

The book cover features a complex background of overlapping geometric shapes. A dark grey triangle is in the top left. A light grey vertical rectangle is in the center. To its right, a blue sky with white clouds is visible. Below the sky, a dark grey horizontal bar is present. The bottom half of the cover is a dark grey area with several black rectangular shapes of varying sizes and orientations, creating a sense of depth and shadow.

André Mineau

# SS Thinking and the Holocaust

VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES

vibs

# INTRODUCTION

To most people in North America and Europe, the SS (*Schutzstaffel* or Protection Squad) epitomizes Nazi evil in its quintessence. Its image, conveyed by literature, film, and personal memories, looks familiar to the educated public in general, to whom it represents the spectacular and horrifying face of Nazism. Its name will remain for ever associated with the camp system, with the Holocaust, with unprecedented crimes against mankind, with a geography of evil spreading from Oradour-sur-Glane to Babi Yar.

Although it had originated in the *Stosstrupp Hitler* (Hitler's shock troop), early in the twenties, the SS lived in the shadows for most of the *Kampfzeit* (time of struggle), at a time when the SA (*Sturmabteilung* or Assault Section) fought for controlling the streets of the German cities. When the Nazis seized power, the SS emerged as an increasingly efficient organization, capable of meeting the challenges facing the new totalitarian state. These challenges demanded the departure of SA street brawlers, to be replaced with professionals and experts trained in the management of the complex issues inherent in modern political life. Within the framework of a remarkable organization, the success story of the SS held to the fact that it could ally the certainties of ideology to the management skills that proved indispensable for solving problems in a large modern state. Owing to this alliance, it succeeded in breaking up the SA and in seizing the police apparatus and the embryonic camp system, so as to impose Nazi order on Germany. Toward the end of 1938, the SS was entrusted with the Jewish Question, while a new large-scale war in Europe would allow SS managers to move forward with daring expansionist policies, through which they would invade the military and the economy, so as to become an empire within the empire.

## 1. General Considerations

The SS has been widely studied as a practical organization devoted to murder on a daily basis, from the viewpoint of internal rivalries, of decision-making processes, and of policies that led to concentration camps and to the Holocaust. This historical emphasis is easy to justify, given the scope and monstrosity of SS endeavors. These, however, constituted to a large extent the actualization of an ideology, with regard to which references have often remained oblique. Many authors have been satisfied with general statements about anti-Semitism and about a "master race" in Europe, and they have implicitly considered SS ideology as a known entity, within the framework of Nazism. In fact, "Nazism" represented a complex set of ideas, which the

Nazis themselves did not always and necessarily understand in the same way. In a different perspective, some people, especially in Germany, have considered SS ideology as an excessive form or as a pathological hyperbole of Nazism, which has enabled them to imagine, by contrast, a “more moderate” and “more human” core in the movement.

However it may be, the literature that deals systematically with the SS and ideology still remains rather thin. To limit this non-exhaustive survey to some essential book titles, mention must be made of aging but seminal works by Josef Ackermann (Ackermann, 1970) and by Bradley F. Smith (Smith, 1971). Much later, Richard Breitman addressed some ideological issues in an indirect way, since he was mostly preoccupied with Heinrich Himmler’s role as the “architect of genocide” (Breitman, 1991), but Bernd Wegner devoted more substantial space to ideology (Wegner, 1990). The most recent publications to have an impact dealt in fact either with ideology or with the SS, but not with their systematic conjunction. For example, they were concerned with “Nazi conscience” in general (Koonz, 2003), with Hitler’s ethic in particular (Weikart, 2009), or with the relationship between Nazism and the moral systems of traditional religions (Steigmann-Gall, 2003). And if my last book includes a chapter on SS ideology, it is within the broader framework of a study focusing on Operation Barbarossa and warfare on the Eastern front (Mineau, 2004).

Ideologies are systems of thought, the parts of which come from society at large, and, as such, they require the sustained contribution of thinkers to pick up the relevant parts, to organize them in an apparently coherent structure, and to disseminate the result. And the SS, under the leadership of people whose education level was superior to the German average, would encourage some of its members to develop their skills as thinkers, within a framework that Adolf Hitler would deem acceptable, of course. The first one among these thinkers, who set the tone and the framework through his incessant and meticulous activity, was the *Reichsführer SS* himself, Heinrich Himmler. He produced a huge amount of speeches as conveyors for ideology, in addition to a lot of all-purpose textbooks published under his editorship.

SS ideology carried some dimensions that have remained so far largely unexplored, in relation to Himmler’s key position within the system. If many historians and social scientists have been impressed by the spectacular character of an elitist theory of racial hygiene as the foundation for a modern renewal of medieval military orders, they have overlooked the fact that the *Reichsführer SS* perceived himself as a moralist (Breitman, 1991, p. 243), and that SS ideology found its accomplishment in an ethic. More specifically, SS ideology represented the biological subversion of the foundations of traditional morality, while it constituted at the same time the moralization or moral form of Nazi ideology. This perspective makes it possible to re-examine the body of knowledge with regard to SS ideology, in a way that takes a closer look at primary sources.

But can SS ideology be seen as something unique or original? No, certainly not: it was and remained a particular display of Nazi ideology, and its main themes were worked out by Nazi authors in general. However, it is possible to speak in terms of *some amount* of originality of SS thinking within Nazism, insofar as SS thinking claimed to be an ethic or a branch of practical philosophy. Such thinking, beyond the mottos and hollow slogans, was in fact the paroxysm of an ideology of health and performance, the basis of which was widespread in German culture. But it would soon be transfigured into an ethic that would support the terrible praxis of the Holocaust.

