ADOLF HITLER: NIGHTMARE OF OUR CENTURY

1889 Born in Braunau, Austria
1914–1918 Served in World War I
1921 Became chairman of the National Socialist German Workers’ party (the Nazi party)
1923 Munich beer hall Putsch
1924–1927 Wrote Mein Kampf
1933 Became chancellor of Germany
1939 German invasion of Poland; beginning of World War II
1945 Died by suicide

In the early 1920s, the Bavarian city of Munich was a gathering place for the most militant and dissatisfied groups of German war veterans. They despised the weak government of the postwar Weimar Republic; they hated the allies who had defeated Germany in World War I and now seemed bent upon destroying it in peace; and they were desperate in the face of German economic collapse, unemployment, and runaway inflation. In this kind of setting, with a weak and harassed central government far away and the Bavarian state authorities—already distrustful of the national government and disposed to separatism—unwilling or unable to threaten them, a rash of splinter political parties flourished. These parties fought bitterly for support among the veterans and among the equally dissatisfied and hard-pressed working classes from which the bulk of the veterans came. At one extreme were the Communists; at the other a cluster of right-wing extremist groups, which, though they battled each other for supporters, shared a hatred for the Communists and for the Jews, who were a handy—and hated—minority to seize upon. One of these right-wing parties was the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei—Nazi for short. From 1921 its leader was Adolf Hitler.

In November 1923, Hitler and his party command conceived a plan for a Putsch, an armed uprising to capture the leaders of the Bavarian state government and force them to proclaim a revolution
against the Weimar Republic. It was to be the beginning of a new
Germany. Hitler had gained the cooperation of General Erich von
Ludendorff, one of Germany’s war heroes and a right-wing, nationalist
fanatic himself, and he was confident that Ludendorff’s presence
would prevent the military’s intervening against the coup. He was
also sure that he could count on the Bavarian government’s growing
hostility toward the government in Berlin. On the evening of Novem-
ber 8, the Bavarian authorities announced a rally and meeting to be
held in a Munich beer hall. Hitler and his fellow party leaders—
supported by a considerable force of private military police and
strong-arm hoodlums already known as stormtroopers—broke into
the meeting. They hustled the government officials at gunpoint into
a side room and forced them to proclaim a German revolution with
Hitler as dictator. As soon as the officials were released, however, they
repudiated their action. On the following morning, when the rebels
attempted to march on the War Ministry building, they were met by
the police. A skirmish ensued and sixteen Nazis were killed. Two days
later, Hitler was arrested. The “beer hall Putsch” had been a total
failure.

The apparently ruined politician who was so ignominiously han-
dled by the Munich police in those autumn days of 1923 had been
born in nearby Austria, just across the Bavarian border, in the little
town of Braunau, in 1889. The details of his early life are sketchy and
contradictory. Hitler’s own later accounts of his youth differed as the
circumstances demanded, and he generally preferred to remain some-
what mysterious.

His father had been an older man, a retired customs official, stern
and domineering. His mother was much younger, usually domi-
nated—if not brutalized—by her husband and idolized by her son.
Her death in 1907 was a crushing blow to Hitler. Soon after his
mother’s death, with his mediocre career in high school completed,
Hitler went to Vienna, hoping to be admitted to the state school of
art. He failed the entrance examination twice and then drifted into
the Viennese underworld of poverty and crime, often near starva-
tion, though he occasionally found work as a sign and postcard
painter.

Hitler then went to Munich, and there, with the outbreak of World
War I, he joined the German army. Despite a relatively undistin-
guished military record—he rose only to corporal’s rank—the war
was the high point in Hitler’s life. He belonged at last to a substantial,
honored organization engaged in a noble and desperately contested
cause. In 1918, as the war was ending, Hitler was hospitalized as the
result of a gas attack, and, though not seriously injured, he suffered
temporary blindness and loss of speech.

After the war, Hitler joined the obscure political party he was later
him being the restoration of the German glory that had come to ruin in 1918. By the time of the failure of the beer hall *Putsch*, Hitler was a known figure in German radical politics. He should have been finished by the fiasco of the *Putsch*, but he was not. In 1923 his career was only just beginning.
Mein Kampf

ADOLF HITLER

At the insistence of the Bavarian authorities, Hitler and the other leaders of the Putsch were tried, not in the federal court, but in a provincial Bavarian court and given the minimum sentence of five years—of which Hitler served less than nine months—in nearby Landsberg prison. In prison he was treated more like an exiled head of state than a common criminal, with exemption from work details, extended visiting hours for the streams of political dignitaries that came to see him, and other special privileges. Despite the failure of his uprising, Hitler still commanded several thousand irregular stormtroopers, even though they were scattered throughout Bavaria. And no one knew how many members his party had, nor the exact extent of his influence. It was in Landsberg prison that his secretary, Rudolf Hess, suggested to Hitler the title der Führer (the leader). Hitler liked it and adopted it. It was also in prison that he wrote the book “frequently asked of me” by his followers, which he intended to be “useful for the Movement.”

He called it Mein Kampf (My Struggle).

The title suggests an autobiography, and in part the work is an autobiography, though with much falsification of fact. It is also a political polemic against communism and a distorted vision of history, rife with the most savage and hate-filled racism. But most of all, Mein Kampf is a vision of the future as Hitler intended it to be under the domination of his party—the Movement. In this respect, the book is both a political manifesto and an incredible step-by-step prescription for what he planned to do. One of the most thoughtful modern scholars of Mein Kampf, Werner Maser, has observed that “from 1925 until his suicide in April 1945, Hitler clung faithfully to the ghastly doctrine set out in Mein Kampf,” and, even more amazingly, despite the notoriety of his doctrine, “he was able to seize power to consolidate it and to carry the German people with him into the abyss.”

