

Hitler & Nietzsche

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Much has been written and more has been said about the Nietzschean influence behind the new regime in Germany. And while some have condemned National Socialism offhand on that score alone, others (among them some Nietzscheans) have condemned it for being a travesty of Nietzsche — i.e., for having misinterpreted and misapplied the Master's teaching.

But no matter how the dispute on these points may ultimately be decided, it seems fairly obvious that there must be a strong Nietzschean influence in National Socialism, if only because of the powerful breath of pre-Socratic Hellenism which has prevailed in Germany ever since the NSDAP seized the reins of government.

For the sake of those readers who are not quite clear regarding this association of Nietzscheism with pre-Socratic values, perhaps it would be as well to point out that, according to Nietzsche, the history of mankind falls, as it were, into two halves — the period preceding Socrates, during which the public estimate of a man was always based upon his biological worth, and the period following Socrates, during which the public estimate of a man always tended to neglect or ignore his biological worth. How Socrates changed the point of view in order to make things tolerable for himself (a degenerate specimen) I have already explained in these pages. Thus, Nietzsche claimed that the Socratic way of looking at men which ignored their biological worth, or regarded it as negligible, was a way which favored degenerates, just as it had favored the great degenerate who first instituted it; and the German philosopher advocated a return to the pre-Socratic values which, by being concentrated on biological worth, would combat and eliminate degeneracy.

Now, if only in this return to the biological angle of vision in viewing mankind, modern Germany is essentially Nietzschean, and when we come to appreciate the other elements in National Socialism which owe their inspiration to Nietzsche, and bear in mind not only Adolf Hitler's sincere and earnest admiration of Nietzsche's philosophy and his great friendship with Frau Förster-Nietzsche, Nietzsche's sister, but also Alfred Rosenberg's

strong sympathy with the Nietzschean outlook — Rosenberg being the head of the department in charge of political training for the National Socialist Party — we are left in no doubt whatsoever regarding the profound influence the creator of his peripatetic sage Zarathustra is now exerting over his native country. Perhaps it may not be uninteresting to inquire what, besides the wave of pre-Socratic values, may definitely be ascribed to Nietzsche's leadership in the Third Reich.

During the recent *Parteitag* in Nuremberg, the first most characteristic feature was the Führer's own attitude towards culture as outlined in his speech of 9th September at the Opera House. He made it quite clear that he would not and could not regard art as an international affair, as our own Oxford aesthete and dilettantes have always done, and declared that "all this chatter of internationalism in art is as idiotic as it is dangerous." He argued that since art is the expression of a people's life and the bloom on the tree of their values, and that "no man can bear any intimate relation to any cultural achievement which does not have its roots in his own origins and soil," it is as ridiculous to expect a national art product to have international validity or to make the same appeal everywhere as to suppose that a German or an English national can feel the same emotions when reading another nation's history as when reading his own.

Thus he concluded that culture is invariably the product of discipline and authority within a particular national unit. It invariably springs from the work of the legislator who first established the values of a people. "It is the civilized product of political leadership." And he made it clear that, "just as a Christian age could have only a Christian art, so a National Socialist age could have only a National Socialist art."

All this is perfectly consistent with Nietzscheism. But before showing the connection, it is important to refer to certain misconceptions that may arise, and have indeed arisen, in respect of the last quoted statement of the Führer. To this end I need only recall the communication made by the Berlin Correspondent of the *Morning Post* to his journal on 8th October. Referring only to the statement in question, the writer of the article said: "Which, one wonders, of the susceptible, but non-German-speaking English guest of honor who have since written to the Press to assert that Nazi Germany is saving Christian civilization from Bolshevism, realize that this striking antithesis was uttered and applauded in their hearing? Rarely, if ever, has Herr Hitler given the world such a succinct clue to his pretensions — that the political movement of his formation is destined to inaugurate a new era in Europe, to inherit the moral authority and inspiration exercised by Christianity to a lesser or greater degree in European affairs for a thousand years."

The implication is, of course, that the set of values promulgated by National Socialism are, on the Führer's own showing, in conflict with Christianity. Now I happened to be one of the English guests of honor present when that statement was made, and I understood and applauded it. But so far was I from drawing the conclusions which the *Morning Post's* Berlin correspondent drew that, when I read his interpretation, it was with feelings of complete astonishment.

Nor do I believe that his interpretation could be upheld even on purely historical grounds. For instance, if he will turn up the article “Architecture” in the second volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edition) he will find chapters under various headings which are just as susceptible to his interpretation of the Führer’s words as the Führer’s own statement was. He will find a whole chapter under the heading “Early Christian Architecture,” and later a chapter under the heading “Renaissance Architecture.” Would he infer from this that the writer intended solemnly to maintain that there had been a complete breach between the two periods in question on the matter of Christianity’s moral authority and inspiration? And if he would not, why does he infer it in discussing the Führer’s statement, which, by the by, he wrenches quite gratuitously from its context?

