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THE MYSTICAL ORIGINS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

BY G. L. MOSSE

In spite of nearly thirty years of research the intellectual origins of National Socialism are still shrouded in a darkness as impenetrable as the mystical ideologies present at its beginnings. Though it is well known that Nietzsche and Wagner were among the predecessors of the movement, the intensity of German national feeling was held to be sufficient explanation for the rise of National Socialist ideology. Today we are forced to realize that a more complex cultural development gave its impress to that movement long before it crystallized into a political party.¹ At the very center of this development were ideas which were not so much of a national as of a romantic and mystical nature, part of the revolt against positivism which swept Europe at the end of the XIXth century. In Germany this revolt took a special turn, perhaps because romanticism struck deeper roots there than elsewhere. This German reaction to positivism became intimately bound up with a belief in nature's cosmic life-force, a dark force whose mysteries could be understood, not through science, but through the occult. An ideology based upon such premises was fused with the glories of an Aryan past, and in turn, that past received a thoroughly romantic and mystical interpretation.

This essay intends to throw light on this ideology and to show its connection with later German history. An obvious connection can be seen through some of the men who participated in this stream of thought, men who later became prominent in the National Socialist movement. However, it seems more meaningful to see such a connection in terms of an intellectual atmosphere rather than in terms of individuals. Moreover, with this in mind, the youth movement and the country boarding-school (*Landerziehungsheime*) provide striking examples of a continuity with the 1920's and '30's, though only a brief hint of this can be given within the framework of this essay. We are primarily concerned with the actual formation of this ideology from the 1890's to the first decade of the XXth century. This is necessary because historians have ignored this stream of thought as too outré to be taken seriously. Who indeed can take seriously an ideology which drew upon the occultism of Madame Blavatski, rejected science in favor of "seeing with one's soul," and came dangerously close to sun worship? Yet such ideas made a deep impression upon a whole nation. Historians who have dismissed these aspects of romanticism and mysticism have failed to grasp an essential and important ingredient of modern German history.

¹ Cf. Joachim Besser, "Die Vorgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus im neuen Licht," *Die Pforte*, II, 21/22 (Nov. 1950), 763-785. Cf. also Crane Brinton, "The National Socialists' Use of Nietzsche," this *Journal* (1940), 131-150.

Like all ideologies, National Socialism was formulated by certain men whose thought appealed to a wide variety of minds. It is from these men that we have drawn our examples. The early formulators of this romantic and mystic world-view were men like Paul de Lagarde (1827–1891), Guido von List (1848–1919), Alfred Schuler (1865–1923), and above all, Julius Langbehn (1851–1907).² They were popularized by publishers like Eugen Diederichs (1867–1930) of Jena, whose influence was manifest in the diverse branches of the movement. It was Langbehn who pithily summarized their common aim: “to transform Germans into artists.”³ By “artist” these men meant not a certain profession but a certain world-view opposed to that which they called the “man machine.” This transformation, which they felt had been omitted when Germany became unified, would convert the materialism and science of contemporary Germany into an artistic outlook upon the world, an outlook which would result in an all-encompassing national renewal. Such a viewpoint was connected to their belief in the cosmic life-force which opposed all that was artificial and man-made.

Langbehn in his *Rembrandt as Educator* (1890) supplied the key to this transformation: mysticism was the hidden engine which could transmute science into art.⁴ Nature-romanticism and the mystical provided the foundation for this ideology. It was no mere coincidence that Eugen Diederichs was the German publisher of Henri Bergson. He saw in Bergson a mysticism, a “new irrationalistic philosophy,”⁵ and believed that the development of Germany could only progress in opposition to rationalism. The world picture, Diederichs maintained, must be grasped by an intuition which was close to nature. From this source man’s spirit must flow and bring him into unity with the community of his people. Such true spirituality Diederichs saw

² It is significant that one common tie among all those men was their frustration in being denied academic recognition. Schuler and List were kept at arm’s length by the academic world whose company they sought, while Paul de Lagarde had to teach in a Gymnasium for twelve years before he finally obtained a chair at the University of Göttingen. Julius Langbehn failed to obtain an academic post despite repeated efforts. These experiences undoubtedly deepened their aversion to intellectualism and to what they called academic pedantry. Langbehn’s *Rembrandt as Educator* is full of diatribes against the professors whose world outlook he opposed. Such men were part of what has been called the “academic proletariat.” Langbehn eventually converted to Catholicism (1900). This is not mentioned in C. T. Carr, “Julius Langbehn—a forerunner of National Socialism,” *German Life and Letters*, III (1938–1939), 45–54. For Lagarde, see Jean-Jacques Anstett, “Paul de Lagarde,” *The Third Reich* (London, 1955). There is no modern work on List or Schuler.

³ Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig, 1900), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵ Eugen Diederichs *Leben und Werke*, ed. Lulu von Strauss und Torney-Diederichs (Jena, 1936), 180.

reflected in the German mystic Meister Eckhardt (1260?–1327?) whose works he had edited; later Alfred Rosenberg returned to Meister Eckhardt for the same reasons. Just as the romantics at the beginning of the XIXth century had opposed the “cold rationality” of antiquity and had found their way back to a more genuine humanity, so Diederichs hailed this movement as a “new romanticism.”⁶ Thus, a search for this “genuine humanity” dominated the movement, based upon a closeness to nature for the landscape gave man a heightened feeling for life. When Diederichs organized the gathering of the Free German Youth on the Hohen Meissner mountain in 1913, Ludwig Klages, the Munich philosopher, told them that modern civilization was “drowning” the soul of man. The only way out for man, who belonged to nature, was a return to mother earth.⁷ Such ideas led naturally to a deepening of the cult of the peasant. Julius Langbehn summed this up: “The peasant who actually owns a piece of land has a direct relationship to the center of the earth. Through this he becomes master of the universe.”⁸

In opposition to peasant life there was the city, the seat of cold rationalism. Indeed, this was nothing new or unique; Jacob Burckhardt had already written that in cities art became “nervous and unstable.”⁹ Throughout the XIXth century men had advocated a retreat into the unspoiled landscape away from a society rapidly becoming industrialized and urbanized. But for the “new romanticism” nature did not signify the sole source of human renewal and vitality. Mysticism played a central rôle in this movement, connected with the concern for man’s soul as an embodiment of the cosmic life-force.

Julius Langbehn cited Schiller’s phrase that “it is the soul which builds the body” and added that the outward form of the body was a silhouette of its inner life.¹⁰ The portrait painter Burger-Villingen enlarged upon this when he criticized the phrenology of Francis Gall. Gall’s measurements of the skull led to serious errors, he claimed, because they comprised only the external influences of man. The important thing was to grasp the nature of man’s fate, which was dependent upon his soul.¹¹ Thus Burger-Villingen measured the profiles of men’s faces in order to comprehend the expression of their souls. For this purpose he invented a special apparatus (a plastometer) which was much discussed in the subsequent literature. Julius Lang-

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷ *Freideutsche Jugend: Zur Jahrhundertfeier auf dem Hohen Meissner* (Jena, 1913), 98ff.

⁸ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 131.

⁹ *The Life and Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, tr. Alexander Dru (London, 1955), 225.

¹⁰ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 65.

¹¹ R. Burger-Villingen, *Geheimnis der Menschenform* (Leipzig, 1912), 23, 27.

behn wrote that researches into man's facial characteristics were a part of historical research.¹²

This remark leads into the philosophy of history of these men which provided the explanation for the mystic development of the soul from its base in nature, through the cosmic life-force. History, Diederichs wrote, is never factual but merely a thickening of the life stream of events through which, at one point or place, the universally valid laws of life become visible in reality. History could only be seen with the soul since it was the progression out of nature of the inner life-substance. It was at this point that the mystic and the occult came to the forefront. This belief in a life-force was a kind of cosmic religion to a man like Diederichs, who referred to Plato as one of his sources.¹³ Yet, in opposition to rationalism, this religion was grasped through the intuition of the soul feeling its closeness to nature.

Ernest Daqué, whose book on *Urwelt* (the primeval world) was used extensively by all these men, coined the phrase "nature somnambulism," an intuitive insight into those life-forces which determine the physical nature of man. As man got ever farther away from nature, what remained of this somnambulism was wrongly described as soothsaying or as psychological disabilities. Yet all things creative were a survival of this nature somnambulism.¹⁴ Paul de Lagarde put the same idea somewhat differently. Germans, though reaching into the future, should return to the past—a past devoid of all else but the primeval voice of nature.¹⁵ Manifestly, only those people who were closest to nature could grasp through their souls the inner, cosmic life-force which constituted the eternal.

In Vienna Guido von List set the tone for this kind of argument and fused it with the glories of an Aryan past. Nature was the great Divine guide and from her flowed the life-force. Whatever was closest to nature would therefore be closest to the truth.¹⁶ List believed that the Aryan past was the most "genuine" manifestation of this inner force. It was closest to nature and therefore farthest removed from artificiality—from modern materialism and rationalism. Thus he set himself the task of recreating this past. Given the philosophy of history common to these men, they looked down upon any scholarly disciplines such as archeology: "We must read with our souls the landscape which archeology reconquers with the spade." Again, List advised: "If you want to lift the veil of mystery [i.e., of the past] you must fly into the loneliness of nature."¹⁷ List's ideas

¹² Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 315.

¹³ *Eugen Diederichs*, 74, 452.

¹⁴ Quoted in the National Socialist article: Karl Friedrich Weiss, "Individualismus und Sozialismus," I, *Der Weltkampf*, IV (1927), 66–70.

¹⁵ *Paul de Lagarde, Lebensbild und Auswahl*, ed. K. Boesch (Augsburg, 1924), 52.