The passage excerpted below is from the first chapter of the second volume of Mein Kampf, written in 1927 after Hitler’s release from prison. In it he recalls “the first great public demonstration” of the Movement in Munich in 1920. This was the eve of Hitler’s takeover of the Nazi party, which was already committed to his ideas. These ideas—world conquest, brutal direct action, glorification of power, Aryan racial supremacy, anti-Semitism, and anticommunism—show up starkly in the selection that follows.

On February 24, 1920, the first great public demonstration of our young movement took place. In the festsaal [banquet hall] of the Mu-

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1Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Stackpole, 1939), p. 11.
A Hofbräuhaus the twenty-five theses of the new party's program were submitted to a crowd of almost two thousand and every single point was accepted amid jubilant approval.

With this the first guiding principles and directives were issued for a struggle which was to do away with a veritable mass of old traditional conceptions and opinions and with unclear, yes, harmful aims. Into the rotten and cowardly bourgeois world and into the triumphant march of the Marxist wave of conquest a new power phenomenon was entering, which at the eleventh hour would halt the chariot of doom.

It was self-evident that the new movement could hope to achieve the necessary importance and the required strength for this gigantic struggle only if it succeeded from the very first day in arousing in the hearts of its supporters the holy conviction that with it political life was to be given, not to a new election slogan, but to a new philosophy of fundamental significance.

Since with all parties of a so-called bourgeois orientation in reality the whole political struggle actually consists in nothing but a mad rush for seats in parliament, in which convictions and principles are thrown overboard like sand ballast whenever it seems expedient, their programs are naturally tuned accordingly and—inversely, to be sure—their forces also measured by the same standard. They lack that great magnetic attraction which alone the masses always follow under the compelling impact of towering great ideas, the persuasive force of absolute belief in them, coupled with a fanatical courage to fight for them.

In the first volume I have dealt with the word "folkish," in so far as I was forced to establish that this term seems inadequately defined to permit the formation of a solid fighting community. All sorts of people, with a yawning gulf between everything essential in their opinions, are running around today under the blanket term "folkish." Therefore, before I proceed to the tasks and aims of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, I should like to give a clarification of the concept "folkish," as well as its relation to the party movement.

The concept "folkish" seems as vaguely defined, open to as many interpretations and as unlimited in practical application as, for instance, the word "religious...." In it, too, there lie various basic realizations. Though of eminent importance, they are, however, so unclearly defined in form that they rise above the value of a more or less acceptable opinion only if they are fitted into the framework of a political party as basic elements. ... Only when the ideal urge for independence gets a fighting organization in the form of military instruments of power can the pressing desire of a people be transformed into glorious reality.
of the highest truth into a definitely delimited, tightly organized political community of faith and struggle, unified in spirit and will, is the most significant achievement, since on its happy solution alone the possibility of the victory of an idea depends. From the army of often millions of men, who as individuals more or less clearly and definitely sense these truths, and in part perhaps comprehend them, one man must step forward who with apodictic force will form granite principles from the wavering idea-world of the broad masses and take up the struggle for their sole correctness, until from the shifting waves of a free thought-world there will arise a brazen cliff of solid unity in faith and will.

The general right for such an activity is based on necessity, the personal right on success.

If from the word “folkish” we try to peel out the innermost kernel of meaning, we arrive at the following:

Our present political world view, current in Germany, is based in general on the idea that creative, culture-creating force must indeed be attributed to the state, but that it has nothing to do with racial considerations, but is rather a product of economic necessities, or, at best, the natural result of a political urge for power. This underlying view, if logically developed, leads not only to a mistaken conception of basic racial forces, but also to an underestimation of the individual. For a denial of the difference between the various races with regard to their general culture-creating forces must necessarily extend this greatest of all errors to the judgment of the individual. The assumption of the equality of the races then becomes a basis for a similar way of viewing peoples and finally individual men. And hence international Marxism itself is only the transference, by the Jew, Karl Marx, of a philosophical attitude and conception, which had actually long been in existence, into the form of a definite political creed. Without the subsoil of such generally existing poisoning, the amazing success of this doctrine would never have been possible. Actually Karl Marx was only the one among millions who, with the sure eye of the prophet, recognized in the morass of a slowly decomposing world the most essential poisons, extracted them, and, like a wizard, prepared them into a concentrated solution for the swifter annihilation of the independent existence of free nations of this earth. And all this in the service of his race...

In opposition to this, the folkish philosophy finds the importance of mankind in its basic racial elements. In the state it sees on principle only a means to an end and construes its end as the preservation of the racial existence of man. Thus, it by no means believes in an equality of the races, but along with their difference it recognizes their higher or lesser value and feels itself obligated, through this knowledge, to promote the victory of the better and stronger, and demand the subordination of the inferior and weaker in accordance
with the eternal will that dominates this universe. Thus, in principle, it serves the basic aristocratic idea of Nature and believes in the validity of this law down to the last individual. It sees not only the different value of the races, but also the different value of individuals. From the mass it extracts the importance of the individual personality, and thus, in contrast to disorganizing Marxism, it has an organizing effect. It believes in the necessity of an idealization of humanity, in which alone it sees the premise for the existence of humanity. But it cannot grant the right to existence even to an ethical idea if this idea represents a danger for the racial life of the bearers of a higher ethics; for in a bastardized and niggerized world all the concepts of the humanly beautiful and sublime, as well as all ideas of an idealized future of our humanity, would be lost forever.

Human culture and civilization on this continent are inseparably bound up with the presence of the Aryan. If he dies out or declines, the dark veils of an age without culture will again descend on this globe.

The undermining of the existence of human culture by the destruction of its bearer seems in the eyes of a folkish philosophy the most execrable crime. Anyone who dares to lay hands on the highest image of the Lord commits sacrilege against the benevolent creator of this miracle and contributes to the expulsion from paradise.

