he has been neglecting. Then his passions, too long damned up by society and its laws, become once more dominant and holy and the ultimate reason.” And again: “This war is not ended, but the chord that heralds new power. It is the anvil on which the world will be hammered into new boundaries and new communities. New forms will be filled with blood, and might will be hammered into them with a hard fist. War is a great school, and the new man will be of our cut.”²²⁶

Describing the warrior’s entry into battle: “Now the task is to gather oneself. Yes, perhaps it is a pity. Perhaps as well we are sacrificing ourselves for something inessential. But no one can rob us of *our* value. Essential is not *what* we are fighting for, but *how* we fight. Onward toward the goal, until we triumph or are left behind. The warriors’ spirit, the exposure of oneself to risk, even for the tiniest idea, weighs more heavily in the scale than all the brooding about good and evil.”²²⁷

Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), author of *The Decline of the West*: “We must go right through to the end in our misfortune;

²²⁵Jünger, quoted in Herman 1997, p. 243.

²²⁶Jünger, quoted in Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866–1945* (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 492.

²²⁷Jünger, “Feuer” (1922). Excerpted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 20.

we need a chastisement compared to which the four years of war are nothing. ... A dictatorship, resembling that of Napoleon, will be regarded universally as a salvation. But then blood must flow, the more the better.”²²⁸

Otto Braun, age 19, volunteer who died in World War I, 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.”²²⁹

Some commentators on Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

R. Kevin Hill, American historian of philosophy: “associations between Kantian duty and military experience became increasingly common in late nineteenth-century Germany, especially after the Schiller and Fichte centennials.”²³⁰

Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954), German historian, writing in 1950: “The German power-state idea, whose history began with Hegel, was to find in Hitler its worst and most fatal application and extension.”²³¹

²²⁸ Spengler, quoted in Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920's* (Harper & Row, 1972), p. 351.

²²⁹ Braun, quoted in Kuhn 1963, p. 313.

²³⁰ Hill, *Nietzsche's Critiques: the Kantian Foundations of His Thought* (Oxford, 2003), p. 27; see also Köhnke, *NeoKantianism*, pp. 115-24.

²³¹ Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*. Translated by Sidney B. Fay (Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 15.

American historian William Manchester on nineteenth-century Germany: “the poetic genius of the youth of Germany was saturated with militaristic ideals, and death in battle was prized as a sacred duty on behalf of Fatherland, home, and family.”²³²

Ernst Gläser (1902–1963), German novelist expressing the prevailing spirit of 1914: “At last life had regained an ideal significance. The great virtues of humanity ... fidelity, patriotism, readiness to die for an ideal ... were triumphing over the trading and shopkeeping spirit ... This was the providential lightning flash that would clear the air [and make way for] a new world directed by a race of noble souls who would root out all signs of degeneracy and lead humanity back to the deserted peaks of the eternal ideals ... The war would cleanse mankind from all its impurities.”²³³

²³² Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp* (Little, Brown, and Co., 1964), p. 63.

²³³ Gläser, quoted in Craig 1978, p. 340.