¹⁶ Johannes Baltzli, *Guido von List* (Vienna, 1917), 18, 23. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26, 27.

were brought to Germany largely through the efforts of Alfred Schuler of Munich. This remarkable man, who never published a line, attracted to his person men like Rilke and George. His circle of admirers maintained that Schuler "saw with his soul" and could reconstruct the past by simply using his inward eye. To a small coterie of friends Schuler lectured on the nature of the city. Urbanism was condemned and equated with the intellectual's alleged materialism which supposedly perverted their thought. Against this equation were those adepts whose "idealism" could only stem from the mysterious call of the blood, the true creative instinct.¹⁸

For Schuler the inner life-force was equated with the strength of the blood, an equation common to other writers as well. He fulminated against the shallowness of soulless men ignorant of nature and its life-forces, an ignorance epitomized, he thought, in the Jewish poet Karl Wolfskehl blaspheming: "People are my landscape."¹⁹ Significantly, Schuler believed this life-force could be manipulated through spiritualism. He tried to cure Nietzsche's madness through an ancient Roman spirit rite. Klages was to lure Stefan George to a séance where Schuler would take over George's soul, transmuting it into a living receptacle of cosmic fire. George, stubbornly obdurate, was appalled by the proceedings, and after the séance demanded that Klages accompany him to a café where settled bourgeois, ordinary people, drank beer and smoked their cigars.²⁰ In Klages' eyes he was henceforth condemned, though any historian analyzing the thoughts of these men might easily sympathize with George.

Schuler and Klages were not alone in believing the inner life-force to be akin to spiritualism. Indeed, the mysticism which, as Langbehn put it, transformed science into art, was precisely this life-force defined in terms of the occult. The ideology of this movement had direct ties with those occult and spiritualist movements which were in vogue toward the end of the century. Such ties were especially fostered by Theosophy. The opposition to positivism in Germany fed upon movements which in the rest of Europe were regarded as "fads" rather than as serious world views. In Germany the belief in the life-force or cosmic religion embodied in the blood, which all things Aryan truly represented, led to a world view which gave special status to those who were "initiates" of such mysteries.

The similarity of these ideas to the occult was noted by contemporaries. Franz Hartmann, himself a leading German-American Theosophist, remarked upon the similarity of List's ideas to those of Madame Blavatski, the foundress of Theosophy. This he did by com-

¹⁸ Alfred Schuler, *Fragmente und Vorträge aus dem Nachlass*, Einführung von Ludwig Klages (Leipzig, 1940), 33, 159.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰ Claude David, *Stefan George* (Paris, 1952), 200.

paring List's *Bilderschrift* to Madame Blavatski's *Isis Unveiled*. For just as List attempted to tear the veil from the true wisdom of the ancient Germans, so Blavatski revealed the surviving traces of a "secret science" in ancient and medieval sources. Their principles, she maintained, had been lost from view and suppressed; in like manner List claimed that Christianity had tried to wipe out the language of the ancient Germans, thus destroying their true nature wisdom.²¹ List believed that this lost language could be found in the mystic writings of the Kabbalah, mistakenly thought to be Jewish, but in reality a compilation of ancient German wisdom which had survived persecution. Madame Blavatski made identical use of the Kabbalah; she, too, rejected its Jewish origins, considering it a survival of true and secret wisdom.²² Hartmann himself, attracted by such parallelisms, became one of List's leading supporters.

But we can go further than this. Madame Blavatski's *Isis Unveiled* was concerned with a study of nature. She attempted to study nature as she thought the ancients had studied it, in relation not so much to its outward form but to its inward meaning. Thus she also saw nature as being eternally transmitted through a life force which she thought of as an omnipresent vital ether, electro-spiritual in composition.²³ This vague idea directly influenced men of the 1920's like Herbert Reichstein, who believed that the first Aryan was created by an electric shock directly out of this ether. They called their theory "theozoology."²⁴ Her approach was, in general, similar to those exponents of the life-force we have discussed; she, too, felt that seeing with one's soul was the reality and deplored scientific methods.

There is, however, a still closer relationship of these two bodies of thought through their use of imagery. For Madame Blavatski, fire was the universal soul substance, and this led Franz Hartmann to state that it was the sun which was the external manifestation of an invisible spiritual power.²⁵ For the men we have discussed, the image of the Aryan coming out of the sun was common. The painter Fidus, so closely associated with the German youth movement, used this motif constantly. This popular painter believed that it was not enough for the artist to faithfully reproduce nature. Painting, for Fidus, was a transmission from the extrasensory world.²⁶ His paint-

²¹ Baltzli, *Guido von List*, 45; Franz Hartmann (1838–1912); Helena Petrovna Blavatski (1831–1891); Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy* (New York, 1930), 116–117.

²² Baltzli, *Guido von List*, 55n.; Kuhn, *Theosophy*, 144.

²³ *Ibid.*, 135, 133.

²⁴ Besser, "Die Vorgeschichte . . ." *loc. cit.*, 773.

²⁵ Franz Hartmann, *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme* (Boston, 1891), 166n. 1.