And so the folkish philosophy of life corresponds to the innermost will of Nature, since it restores that free play of forces which must lead to a continuous mutual higher breeding, until at last the best of humanity, having achieved possession of this earth, will have a free path for activity in domains which will lie partly above it and partly outside it.

... Not until the international world view—politically led by organized Marxism—is confronted by a folkish world view, organized and led with equal unity, will success, supposing the fighting energy to be equal on both sides, fall to the side of eternal truth.

A philosophy can only be organizationally comprehended on the basis of a definite formulation of that philosophy, and what dogmas represent for religious faith, party principles are for a political party in the making.

Hence an instrument must be created for the folkish world view which enables it to fight, just as the Marxist party organization creates a free path for internationalism.

This is the goal pursued by the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.

That such a party formulation of the folkish concept is the precondition for the victory of the folkish philosophy of life is proved most sharply by a fact which is admitted indirectly at least by the enemies of such a party tie. Those very people who never weary of emphasizing that the folkish philosophy is not the “hereditary estate” of an individual, but that it slumbers or “lives” in the hearts of God knows how many millions, thus demonstrate the fact that the general existence of
such ideas was absolutely unable to prevent the victory of the hostile world view, classically represented by a political party. If this were not so, the German people by this time would have been bound to achieve a gigantic victory and not be standing at the edge of an abyss. What gave the international world view success was its representation by a political party organized into storm troops; what caused the defeat of the opposite world view was its lack up to now of a unified body to represent it. Not by unlimited freedom to interpret a general view, but only in the limited and hence integrating form of a political organization can a world view fight and conquer.

Therefore, I saw my own task especially in extracting those nuclear ideas from the extensive and unshaped substance of a general world view and remolding them into more or less dogmatic forms which in their clear delimitation are adapted for holding solidly together those men who swear allegiance to them. In other words: From the basic ideas of a general folkish world conception the National Socialist German Workers’ Party takes over the essential fundamental traits, and from them, with due consideration of practical reality, the times, and the available human material as well as its weaknesses, forms a political creed which, in turn, by the strict organizational integration of large human masses thus made possible, creates the precondition for the victorious struggle of this world view.

Hitler and His Germany

ERNST NOLTE

Despite the fact, as Maser reminds us, that the German people had Hitler’s plan before them in Mein Kampf, they followed him anyway. Why? The answer may be, to some extent, that they did not take him seriously. There were, after all, other leaders of lunatic rightist movements in Germany in the 1920s, plumping for German nationalism, spouting anti-Semitic and anti-Communist slogans while the Communists shouted back. But to a greater extent, the German people did take Hitler seriously. He preached his doctrine of hatred for the Jews and fear of the Communists, of rabid, militant nationalism more effectively, more tirelessly, more virulently than his competitors—and the German people listened. What Hitler said was crude, but it had a powerful appeal. The Nazi party grew stronger every year, until by the elections of 1932 it was the second most powerful party in Germany. Hitler courted the military establishment, the one great indispensable German national institution, as carefully as he had courted old General Ludendorff in the early 1920s. And he cultivated the economic baronage. Germany’s desperate plight was worsened by the world depression of the early 1930s, and the captains of industry, always conservative and disposed to right-wing
politics, now frightened by the threat of trade unionism and the Communists, sought a financial-political alliance with Hitler.

In 1933 the aged President Paul von Hindenburg was compelled by the political situation to name Hitler as chancellor. Hitler persuaded Hindenburg to call for new elections in an effort to achieve a Nazi majority in the Reichstag. Then, on February 27, 1933, a spectacular fire gutted the Reichstag building. It was a case of arson—the arsonist, a Dutch radical, was arrested and confessed—but the fire and the sinister rumors that the Nazis spread of Communist plots provided the excuse for an emergency declaration. In this atmosphere of tension, the Nazis polled a working parliamentary majority in the elections. Upon Hindenburg's death the following year, the offices of chancellor and president were merged for Hitler. The Fuehrer was made. Germany was recovering economically, partly as a result of Hitler's military spending, which created a vast public debt but also jobs and prosperity. The German recovery was also aided by the beginning of worldwide recovery. But no matter. Hitler claimed the credit. More Germans supported him, and those who did not were intimidated by open terrorism. Jews had already begun to stream out of Germany.

Hitler was now ready to implement his foreign policy. In 1935 the Rhineland was reclaimed by plebiscite and the following year remilitarized. In 1938 Austria was united with Germany; Czechoslovakia was surrendered to Germany; and on September 1, 1939, Poland was invaded. World War II had begun.

That Hitler was a dangerous psychopath is virtually a cliché of modern European historical studies, and every book that deals seriously with Hitler or his age must come to terms with it and venture a diagnosis. A more interesting question than what particular aberration Hitler suffered from is why the German people were willing to follow a madman, in Werner Maser's phrase, "into the abyss." It is a much more difficult question, a more essential one, and one to which the answers are more diverse. German scholars of the postwar era have been especially preoccupied with this question.

In a now famous essay, Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism, the German historian Ernst Nolte gave his analysis. Although he subjects Hitler to penetrating study and finds him "infantile," "monomaniacal," and "mediumistic," Nolte is unwilling to set him down simply as a madman. Rather, he argues that these very aberrant qualities enabled him to exemplify the experience of his more normal fellow citizens. Hitler told the German people in a passionate and oversimplified way what they themselves wanted to hear, and for this reason he came for a brief time "to be lord and master of his troubled era."

We turn now to Nolte's analysis.