All I inferred from the Führer’s words was that just as Christianity had, as an international faith untinged by local sentiment and character, produced a certain kind of art which ultimately became differentiated as the Church split up and became influenced by national segregations of humanity, so National Socialism (one of these more recent segregations) would necessarily and in time produce an art having its own peculiar character. There was not a word in the Führer’s speech to indicate, however, that an antithesis was meant or that this peculiar national character manifesting itself in National Socialist art would necessarily be in conflict with true Christianity. And as far as I can see, the influence drawn by the *Morning Post*’s Berlin correspondent was as entirely gratuitous as was his quotation of this one line out of context of the Führer’s address.

The Führer was simply making it quite clear to his listeners that any art which is nondescript to the point of being independent of the soul of the people among which it finds its being — any art, that is to say, which in the true sense may be termed “international” — is of minor importance unless, of course, a homogeneity of types and values prevails over all national units. And why must this be so? Because such art cannot help being chaotic, labyrinthine, and characterless, owing to its being rooted in a clash and chaos of values.

“No people could live,” said Nietzsche,[1] “that did not in the first place value. If it would maintain itself, however, it must not value as its neighbour doth Values did man stamp upon things only that he might preserve himself.”

To have the same art as everybody else, therefore, would be to value as everybody else values, and this to a people means self-extermination; hence the basic stupidity of the idea of an international art in present-day conditions, in which homogeneity of type and values is still remote. “What does all art do?,” Nietzsche asks. “Does it not praise? Does it not glorify? Does it not select? Does it not bring into prominence? In each of these cases it strengthens or weakens certain valuations.”

But the Führer did not imply or lead his audience to suppose that out of National Socialism a new art peculiar to it would be evolved, as it were, overnight. He suggested nothing so ridiculous. He spoke, on the contrary, of the “enormous importance of prolonged moulding” (*die ungeheure Bedeutung dieser langsamen Formung*). He made it

plain that his own and his colleagues' efforts were concentrated on restoring to the German people those great traditions of their nation, those tried and time-honored customs, those characteristic institutions and values, out of which an art of the future, a National Socialist art, would necessarily grow, as did a Judeo-Greco-Christian art out of a Europe made well-nigh homogeneous in spirit by the Hellenistic, Jewish and other values spread by the early Church.

“The essential thing in heaven and earth,” said Nietzsche, “is apparently that there should be long obedience in the same direction; then there comes about and has always come about in the long run something which has made life worth living — for instance, virtue, art, music, dancing, reason, spirituality, etc. . . . Even the beauty of a race or family, the pleasantness and kindness of their whole demeanor, is acquired by effort; like genius it is the final result of the accumulated labor of generations.”

Those who know of the recent scientific justification of this standpoint, who remember Herbert Spencer's words: “The aspects which displease us are the outward correlatives of inward imperfections,” and who are aware of the fact that research workers like Dr. Kretschmer, Dr. George Draper, and Dr. E. S. Talbot all associate morbidity, abnormality, or degeneracy with ugliness, will appreciate the prescience of Nietzsche when they learn that as long ago as 1888 he was writing: “from the physiological standpoint, everything ugly weakens and depresses man. It reminds him of decay, danger impotence . . . Ugliness is understood to signify a hint and a symptom of degeneration; that which reminds us however remotely of degeneracy, impels us to the judgment ‘ugly’ . . . A certain hatred expresses itself here. What is it that man hates? Without a doubt it is the decline of his type. In this respect his hatred springs from the deepest instincts of the race: there is, however, caution, profundity and far-reaching vision in this hatred — it is the most profound hatred that exists. On its account alone art is profound.” These sentiments are redolent of a period when man still clung to the point of view — now at last in the process of being confirmed by science — that body and mind are one and cannot be separated, that they are both merely different aspects of the same thing.

The emphasis the Führer laid on this prerequisite, beauty, the way he linked it up with the demands he makes of a national art, and his idea that the best of his nation's stock should be the standard glorified by the national art — all these elements in his memorable address, down to the very notion of a national art as the glorifier of a type, reveal him and his associates not merely as a new and potent force for the sanitation of European humanity (a force which is now inspiring even our own people), but also certainly as followers of Nietzsche or, to put it moderately, as influenced by the poet-philosopher's teaching.

Maybe that he would never have presumed, even with Nietzsche behind him, to come forward with such a doctrine at this hour, had he not known that science itself — much more acceptable than Nietzsche to the modern man — was rapidly advancing to the defense of the same position. And the fact that he has found loyal support in scientific quarters in Germany rather confirms this supposition.

Turning now to the legislation of the National Socialist rulers during the last three years, and all the emphasis it lays on the desirability of sound stock, of preventing inferior or tainted stocks from multiplying, and of eliminating from the ranks of parents all persons who are in any way hereditarily diseased, we find further confirmation of the Nietzschean influence, and, as I pointed out above, light upon definite proof that the pre-Socratic bias of Nietzsche is at last making itself felt in Germany. Indeed, certain passages from Nietzsche might even now serve as the outline of the National Socialist program.