²⁶ *Erste Gesamtausstellung der Werke von Fidus zu seinem 60. Geburtstage* (Woltersdorf bei Erkner, 1928), 9, 11.

ings included studies of astral symbolism, as well as designs for theosophic temples. It was he who painted the official picture to symbolize the Hohen Meissner gathering. Best known, however, were his paintings, bordered by theosophic symbols, on themes such as the "wanderers into the sun"—girl and boy wandering hand in hand, surrounded by growing plants, their nude boyish bodies translucent before a blazing sun.

Eugen Diederichs was also deeply concerned with such symbolism. He founded, in 1910, the so-called Sera circle in Jena. Its symbol was a red and golden flag with the sun as centerpiece. The main activities of this circle centered in the youth movement: excursions, folk dances, and above all, the old Germanic festival of the "changing sun."²⁷ Here Germanic custom and spiritualist symbolism were intertwined. For Diederichs also the sun was the creator of life, a reaffirmation of the prime importance of those cosmic forces which underlay all reality.²⁸

Langbehn himself maintained that "a theologian should always be somewhat of a theosophist" to compensate for the formalism inherent in his profession. He saw a similar value in spiritualism in general. His criticism of contemporary occultism was not that it was wrong, but that it was misdirected, searching through professional mediums for spirits where there were none.²⁹ Such a linkage between theosophy and the *völkisch* world view will remain throughout the movement's history. This can be conclusively demonstrated through *Prana*, which called itself a German monthly for applied spiritualism and which was published by the theosophical publishing house at Leipzig. The editor was Johannes Balzli, the secretary of the Guido von List society, founded to spread the "master's" teaching and to finance his publications. Franz Hartmann, himself an honorary member of that society, was one of *Prana's* most frequent contributors as was C. W. Leadbetter, the stormy Anglican curate whom Madame Blavatski had taken with her to India and who later became Annie Besant's Svengali. Guido von List himself contributed to its pages, while Fidus provided most of the illustrations. The word "Prana" was taken to mean the power of the sun, the visible symbol of God, and "all present." This in turn was to be the sign of the "new Germany."³⁰

In *Prana's* pages we find ideas on food and medicine which were common to this movement. Medical science was universally deplored in favor of spiritual healing, and the eating of meat was said to impede not only spiritual progress but the understanding of nature and

²⁷ *Eugen Diederichs*, 171, 220, 297.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

²⁹ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 93. "With a dose of mysticism one can gild the life of a nation" (203).

³⁰ *Prana, Organ für angewandte Geisteswissenschaften*, VI, 1-2 (1915), 4.

the life-force.³¹ Theosophists linked the flesh of animals to their undeveloped intelligence; eating meat would thus induce animal coarseness in humans. *Prana's* writers further elaborated this idea, adding that meat could not increase life for it was lifeless and thus led to death.³² The medical and vegetarian vagaries of Adolf Hitler were intimately linked with the mystic, Aryan ideology found in the pages of *Prana*, though *Prana* was not the only journal that reflected this mixture of thought.

That such ideas marched into the 1920's with renewed vigor can be seen in the case of Arthur Dinter, who rose to prominence as an early National Socialist in the '20's. As a National Socialist deputy he played a leading rôle in the overthrow of the socialist government of Thuringia in 1924 and subsequently became the editor of the "National Socialist" published in Weimar. His celebrated racial novel "The Sin Against the Blood" attained a large circulation. Though his companion novel "The Sin Against the Spirit" never proved as popular, it combined the racial ideology of his first book with episodes which could have been taken directly from Madame Blavatski. For him the racial ideas of a man like Houston Stewart Chamberlain made sense only when they were integrated with his own spiritualistic experiences. Dinter made liberal use of such theosophist concepts as the astral ether, the sun, and the idea of rebirth (Karma).³³ For Lanz von Liebenfels, another of *Prana's* favorites, the term "Ariosophy" meant a combination of such ideas with a world view centered upon the Germanic past.³⁴ Small wonder that the industrialist who was the principal financial contributor to Guido von List's society was also an ardent spiritualist.³⁵

This, then, was the mysticism which transformed science into art. When these men called upon Germans to be artists they wanted them to recognize that their true soul was an expression of the cosmic spirit of the world based upon nature. Possession of such a spirit meant recalling that which was truly genuine, the Germanic past, as opposed to modern and evil rationalism. Langbehn, so often cited by his successors, felt this to be the only true individualism in a world of mass man. This individualism would lead to the creation of an organic

³¹ *Ibid.*, 348-349. Nourishment and the development of the soul go hand in hand. Anti-alcoholism plays an important rôle here as well. At the Hohen Meissner gathering the Temperance League said that it too wanted to serve the race. *Freideutsche Jugend*, 16; see also Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 296-297.

³² Kuhn, *Theosophy*, 297; *Prana*, 46-47.

³³ Arthur Dinter, *Die Suende wider den Geist* (Leipzig, 1921), 236.

³⁴ Besser, "Die Vorgeschichte . . .," 773.