The dominant trait in Hitler's personality was infantilism. It explains the most prominent as well as the strangest of his characteristics and actions. The frequently awesome consistency of his thoughts and behavior must be seen in conjunction with the stupendous force of his rage, which reduced field marshals to trembling nonentities. If at the age of 54 he had fallen ill and dropped dead, the world would have been spared many of the consequences of his reign.
exactly as he had designed it at the age of fifteen before the eyes of his astonished boyhood friend, this was not a mark of consistency in a mature man, one who has learned and pondered, criticized and been criticized, but the stubbornness of the child who is aware of nothing except himself and his mental image and to whom time means nothing because childishness has not been broken and forced into the sober give-and-take of the adult world. Hitler’s rage was the uncontrollable fury of the child who bangs the chair because the chair refuses to do as it is told; his dreaded harshness, which nonchalantly sent millions of people to their death, was much closer to the rambling imaginings of a boy than to the iron grasp of a man, and is therefore intimately and typically related to his profound aversion to the cruelty of hunting, vivisection, and the consumption of meat generally.

And how close to the sinister is the grotesque! The first thing Hitler did after being released from the Landsberg prison was to buy a Mercedes for twenty-six thousand marks—the car he had been dreaming of while serving his sentence. Until 1933 he insisted on passing every car on the road. In Vienna alone he had heard Tristan and Isolde between thirty and forty times, and had time as chancellor to see six performances of The Merry Widow in as many months. Nor was this all. According to Otto Dietrich he reread all Karl May’s boys’ adventure books during 1933 and 1934, and this is perfectly credible since in Hitler’s Table Talk he bestowed high praise on this author and credited him with no less than opening his eyes to the world. It is in the conversations related in Hitler’s Table Talk that he treated his listeners to such frequent and vindictive schoolboy reminiscences that it seems as if this man never emerged from his boyhood and completely lacked the experience of time and its broadening, reconciling powers.

The monomaniacal element in Hitler’s nature is obviously closely related to his infantilism. It is based largely on his elemental urge toward tangibility, intelligibility, simplicity. In Mein Kampf he expressed the maxim that the masses should never be shown more than one enemy. He was himself the most loyal exponent of this precept, and not from motives of tactical calculation alone. He never allowed himself to face more than one enemy at a time; on this enemy he concentrated all the hatred of which he was so inordinately capable, and it was this that enabled him during this period to show the other enemies a reassuring and “subjectively” sincere face. During the crisis in Czechoslovakia he even forgot the Jews over Beneš.  

3Eduard Beneš, the heroic president of Czechoslovakia who resisted Hitler’s schemes and the machinations of the other great powers. He escaped to the United States in 1938. Later, in Britain, he was the head of the Czech government in exile. At the end of the war, he returned to become president of Czechoslovakia once more until his death in 1948.
also the cause of an obscure or complex event. The Weimar system was caused by the “November criminals,” the predicament of the Germans in Austria by the Hapsburgs, capitalism and bolshevism equally by the Jews.

A good example of the emergence and function of the clearly defined hate figure, which took the place of the causal connection he really had in mind, is to be found in Mein Kampf. Here Hitler draws a vivid picture of the miseries of proletarian existence as he came to know it in Vienna—deserted, frustrated, devoid of hope. This description seems to lead inevitably to an obvious conclusion: that these people, if they were not wholly insensible, were bound to be led with compelling logic to the socialist doctrine, to their “lack of patriotism,” their hatred of religion, their merciless indictment of the ruling class. It should, however, have also led to a self-critical insight: that the only reason he remained so aloof from the collective emotions of these masses was because he had enjoyed a different upbringing, middle-class and provincial, because despite his poverty he never really worked, and because he was not married. Nothing of the kind! When he was watching spellbound one day as the long column of demonstrating workers wound its way through the streets, his first query was about the “wirepullers.” His voracity for reading, his allegedly thorough study of Marxist theories, did not spur him on to cast his gaze beyond the frontier and realize that such demonstrations were taking place in every city in Europe, or to take note of the “rabble-rousing” articles of a certain Mussolini, which he would doubtless have regarded as “spiritual vitriol” like those in the Arbeiterzeitung.4

What Hitler discovered was the many Jewish names among the leaders of Austrian Marxism, and now the scales fell from his eyes—at last he saw who it was who, beside Hapsburgs, wanted to wipe out the German element in Austria. Now he began to preach his conclusions to his first audiences; now he was no longer speaking, as until recently he had spoken to Kubizek, to hear the sound of his own voice: he wanted to convince. But he did not have much success. The management of the men’s hostel looked on him as an insufferable politicizer, and for most of his fellow inmates he was a “reactionary swine.” He got beaten up by workers, and in conversations with Jews and Social Democrats he was evidently often the loser, being no match for their diabolical glibness and dialectic. This made the image of the enemy appear all the more vivid to him, all the more firmly entrenched. Thirty years later the most experienced statesmen took him for a confidence-inspiring statesman after meeting him personally; hard-bitten soldiers found he was a man they could talk to; educated supporters saw in him the peo-
people’s social leader. Hitler himself, however, made the following observations in the presence of the generals and party leaders around his table: though Dietrich Eckart had considered that from many aspects Streicher was a fool, it was impossible to conquer the masses without such people, ... though Streicher was criticized for his paper, Der Stürmer; in actual fact Streicher idealized the Jew. The Jew was far more ignoble, unruly, and diabolical than Streicher had depicted him.

Hitler rose from the gutter to be the master of Europe. There is no doubt that he learned an enormous amount. In the flexible outer layer of his personality he could be all things to all men: a statesman to the statesmen, a commander to the generals, a charmer to women, a father to the people. But in the hard monomaniacal core of his being he did not change one iota from Vienna to Rastenburg.

Yet if his people had found that he intended after the war to prohibit smoking and make the world of the future vegetarian it is probable that even the SS would have rebelled. There are thousands of monomaniacal and infantile types in every large community, but they seldom play a role other than among their own kind. These two traits do not explain how Hitler was able to rise to power.