Take, for instance, the following:

“There are cases when to have a child would be a crime — for example, for chronic invalids and extreme neurasthenics. These people should be converted to chastity, and for this purpose the music of *Parsifal* might at all events be tried.”

Compare this with the Führer’s reiterated claim that if in the past voluntary chastity has been constantly demanded of a section of the population for the sake of religion alone, why is it not justifiable to expect and demand voluntary chastity, for reasons of devotion to the homeland, of all those whose reproductive efforts would merely extend degeneracy?

“Society as the trustee of Life,” says Nietzsche, “is responsible to Life for every botched existence that comes into this world, and as it has to atone for such lives, it ought to make it impossible for them to see the light of day: it should in many cases actually prevent the act of procreation, and may, without any regard for rank, descent or intellect, hold in readiness the most rigorous forms of compulsion and restriction, and under certain circumstances, have recourse to castration. The Mosaic law, ‘Thou shalt do no murder,’ is a piece of ingenious puerility compared with the earnestness of this forbidding of life to decadents, ‘Thou shalt not beget.’ For Life itself recognizes no solidarity or equality of rights between the healthy and unhealthy parts of an organism. The latter must at all cost be eliminated, lest the whole fall to pieces. Compassion for decadents, equal rights for the physiologically botched — this would be the very pinnacle of immorality; it would be setting up Nature’s most formidable opponent as morality itself!”

It is hardly possible to read the above without appreciating the extent to which its light is reflected in the eugenic legislation and general atmosphere of modern Germany. The details of much of this legislation has already been dealt with in this journal.[2] But the fact that in the Third Reich the husbandman’s concept of pity (i.e., as an emotion felt when the sound and valuable plant is in danger of being sacrificed for the unsound or worthless plant) is beginning to take the place of the urbanite’s sentimental and unreasoning pity which is felt only for morbid or abnormal existences and is prepared to succour the latter at no matter what cost to the sound — surely that is the plainest proof that Nietzsche’s inspiration is at work.

“A medical certificate as a condition of any marriage,” said Nietzsche, “endorsed by the parochial authorities, in which a series of questions addressed to the parties and the medical officers must be answered (family histories).” And he made this demand for the marriages of the future. This has already been realized legislatively, as we have seen, in modern Germany.

Turning now to political forms and the license permitted in criticizing them, Nietzsche's anti-democratic bias is of course well-known, as is also the Führer's. According to the latter, and I think rightly, democracy is the precursor of anarchy and communism, because, as the suffrage is extended to the ranks of the ignorant, the purely subjective and the foolish, who cannot see beyond the limits of their own self-interest, the democratic form of government necessarily leads to a chaotic clash of self-interested groups or sections who are prepared to see their country perish before they will yield one iota of what they conceive to be their immediate advantage. According to Nietzsche, democracy must be wrong because it means that the few successful throws of Nature's dice must be swamped by the mediocre, the inferior and the congenitally undesirable.

"I am opposed to parliamentary government and the power of the Press," he said, "because they are the means whereby cattle become masters." But today it is even worse than that. The advocates of democracy claim that it is no respecter of persons, but the real trouble is that it is no disrespector of persons. This means that parliamentary government is not only a means whereby cattle become masters, but also whereby sick and degenerate cattle become masters, and everybody, however ill-informed, is led to think that he has a right to discuss any problem.

Throughout the *Parteitag* the Führer repeatedly emphasized the value to Germany of having rid herself of her democracy, her talking institutions, her overweening loose-lipped chatterboxes, and the voice of degeneracy and impudence at her council table. And here again, like Napoleon, Bismarck, and other eminent political thinkers, he showed his appreciation of silence as a healing force in the life of a wounded, disordered nation. Referring to the sacred years of inarticulate babyhood during which, as we now know, we acquire most of what ultimately determines our character as men, de Quincey spoke of "that mighty silence which infancy is thus privileged by nature and by position to enjoy." Nietzsche, too, was well aware of the value of silence and enjoins on those who would rediscover wisdom the duty of emulating the Pythagoreans.

But in a democracy the noise of chatter never ceases, the tongue of the nation never rests, and the impudence of degenerate nonentities is pampered and defended. When, therefore, the Führer repeatedly assures Germany of the benefits of her silence, if only as a therapeutic measure, and points to the advantage which, as the silent nation, she now enjoys over all the vociferous and chattering nations of Western democracy, he once more reveals, if not the Nietzschean influence, at least a deep sympathy with the ideas of the latter-day German sage.

Notes

1. The quotations from Nietzsche's works in this article are all taken from the authorized English translation, edited by Dr Oscar Levy.

2. See Anthony M. Ludovici, "[Hitler and the Third Reich](#)," *The English Review* 63, 1936, pp. 35-41, 147-153, 231-239.

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