³⁵ Baltzli, *Guido von List*, 185. His name was Friedrich Wannieck; he contributed more to the List society than all other members put together (79). Wannieck and Franz Hartmann had at least one séance together (185).

human being in contact with cosmic forces. These forces were conceived in spiritualist terms, though Langbehn's touchstone was not Madame Blavatski, but Swedenborg. To him this mystic was the ideal German type.³⁶ In a similar manner Diederichs came to see the identical image reflected in Meister Eckhardt.³⁷

Such a philosophy of life did not need spiritualistic mediums in order to penetrate the "secret mysteries." Indeed, for List the past came alive in the very human shape of Tarnhari, who called himself the chief of the lost German tribe of the *Völsungen*. The tribal traditions, which he related from his fund of ancestral memories confirmed List's own researches. Tarnhari promptly produced several works of his own in which he told "family stories going back to pre-historic times." The stone of wisdom had come alive. It is symptomatic that this impressed Ellegard Ellerbeck, later one of the chief ornaments of National Socialist literature. As he wrote to List, "reading yours and Tarnhari's works I realize again that Ar [Aryan] lives laughingly."³⁸

One idea implied in all of this must be stressed. Only he who had ties with the genuine past could have a true soul, could be an organic and not a materialistic human being. Such ties were conceived of as being inherited. The genuine spirit of the ancestors was cumulative in their progeny. For Guido von List as for his successors, only the Aryan could grasp the "mysteries" of life which governed the world. These ideas allowed Langbehn not only to stress once more the virtue of a settled and ancient Germanic peasantry, but of a hereditary monarchy as well. A hereditary monarch was not merely someone elevated from the masses like the president of a republic. In the government of the nation such a monarch would be aided by the "natural aristocracy." This aristocracy did not derive solely from an inheritance of status; every German could be a part of it if he threw off rationalism and became again an "artist"—the organic man.³⁹ Such a man was Rembrandt, in Langbehn's opinion; writing his book *Rembrandt as Educator (Erzieher)*, he hoped to influence Germans through a striking example. The end result was to be the creation of an organic state where there would be neither "bourgeois," nor "proletarians," nor "junkers," but only the "people" linked together in a common creativity (now become possible), and united in a bond of brotherhood. Classes would not be abolished; as Langbehn put it: "Equality is death. A corporate society is life."⁴⁰

³⁶ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 94–95. Blavatski and G. R. S. Meade believed that "of all mystics, Swedenborg has certainly influenced Theosophy most . . .," though his powers did not go beyond the plane of matter. H. P. Blavatski, *The Theosophical Glossary* (Hollywood, 1918), 293.

³⁷ Eugen Diederichs, 15.

³⁸ Baltzli, *Guido von List*, 155, 199.

³⁹ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 130–131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158, 159.

In his first book, H. F. K. Günther, later to become the chief racial expert of the Third Reich, sketched such a social ideal. Human rights have today pre-empted the place of human duties. These duties, formerly expressed in the loyalty of the knightly gentleman to his king and generalized throughout society in the web of reciprocal loyalties between landlord and peasant, must once again become the cement of social organization. To Günther, "the community, the public good, demands that every profession fulfill the work which is its due."⁴¹ Manifestly, such a social ideal found in all these men, continued the impetus of romanticism. It was reminiscent of that Bavarian deputy who earlier in the XIXth century believed that "Love" would cure the tensions between laborer and employer. In an immediate sense it was a part of the ideal of an organic society which reflected organic man. Langbehn was explicit in his insistence that true individualism could only be realized in such a social order. He considered liberal individualism a part of materialism, dissolving society into incompatible units rather than knitting it together.⁴² Paul de Lagarde summarized this in one of those phrases which made him so popular: "That man is not free who can do as he likes, but he is free who does what he should do. Free is he who is able to follow his creative principle of life; free is that man who recognizes and makes effective the innate principles which God put within him."⁴³

Such freedom led to an organic view of man and the state. Not only was liberalism mistaken, but socialism as well. Social democracy, Diederichs claimed, was mechanistic; a true people's state was viable only if it reorganized society in a more meaningful manner, according to the aristocratic principle, the only environment in which men could unfold their real inner selves.⁴⁴ Langbehn concluded that this corporate structure not only fulfilled the aristocratic principle but was also in tune with the Germanic past. Significantly, this ideal urged these men to advocate only one concrete social reform: each worker should be given his own plot of land.⁴⁵ Again, the reform's justification was sought not in terms of material welfare within the framework of the movement's general ideology—factory work removed man from the all-important contact with nature.

Yet these men desired the transformation of their ideology into deeds. It is of great significance that while Diederichs used the word "theosophy" in the first prospectus of his publishing house, he came to be critical of that movement—not because it was spiritualist, but

⁴¹ H. F. K. Günther, *Ritter, Tod und Teufel* (1920). Quoted in R. Walther Darré, *Das Bauernthum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (Munich, 1937), 97. Darré was the National Socialist Minister of Agriculture.

⁴² Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 5.

⁴³ Paul de Lagarde, 96.

⁴⁴ Eugen Diederichs, 351–352.