August Kubizek tells a strange story which there is little reason to doubt and which sheds as much light on the moment when Hitler decided to enter politics as on the basis and prospects of that decision. After a performance of Rienzi in Linz, Kubizek relates, Hitler had taken him up to a nearby hill and talked to him with shining eyes and trembling voice of the mandate he would one day receive from his people to lead them out of servitude to the heights of liberty. It seemed as if another self were speaking from Hitler’s lips, as if he himself were looking on at what was happening in numb astonishment. Here the infantile basis is once again unmistakable. The identification with the hero of the dramatic opera bore him aloft, erupted from him like a separate being. There were many subsequent occasions testifying to this very process. When Hitler chatted, his manner of talking was often unbearably flat; when he described something, it was dull; when he theorized, it was stilted; when he started up a hymn of hate, repulsive. But time and again his speeches contained passages of irresistible force and compelling conviction, such as no other speaker of his time was capable of producing. These are always the places where his “faith” finds expression, and it was obviously this faith which induced that emotion among the masses to which even the most

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5Julius Streicher was the publisher of a radical, anti-Semitic newspaper, Der Stürmer, and one of Hitler’s earliest supporters. He continued to be a functionary of the party, survived the war, and was convicted of war crimes at Nürnberg.

6An opera by Wagner.
hostile observer testified. But at no time do these passages reveal anything new, never do they make the listener reflect or exert his critical faculty: all they ever do is conjure up magically before his eyes that which already existed in him as vague feeling, inarticulate longing. What else did he express but the secret desires of his judges when he declared before the People's Court: “The army we have trained is growing day by day, faster by the hour. It is in these very days that I have the proud hope that the hour will come when these unruly bands become battalions, the battalions regiments, the regiments divisions, when the old cockade is raised from the dust, when the old flags flutter again on high, when at last reconciliation takes place before the eternal Last Judgment, which we are prepared to face.”

His behavior at a rally has often been described: how, uncertain at first, he would rely on the trivial, then get the feel of the atmosphere for several minutes, slowly establish contact, score a bull's-eye with the right phrase, gather momentum with the applause, finally burst out with words which seemed positively to erupt through him, and at the end, in the midst of thunderous cheering, shout a vow to heaven or, amid breathless silence, bring forth a solemn Amen. And after the speech he was as wet as if he had taken a steambath and had lost as much weight as if he had been through a week's strict training.

He told every rally what it wanted to hear—yet what he voiced was not the trivial interests and desires of the day but the great universal, obvious hopes: that Germany should once again become what it had been, that the economy should function, that the farmer should get his rights, likewise the townsman, the worker, and the employer, that they should forget their differences and become one in the most important thing of all—their love for Germany. He never embarked on discussion, he permitted no heckling, he never dealt with any of the day-to-day problems of politics. When he knew that a rally was in a critical mood and wanted information instead of Weltanschauung, he was capable of calling off his speech at the last moment.

There should be no doubt as to the mediumistic trait in Hitler. He was the medium who communicated to the masses their own, deeply buried spirit. It was because of this, not because of his monomaniacl obsession, that a third of his people loved him long before he became chancellor, long before he was their victorious supreme commander. But mediumistic popular idols are usually simpletons fit for ecstasy rather than fulfillment. In the turmoil of postwar Germany it would have been impossible to love Hitler had not monomaniacl obsession driven the man on and infantile wishful thinking carried him beyond the workaday world with its problems and conflicts. Singly, any one of
these three characteristics would have made Hitler a freak and a fool; combined, they raised him for a brief time to be lord and master of this troubled era.

A psychological portrait of Hitler such as this must, however, give rise to doubts in more ways than one. Does the portrait not approach that overpolemical and oversimplified talk of the “madman” or the “criminal”? There is no intention of claiming that this represents a clinical diagnosis. It is not even the purpose of this analysis to define and categorize Hitler as an “infantile mediumistic monomaniac.” What has been discussed is merely the existence of infantile, mediumistic, and monomaniacal traits. They are not intended to exhaust the nature of the man Hitler, nor do they of themselves belong to the field of the medically abnormal. Rather do they represent individually an indispensable ingredient of the exceptional. There can be few artists without a streak of infantilism, few ideological politicians without a monomaniacal element in their make-up. It is not so much the potency of each element singly as the combination of all three which gives Hitler his unique face. Whether this combination is pathological in the clinical sense is very doubtful, but there can be no doubt that it excludes historical greatness in the traditional sense.

A second objection is that the psychological description prevents the sociological typification which from the point of view of history is so much more productive. Many attempts have been made to understand Hitler as typical of the angry petit bourgeois. The snag in this interpretation is that it cannot stand without a psychologizing adjective and almost always suggests a goal which is obviously psychological as well as polemical. What this theory tries to express is that Hitler was “actually only a petit bourgeois,” in other words, something puny and contemptible. But it is precisely from the psychological standpoint that the petit bourgeois can best be defined as the normal image of the “adult”: Hitler was exactly the reverse. What is correct, however, is that, from the sociological standpoint, bourgeois elements may be present in an entirely nonbourgeois psychological form. It remains to be shown how very petit bourgeois was Hitler’s immediate reaction to Marxism. However, it was only by means of that “form” which cannot be deduced by sociological methods that his first reaction underwent its momentous transformation.

The third objection is the most serious. The historical phenomenon of National Socialism might be considered overparticularized if it is based solely on the unusual, not to say abnormal, personality of one man. Does not this interpretation in the final analysis even approach that all too transparent apologia which tries to see in Hitler, and only in him, the “causa efficiens of the whole sequence of events”? But this is not necessarily logical. It is only from one aspect that the infantile person is more remote from the world than other people; from another aspect he is much closer to it. For he does not dredge up the stuff of his dreams
and longings out of nothing; on the contrary, he compresses the world of his more normal fellow man, sometimes by intensifying, sometimes by contrasting. From the complexity of life, monomaniacal natures often wrest an abstruse characteristic, quite frequently a comical aspect, but at times a really essential element. However, the mediumistic trait guarantees that nothing peripheral is compressed, nothing trivial monomaniacally grasped. It is not that a nature of this kind particularizes the historical, but that this nature is itself brought into focus by the historical. Although far from being a true mirror of the times—indeed, it is more of a monstrous distortion—nothing goes into it that is pure invention; and what does go into it arises from certain traits of its own. Hitler sometimes compared himself to a magnet which attracted all that was brave and heroic; it would probably be more accurate to say that certain extreme characteristics of the era attracted this nature like magnets, to become in that personality even more extreme and visible. Hence from now on there will be little mention of Hitler’s psyche, but all the more of the conditions, forces, and trends of his environment to which he stood in some relationship. For whether he merely interpreted these conditions or intervened in them, whether he placed himself on the side of these forces or opposed them, whether he let himself be borne along by these trends or fought them: something of this force or this trend never failed to emerge in extreme form. In this sense Hitler’s nature may be called a historical substance.

**Hitler: A Study in Tyranny**

**ALAN BULLOCK**

Not only German scholars, as we have seen, but other scholars of modern European history have been intrigued with the question of why and how Hitler rose to power. The most widely respected of these is Alan Bullock, whose most important work is Hitler: A Study in Tyranny. Bullock tends to share Nolte’s opinion about Hitler’s infantilism—though he does not use the term. Stressing the fact that Hitler was incapable of real growth or change, Bullock finds him at the end of his career the same as at its beginning, unwilling to admit the possibility of his own error and seeing everyone’s faults but his own. But even with such serious flaws of character and personality, Bullock, again like Nolte, is unwilling to dismiss Hitler as a madman. He sees him rather as the possessor of gifts amounting to political genius, evil genius admittedly but genius nonetheless. And he sees Hitler as using those gifts to secure a wholly personal tyranny over Germany. On the question of why Germany followed Hitler, Bullock diverges sharply from Nolte and from many other German scholars. He finds the explanation, not in the terrible German experience of defeat in World War I and depression in the postwar era, but more
deeply rooted in German history, in German nationalism, militarism, and authoritarianism—of which Hitler’s tyranny was the “logical conclusion.”

We pick up Bullock’s account of Hitler at its last moment, late in April 1945, in the chancellery bunker in Berlin. While Russian artillery crashes above him, shattering what remains of his capital, he dictates to his secretary, Frau Junge, his will and his political testament. Hitler is on the point of committing suicide.

Facing death and the destruction of the régime he had created, this man who had exacted the sacrifice of millions of lives rather than admit defeat was still recognizably the old Hitler. From first to last there is not a word of regret, nor a suggestion of remorse. The fault is that of others, above all that of the Jews, for even now the old hatred is unappeased. Word for word, Hitler’s final address to the German nation could be taken from almost any of his early speeches of the 1920s or from the pages of *Mein Kampf*. Twenty-odd years had changed and taught him nothing. His mind remained as tightly closed as it had been on the day when he wrote: “During these years in Vienna a view of life and a definite outlook on the world took shape in my mind. These became the granite basis of my conduct. Since then I have extended that foundation very little, I have changed nothing in it.” . . .

In the course of Sunday, the 29th, arrangements were made to send copies of the Fuehrer’s Political Testament out of the bunker, and three men were selected to make their way as best they could to Admiral Doenitz’s and Field-Marshal Schoerner’s headquarters. One of the men selected was an official of the Propaganda Ministry, and to him Goebbels entrusted his own appendix to Hitler’s manifesto. At midnight on 29 April another messenger, Colonel von Below, left carrying with him a postscript which Hitler instructed him to deliver to General Keitel. It was the Supreme Commander’s last message to the Armed Forces, and the sting was in the tail:

The people and the Armed Forces have given their all in this long and hard struggle. The sacrifice has been enormous. But my trust has been misused by many people. Disloyalty and betrayal have undermined resistance throughout the war. It was therefore not granted to me to lead the people to victory. The Army General Staff cannot be compared with the General Staff of the First World War. Its achievements were far behind those of the fighting front.

The war had been begun by the Jews, it had been lost by the generals. In neither case was the responsibility Hitler’s and his last word of all was to reaffirm his original purpose:

The efforts and sacrifice of the German people in this war [he added] have been so great that I cannot believe they have been in vain. The aim must still be to win territory in the east for the German people. . . .
He now began to make systematic preparations for taking his life. He had his Alsatian bitch, Blondi, destroyed, and in the early hours of Monday, 30 April, assembled his staff in the passage in order to say farewell. Walking along the line, he shook each man and woman silently by the hand. Shortly afterwards Bormann sent out a telegram to Doenitz, whose headquarters was at Ploen, between Lübeck and Kiel, instructing him to proceed “at once and mercilessly” against all traitors... 

In the course of the early afternoon Erich Kempka, Hitler's chauffeur, was ordered to send two hundred litres of petrol to the Chancellery Garden. It was carried over in jerricans and its delivery supervised by Heinz Linge, Hitler’s batman.

Meanwhile, having finished his lunch, Hitler went to fetch his wife from her room, and for the second time they said farewell to Goebbels, Bormann, and the others who remained in the bunker. Hitler then returned to the Fuehrer's suite with Eva and closed the door. A few minutes passed while those outside stood waiting in the passage. Then a single shot rang out.

After a brief pause the little group outside opened the door. Hitler was lying on the sofa, which was soaked with blood: he had shot himself through the mouth. On his right-hand side lay Eva Braun, also dead; she had swallowed poison. The time was half past three on the afternoon of Monday, 30 April, 1945, ten days after Hitler's fifty-sixth birthday.