⁴⁵ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 158, 160.

because it was too purely speculative in nature. The feeling about infinity must lead to deeds, and to his important journal, he gave the name *Die Tat*, "The Deed."⁴⁶ Paul de Lagarde had already made it plain that while something was accomplished through the understanding of true ideology, it was even more important to transform such ideals into serious practical action.⁴⁷ It was an "idealism of deeds" which such men desired, deeds which helped to create a nation resting upon this idealistic foundation. Through such a concept, ideas of force came to play an important rôle in this ideology. For Langbehn, art and war went hand in hand. His proof was by a method representative of his whole work. Shakespeare's name meant, after all, shaking a spear, and this for him was proof of the connection between art and war. Moreover, in German spear (*Speer*) and army (*Wehr*) are words which rhyme. Thus in the Germanic past, true individual development had gone hand in hand with war.⁴⁸

The lineaments of this "idealism of deeds" clearly emerge in the poetry of Avenarius, the first author of Diederichs' publishing house. Happiness was not the goal of life. What was important for the poet was the strength and wealth of the soul and this strength depended upon the degree to which nature reflected itself within it. This whole feeling must be grounded in honesty and rootedness. But such ideals, in turn, must be sharpened through conflict with the non-believing world around them. Struggle becomes, therefore, a necessity. Avenarius as a poet gave due honor to the good fight honestly waged; poets must sympathize with the use of force. As one of the commentators of his poetry declared: "His is a true Germanic personality which is proud and straight, knows the bitter hate against all which is cowardly and fraudulent. Such ideas are a reminder not to let the soul degenerate through mildness."⁴⁹

The "idealism of deeds" postulated the use of force to establish and defend a Germany based upon this romantic and mystic ideology. It was to be used not to destroy the existing social structure but to create and perpetuate the organic state. One employed force against the enemy—that materialistic and rationalistic culture which had undermined the weakened and retreating Aryan by divorcing him from nature's life-force. The Jew, the creature of urbanism and materialism, typified this enemy within the gates. To Langbehn, Berlin and the Jew were the components of a conspiracy inimical to German revival, just as later a National Socialist writer exclaimed that *völkisch*

⁴⁶ *Eugen Diederichs*, 72. On the *Tat* see Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism* (Princeton, 1957), 97-100.

⁴⁷ *Paul de Lagarde*, 64.

⁴⁸ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 218-219.

⁴⁹ Gerhard Heine, *Fred. Avenarius als Dichter* (Leipzig, 1904), 45.

thought would triumph in the provinces, not in the cities. Berlin, above all, was the domain of the Jews.⁵⁰ Perhaps such considerations led to the anxious question in an issue of the National Socialist *Weltkampf* concerning Madame Blavatski's Jewish origins, to which the comforting (and true) answer was given that she was of Baltic extraction.⁵¹

To their hatred of the Jews, these men added an ambivalent attitude toward Christianity. Ludwig Klages continued a trend which derived from Guido von List, who had linked victorious Christianity to the virtual extinction of the ancient Germanic nature wisdom. He regarded it as his life's task to resurrect this wisdom. Klages believed that the course of a victorious Christianity was plotted from "a center" inimical to the Aryans.⁵² Thus a universal Christian conspiracy against the truth was placed next to the universal Jewish conspiracy, a conspiracy documented by the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. With Lagarde and others, this developed into a Catholic-Jesuit conspiracy linked, so they asserted, to the Jewish world conspiracy itself.⁵³ Men like Diederichs and Langbehn were in a quandry, however, for they did not deem it wise to reject Christianity altogether. Protestantism as the German form of Christianity, in opposition to the Catholic conspiracy, was their solution to the problem. Their distrust of Christianity led them to reject Christ conceived as an historical figure; instead they tried to assimilate Him to their concept of the life-force.

This could be done, as did Schuler, by holding Christ to be merely the most important of the "initiates" into the Germanic wisdom. For List, all the great "initiates," Buddah, Osiris, and Moses were Saxons.⁵⁴ More popular, however, was Houston Stewart Chamberlain's and Langbehn's idea of Christ as the Aryan prototype. Diederichs believed, as did Lagarde (and indeed, all of the men discussed), that St. Paul, the Jew, had made Christ into a Jewish figure, imprisoning him within the confines of theological thought. Instead, Christ was at one with the cosmic spirit, a spirit best understood not through scripture but through such mystics as Diederich's favorite, Meister Eckhardt.⁵⁵ He spent much of his energy propagating this kind of

⁵⁰ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 113, Tudel Weller, *Rabaukeñ! Peter Moenkemann haut sich durch* (Munich, 1938), 114; cf. George L. Mosse, "Culture, Civilization and German Anti-Semitism," *Judaism*, VII, 3 (Summer 1958), 256-267.

⁵¹ *Weltkampf*, IV (1927), 189.

⁵² Baltzli, *Guido von List*, 29; Klages in Schuler, *Fragmente*, 43.

⁵³ *Paul de Lagarde*, 104.

⁵⁴ Schuler, *Fragmente*, 163ff.; Review of Guido von List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysterien-Sprache in Prana*, VI, 11-12 (February-March 1916), 560.