Hitler's instructions for the disposal of their bodies had been explicit, and they were carried out to the letter. Hitler's own body, wrapped in a blanket, was carried out and up to the garden by two S.S. men. The head was concealed, but the black trousers and black shoes which he wore with his uniform jacket hung down beneath the covering. Eva's body was picked up by Bormann, who handed it to Kempka. They made their way up the stairs and out into the open air, accompanied by Goebbels, Guensche, and Burgdorf. The doors leading into the garden had been locked and the bodies were laid in a shallow depression of sandy soil close to the porch. Picking up the five cans of petrol, one after another, Guensche, Hitler's S.S. adjutant, poured the contents over the two corpses and set fire to them with a lighted rag.

A sheet of flame leapt up, and the watchers withdrew to the shelter of the porch. A heavy Russian bombardment was in progress and shells continually burst on the Chancellery. Silently they stood to attention, and for the last time gave the Hitler salute; then turned and disappeared into the shelter... 

In this age of Unenlightened Despotism Hitler has had more than a few rivals, yet he remains, so far, the most remarkable of those who have used modern techniques to apply the classic formulas of tyranny.
Before the war it was common to hear Hitler described as the pawn of the sinister interests who held real power in Germany, of the Junkers or the Army, of heavy industry or high finance. This view does not survive examination of the evidence. Hitler acknowledged no masters, and by 1938 at least he exercised arbitrary rule over Germany to a degree rarely, if ever, equalled in a modern industrialized State.

At the same time, from the re-militarization of the Rhineland to the invasion of Russia he won a series of successes in diplomacy and war which established an hegemony over the continent of Europe comparable with that of Napoleon at the height of his fame. While these could not have been won without a people and an Army willing to serve him, it was Hitler who provided the indispensable leadership, the flair for grasping opportunities, the boldness in using them. In retrospect his mistakes appear obvious, and it is easy to be complacent about the inevitability of his defeat; but it took the combined efforts of the three most powerful nations in the world to break his hold on Europe.

Luck and the disunity of his opponents will account for much of Hitler's success—as it will of Napoleon's—but not for all. He began with few advantages, a man without a name and without support other than that which he acquired for himself, not even a citizen of the country he aspired to rule. To achieve what he did Hitler needed—and possessed—talents out of the ordinary which in sum amounted to political genius, however evil its fruits.

His abilities have been sufficiently described in the preceding pages: his mastery of the irrational factors in politics, his insight into the weaknesses of his opponents, his gift for simplification, his sense of timing, his willingness to take risks. An opportunist entirely without principle, he showed considerable consistency and an astonishing power of will in pursuing his aims. Cynical and calculating in the exploitation of his histrionic gifts, he retained an unshaken belief in his historic role and in himself as a creature of destiny.

The fact that his career ended in failure, and that his defeat was preeminently due to his own mistakes, does not by itself detract from Hitler's claim to greatness. The flaw lies deeper. For these remarkable powers were combined with an ugly and strident egotism, a moral and intellectual cretinism. The passions which ruled Hitler's mind were ignoble: hatred, resentment, the lust to dominate, and, where he could not dominate, to destroy. His career did not exalt but debased the human condition, and his twelve years' dictatorship was barren of all ideas save one—the further extension of his own power and that of the nation with which he had identified himself. Even power he conceived of in the crudest terms: an endless vista of military roads, S.S. garrisons, and concentration camps stretching across Europe and Asia.

The great revolutions of the past, whatever their ultimate fate,
have been identified with the release of certain powerful ideas: individual conscience, liberty, equality, national freedom, social justice. National Socialism produced nothing.

The view has often been expressed that Hitler could only have come to power in Germany, and it is true—without falling into the same error of racialism as the Nazis—that there were certain features of German historical development, quite apart from the effects of the Defeat and the Depression, which favored the rise of such a movement.

This is not to accuse the Germans of Original Sin, or to ignore the other sides of German life which were only grossly caricatured by the Nazis. But Nazism was not some terrible accident which fell upon the German people out of a blue sky. It was rooted in their history, and while it is true that a majority of the German people never voted for Hitler, it is also true that thirteen million did. Both facts need to be remembered.

From this point of view Hitler's career may be described as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the most powerful political tradition in Germany since the Unification. This is what nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, the worship of success and force, the exaltation of the State and *Realpolitik* lead to, if they are projected to their logical conclusion.

There are Germans who will reject such a view. They argue that what was wrong with Hitler was that he lacked the necessary skill, that he was a bungler. If only he had listened to the generals—or Schacht—or the career diplomats—if only he had not attacked Russia, and so on. There is some point, they feel, at which he went wrong. They refuse to see that it was the ends themselves, not simply the means, which were wrong: the pursuit of unlimited power, the scorn for justice or any restraint on power; the exaltation of will over reason and conscience; the assertion of an arrogant supremacy, the contempt for others' rights. As at least one German historian, Professor Meinecke, has recognized, the catastrophe to which Hitler led Germany points to the need to re-examine the aims as well as the methods of German policy as far back as Bismarck.

The Germans, however, were not the only people who preferred in the 1930s not to know what was happening and refused to call evil things by their true names. The British and French at Munich; the Italians, Germany's partners in the Pact of Steel; the Poles, who stabbed the Czechs in the back over Teschen; the Russians, who signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact to partition Poland, all thought they could buy Hitler off, or use him to their own selfish advantage.

Hitler, indeed, was a European, no less than a German phenomenon. ... The conditions and the state of mind which he exploited, the *malaise* of which he was the symptom, were not confined to one country, although they were more strongly marked in Germany than anywhere else. Hitler's idiom was German, but the thoughts
and emotions to which he gave expression have a more universal currency.

Hitler recognized this relationship with Europe perfectly clearly. He was in revolt against “the System” not just in Germany but in Europe, against that liberal bourgeois order, symbolized for him in the Vienna which had once rejected him. To destroy this was his mission, the mission in which he never ceased to believe; and in this, the most deeply felt of his purposes, he did not fail. Europe may rise again, but the old Europe of the years between 1789, the year of the French Revolution, and 1939, the year of Hitler’s War, has gone forever—and the last figure in its history is that of Adolf Hitler, the architect of its ruin. “Si monumentum requiris, circumspice”—“If you seek his monument, look around.”

Questions for Review and Study

1. Given the political climate of Germany in the late 1920s, it was nearly inevitable that some radical political leader and extremist party would come to power. How did it happen that Hitler and the Nazi party did so?

2. What major elements of Hitler’s later Nazi program appear in Mein Kampf?

3. Why do you think the German people were so willing to follow Hitler “into the abyss”?

4. How would you compare the personalities and programs of Hitler and Lenin?

5. Why did the first upsurge of Naziism take place in Bavaria?

6. Why were Germany’s economic leaders so willing to listen to Hitler?

Questions for Comparison

1. Compare Lenin’s revolutionary vision to Hitler’s. Against what aspects of their respective societies were the young Lenin and Hitler reacting? How was each a product of the First World War? What were the essentials of their respective doctrines? What did each hold sacred? Whose critique was more severe? Why did Lenin succeed and Hitler ultimately fail?

2. Compare Hitler and Stalin’s nationalism (see p. 271). On what ideals and institutions did their regimes rest, and to whom did their ideals appeal? How did the world wars strengthen them politically? Is idealism or opportunism more apparent in the conduct of these totalitarians? Whose aims seem more comprehensible? If historical understanding is a form of sympathy (as some suggest), can we ever expect to understand those whose aims earn so little of our sympathy?
Suggestions for Further Reading

Students are encouraged to read further in Hitler's revealing *Mein Kampf*, beyond the brief passage excerpted in this chapter. The understanding of *Mein Kampf* will be greatly enhanced by reading *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, by Werner Maser. The same eminent German authority on Hitler has also edited *Hitler's Letters and Notes*. Also important for insights into Hitler is *Hitler: Secret Conversations, 1941–1944*, translated by N. Cameron and R. H. Stevens, Hitler's conversations with his intimates that he himself preserved. On Hitler's public policy, see Max Domarus's *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945*.

The two best biographies of Hitler are Alan Bullock's classic, excerpted in this chapter, and Joachim C. Fest's, which adds some material not available to Bullock. This is the case also with Werner Maser's biography. John Toland's *Adolf Hitler* is a massive, definitive work based on every shred of material available, but students may still prefer the more interpretive and readable works just mentioned or two brief, up-to-date, and competent biographies, each titled *Hitler*, by William Carr and Ian Kershaw. There are three interesting psychohistorical works: Walter C. Langer's *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* is a fascinating account of how a team of psychiatrists and psychologists built up a strategic psychological profile of Hitler during World War II. Rudolf Binion's *Hitler among the Germans* is a psychohistory of Hitler and his Germany. Robert G. Waite's *The Psychopathic God* is more decidedly up-to-date and professionally psychoanalytic than Binion and more up-to-date than Langer. Three special studies are also recommended: Bradley F. Smith's *Adolf Hitler* and two excellent accounts of the beer hall *Putsch*, by Harold J. Gordon and John Dornberg. An important analytical work is Ian Kershaw's *The “Hitler Myth.”* See also Kershaw's excellent synthesis of the current historiography of the Nazi movement, *The Nazi Dictatorship*.

In addition to Ernst Nolte's book, students are urged to read H. R. Kedward's *Fascism in Western Europe, 1900–1945* or F. L. Carsten's *The Rise of Fascism*. On German fascism, one of the most complete and comprehensive works is *The German Dictatorship*, by K. D. Bracher. Richard F. Hamilton's *Who Voted for Hitler?* is a detailed study of the political functioning of German fascism. On the social functioning of German fascism, see *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*. Two good recent books on the centrality of racism to the Nazi system are *The Racial State*, by Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, and *The Germans and the Final Solution*, by David Bankier.

Probably the best general survey of political, social, and cultural history is Raymond J. Sontag's *A Broken World, 1919–1939*, but the most readable and exciting popular history is *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, by William L. Shirer. A. J. P. Taylor's *From Sarajevo to Potsdam* is a vigorous, witty, highly personal interpretive history. Hannah Vogt's *The
Burden of Guilt is especially interesting in that it was specifically written for the instruction of post–World War II German young people. In the German bestseller The Meaning of Hitler, Sebastian Haffner reassesses (and condemns) Hitler, arguing against the tendencies to try to rehabilitate or justify him. Of the several books by those close to Hitler, the best, most important, and most interesting is Albert Speer’s Inside the Third Reich. Three important books on the German army must be recommended: John W. Wheeler-Bennett’s The Nemesis of Power; Robert J. O’Neill’s The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933–1939; and Len Deighton’s Blitzkrieg, an exciting, readable account of the employment of Hitler’s army. Hitler’s Mistakes, by Ronald Lewin, is an interesting critical appraisal of Hitler’s failures as a military strategist.

A sizable number of good new books on Hitler and Nazi Germany have appeared since the last edition of this book in 1994. They include The Origins of Nazi Genocide, by Henry Friedlander; The Death of Hitler, by Ada Petrova and Peter Watson; Third Reich, by D. G. Williamson; Germany, Hitler, and World War II, by Gerhard L. Weinberg; Nazi Germany, by Klaus P. Fisher; and Hitler Warned Us, by John Laffin. (Titles with an asterisk are out of print.)