⁵⁵ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 353, *Eugen Diederichs*, 84-85; Anstett, "Paul de Lagarde," *loc. cit.*, 184.

Christianity. The chief advisor to his publishing house was Alfred Drews, who in his *Myth of Christ (Die Christus Mythe)*, published by Diederichs, attacked the historicity of the Christ figure. Similarly, Munich's *völkish* publisher, J. F. Lehmann, spent his time furthering an identical evangelism, agitating against the theologians of the organized churches who were as inimical to the "idealism of deeds" as were the Jews themselves. Indeed, such a view of Christ rendered the Old Testament null and void; Arthur Dinter suggested that it be banned from the schools.⁵⁶

Langbehn combined this view of Christ with the ideal of force. Germans, he wrote, should model themselves upon the medieval bishops who advanced, sword in hand, against their enemies. Such Christianity fitted into a German and mystical context, which symbolized a humanity which knew the necessity of force. "Humanity wants what is best, the fighter accomplishes what is best."⁵⁷

Here also art and war must be combined. Yet this concept of Christianity rested on slight foundations. Diederichs, for one, realized this when he wrote that the very word Christ made him "nervous." He never tried to disguise the heathen quality of his *Sera* circle.⁵⁸ By fusing Christ with the life-spirit of the Aryan these men wanted to create a national religion. One of the attractions of Swedenborg for Langbehn was the fact that Swedenborg posited a separate heaven for each nation and thus recognized the importance of the national factor in religion.⁵⁹ Luther, however, was their real hero, for these men saw in him a truly national religious figure who rejected theology, so they thought.

These are the principle facets of an ideology which was to pass into the National Socialist movement. This was the "race mysticism" about which men like Günther and Rosenberg wrote. Out of this mixture of the romantic and the occult the Aryan arose: sometimes out of the sun, sometimes through a historical process, but always as a true, organic individual—a part of nature and of the life-force which springs from nature. Guido von List sang of the Aryan during the ice age engaged in building his spiritual and bodily strength in the hard fight with nature, arising quite differently than other races who lived without struggle in the midst of a bountiful world.⁶⁰ For the element of struggle was always a part of this ideology; art and

⁵⁶ Melanie Lehmann, *Verleger J. F. Lehmann; Ein Leben im Kampf für Deutschland* (Munich, 1935), 23ff. Lehmann was intimately involved with the growth of the National Socialist party in Munich.

⁵⁷ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 326–327.

⁵⁸ Eugen Diederichs, 73.

⁵⁹ Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 95.

⁶⁰ Guido von List, *Die Namen der Völkerstämme Germaniens und deren Deutung* (Leipzig, 1909), 4.

battle go together. This, however, was not the Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest, but rather the good fight of the Aryan who was eternally of the elect. The effectiveness of Dacqué's book in overcoming the "English disease," Darwinism, was noted by a National Socialist journal of the 1920's. Darwinism was of one cloth with political democracy; both dissolved the organic unity of man as part of nature, and Darwinism did so through survival of the fittest.⁶¹ The Aryan was the sole organic man and his task was not a struggle for survival against equals, for he had none. Instead, his was an inner struggle to recapture his unique heritage and an outward struggle to rid himself of Jews and theologians. Alfred Rosenberg had this in mind when he wrote of the "romanticism of steel"; the revolution against capitalist bourgeois society could only have reality if it served the permanent values of blood in revolt.⁶²

The men we have singled out for analysis were some of the chief purveyors of this thought. There were a host of others. A list of organizations sponsoring the meeting at the Hohen Meissner makes this amply clear. The German youth movement has entered this story at every turn. Undoubtedly the *Wandervögel* were one of the prime transmitters of the movement's thought. They too rejected intellectualism for the mystique of contact with nature. Excursions brought out the "real man" as opposed to the artificial man of modern material culture. For Fischer, the founder of that movement, romanticism was an expression of national feeling with an explicit racial base. Blüher, the controversial historian of the *Wandervögel*, reminisced that in the movement's early days consciousness of race sufficed to join soul to nature.⁶³ Closely associated with the youth movement were the country boarding-schools founded by Hermann Lietz (1898). These schools, which later had a great influence, institutionalized many of the ideas we have discussed. One admirer said correctly that "in Lietz's hands the regenerating natural forces of agriculture and rural life were made to work for the education of men."⁶⁴ Lietz believed that the emphasis in education should not be on book learning but on building character through contact with the landscape of the fatherland and knowledge of the Teutonic inheritance. The end product of this educational process was to be an aristocracy of men and women who would not "bend their knees" before

⁶¹ *Weltkampf*, IV (1927), 92.

⁶² Alfred Rosenberg, "Rebellion der Jugend," *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, Heft 2 (May 1930), 50ff.

⁶³ Hans Blüher, *Wandervögel, Geschichte einer Jugendbewegung* (Berlin, 1916), II, 83ff. Blüher blamed Christianity for the degeneration of the pure romantic of the *Wandervögel* (172).

⁶⁴ Alfred Andreesen, *Hermann Lietz* (Munich, 1934), 101.

the Moloch of capitalism and materialism. Instead, they would stand for an ideal which represented in Lietz's words a "purer religious world of thought and feeling." For the sake of this ideal such leaders would take up the fight against the "dark" instincts of the masses.⁶⁵

This religious world Lietz saw in terms of a Christianity which, as for the others, was divorced from Christ as a historical personage. In Paul de Lagarde he saw the theologian nearest to his position. Christ must be rescued from St. Paul and emerge again as a hero image: thus young Germans could be inspired to an active, heroic life. For this task the ancient German and Grecian religious myths were more valuable than the Old Testament, which Lietz also rejected.⁶⁶ Lietz developed these ideas into an explicit racism. At first he took Jewish students into his school, but he gradually banned them from his educational system. Toward the end of his life, after the German defeat in the world war, he began to write about the necessity of freeing Germany from the "Jewish spirit" and from all those who were moved by it.⁶⁷

Typical for Lietz's attitudes was the change which he made in the English system of student self-government, a system which had originally impressed him and had, in a sense, inspired his work. He substituted for this the "family" system—each teacher was supposed to be the "father" of a small group of students. The difference of class and status were to be displaced by an "organic state."⁶⁸ This led to a break with some of his associates who believed, as Lietz did not, in the reasonableness of the majority and thus wished educational decisions to be made by students and faculty jointly. The ideal of the organic state was thus mirrored in the structure of the schools themselves. As he wrote toward the end of his life: only the organic, that which is in tune with nature,⁶⁹ will last. Here too Lietz was close to the ideology we have discussed. It is small wonder that the list of books which he recommended for reading aloud to students during the evening hour set aside for that purpose included racial-nationalistic novels and ended by recommending the books published by Eugen Diederichs. Diederichs, in turn, longed to publish Lietz's works, while Lehmann actually published books which furthered his

⁶⁵ Hermann Lietz, *Deutsche Nationalerziehung* (Weimar, 1938), 123–124.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 114, 120; H. Lietz, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Weimar, 1935), 41, 47. Christ symbolized struggle (189).

⁶⁷ For his developing attitude towards Jews see Lietz, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 115. From 1909 on, only students of Aryan descent were admitted (161). On the Jewish spirit, see Lietz, *Deutsche Nationalerziehung*, 14.

⁶⁸ *Lebenserinnerungen*, 194; Andreesen, *Hermann Lietz*, iii; for Lietz's own hymn on patriarchal society, see *Lebenserinnerungen*, 194.

⁶⁹ Hermann Lietz, *Des Vaterlandes Not und Hoffnung* (Haubinda, 1934), 86.

cause, and sent his sons to one of Lietz's schools. Nor is it astonishing that one of his leading collaborators became one of the most prominent of National Socialist educators.⁷⁰

Again, in this case, personal continuities were not as important as the furthering, indeed institutionalizing, of a cultural atmosphere. After the first world war many country boarding schools were founded, some by prominent men like Prinz Max von Baden. Their aim was a national, spiritual renewal based on the principles which Lietz had set forth. To be sure, some substituted a broad non-national humanitarian outlook, while others adopted Lietz's ideas without giving them an explicit racial base. Yet the atmosphere was set; its romanticism and "idealism of deeds" colored the thought of those generations who had passed through the country boarding schools and the youth movement.

Transmitted in this way, the romantic and mystic ideology with which we have been concerned drew ever widening circles into its sphere of influence, even if among these many later rejected National Socialism. Among those influenced were some of the best literary minds of contemporary Germany. Stefan George came under the influence of Schuler and Klages at the same time that he composed some of the "cosmic" poems of his *Seventh Ring (Der Siebente Ring)*. Claude David has no hesitation in saying that the hand of this group of men is seen in some of Rilke's *Elegies*.⁷¹ Still more actively involved with the movement was August Strindberg. He participated in the ancient Germanic rites which Lanz von Liebenfels, with List's assistance, performed in one of his Hungarian castles.⁷² Strindberg's novel *Tschandala* took over a word which List and Liebenfels had used to designate the lower races.

In Germany the recovery of the unconscious, in reaction against the dominant positivist ideologies, laid the groundwork for the German form of XXth-century totalitarianism. This reaction combined the deep stream of German romanticism with the mysteries of the occult as well as with the idealism of deeds. What sort of deeds these turned out to be is written in blood on the pages of history.

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⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 76. *Eugen Diederichs*, 64; Lehmann, *Verleger*, 38, 277. The close collaborator was Alfred Andreesen, from 1909 his deputy director at Bieberstein. Lietz, in his social-political confession of faith during the war, tells of his allegiance to the world view of German idealism. *Lebenserinnerungen*, 196. The schools were also represented on the Hohen Meissner in 1913 (*Freideutsche Jugend*, 18).

⁷¹ David, *Stefan George*, 208.

⁷² For the relationship of Strindberg and Lanz von Liebenfels, see Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann Der Hitler Die Ideen Gab* (Munich, 1958), 92-99.