## 2. Objectives

This study purports to describe SS ideology in a systematic manner, as an *apparently* philosophical system composed of different parts articulated to each other. It tries to show how this system was accomplished through ethics, which represented the pivot for its actualization in praxis. This book illustrates how and why the SS, as a police of programmatic praxis in the field of general bio-engineering, constituted in fact a police of history, aimed at preventing a repetition of 1918, as well as a police of Being, implementing the political sanitation of *Lebensraum* (living space) that culminated in the Holocaust. It concludes on some remarks about Holocaust memorial institutions, which have put forward an innovative philosophical way of challenging SS thinking a posteriori. More specifically, it lies on the following statements.

## 3. Hypotheses

1. SS ideology was the expression of an apparently philosophical self-containing system of thought, because it was articulated around an organized and systematic body of knowledge, which claimed to integrate humanity, in nature and in action, inside a global vision of Being.
2. Using ontology and anthropology as foundations, SS thinking developed essentially in the field of ethics.
3. It portrayed itself as the ground theory for a global approach to society and civilization, based on eugenics and ethnic cleansing.
4. It accomplished the fusion of the modern biological paradigm with the cultural shock brought about by World War I: it promoted total war for the sake of total health.
5. Within the context of Nazism, SS thinking did much to work out the theory for which the Holocaust would be the ultimate praxis: it intended to

provide the Holocaust with legitimacy, from the viewpoints of ontology, anthropology, politics, and ethics.

6. Given that institutional philosophy largely ignores SS theory and praxis, Holocaust memorial institutions may represent an alternative for understanding and reflection.

#### 4. Methodology

In order to reconstruct SS ideology in its essential aspects, it is necessary to proceed from the primary sources in which it was formulated. With regard to Himmler, these sources abound: they comprise a book (Himmler, 1936), letters and administrative documents of all sorts, available at the German Federal Archives, in addition to an enormous collection of speeches (*Bundesarchiv* Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA), NS 19). Reinhard Heydrich left a booklet (Heydrich, 1935), and Kurt Daluge authored a long series of speeches. Several documents dealing with ideological education within the SS may also be important (BA NS 31, 33), in addition to periodicals and all-purpose textbooks published by Himmler's office (BA NSD 41), and to the documents surrounding the Nuremberg Trials. Secondary sources play also an important part in providing information, as well as access to exhibits in Holocaust memorial institutions. Needless to say, given the enormous amount of sources, a selection has to be made.

Primary sources allow us to track the main ideas conveyed by SS authors, to understand their meaning, and to describe their inner connections within a specific architecture of concepts. The SS system of thought must be seen as an average, resulting from the interaction of numerous authors whose intellectual freedom, however, remained constrained, within a hierarchical structure dominated by Himmler. In a Nazi world, this system of thought was all the more important that it constituted the source, the foundation, and the justification for a praxis of oppression and genocide, which took place because a structure of ideas gave sense to it.

This study proceeds to analyze the semantic contents of SS ideology, to show how they made sense, in their authors' minds, in relation to three main points of reference, which were ontological (the reality of Being and Nature), anthropological (the vision of humanity), and ethical (the level of values and duty as guidelines for action). In this way, it becomes possible to understand how a rhetoric of Truth (ontology) supported a vision of the community (anthropology), for the sake of which a mandatory set of norms (ethics) was subsequently justified. The comparative analysis of texts purports to shed some light on how SS ideology was constructed, in terms of ideas, concepts, and representations, within a particular political context characterized by incessant internal feuds arbitrated by Hitler.

## 5. A Brief Recall of Definitions

Insofar as the present book deals with an ideology that was bound for actualization through ethics, within an apparently philosophical system, it is necessary to provide some brief definitions, for purposes of clarity. Since it would be too long and irrelevant to review all possible definitions, I limit myself to propose the formulations that I retain, and I refer to my book on Operation Barbarossa for a more detailed discussion (Mineau, 2004).

I define ideology as a system of ideas, cognitions, and value judgments, which claim to enjoy a privileged access to Truth and to the Good, which found a vision of the political community, and which command the imposition of any legal and moral norms on which the realization of the vision depends. And ethics constitutes an information system that tends to command action, on the basis of rational deliberation relating behavior to values, insofar as these values express the demands of the *alter* on the *ego*. It represents the locus of the relationship between identity and otherness, between individuality and community. It refers to values and norms originating in religion, science, philosophy, tradition, and personal experience, in a given social and cultural context.

Within SS ideology as a form of degraded philosophical discourse, ethics appeared as a justification system for a military policy of social hygiene, aimed at eradicating the biological basis of political enmity. Himmler's speeches, in particular, carried moral formulations of a paradigm centered on social hygiene, which required the cleansing of the Volk's body through the violent purge of unfit, parasitic, criminal, and dangerous elements of all sorts. In his eyes, the worst sort happened to be the Jews. SS thinking stood on one side of the equation, and the Holocaust lay on the other side.

### 3. Volk and Blood

SS ontology considers the Volk as the prime being created by God as Nature. But what is a Volk? A Volk is a blood flow that comes from eternity and leads to eternity. And blood represents the real locus of ontological value, as compared to the individual. Like a single drop lost in the blood flow, the existence (*Dasein*) of the individual has a meaning only if he or she is bound to the Volk as a whole. The blood bearers of the past always carry responsibility for the shaping up of future generations: the Volk is a community of origins as well as a community of destiny (BA RD 18 / 19, p. 9).

The Volk is endowed with two basic natural properties, youth and eternity, which depend on the preservation of blood. As Himmler wrote, life is a chain between ancestors and offspring to come. This chain is endless, and its natural impulse to ensure its continuation stresses the ontological value of the child, on which Himmler has always insisted so much. Through the child, the Volk enjoys eternal life, provided that it preserves its blood. Blood operates as a Fountain of Youth. "We, the SS, a military order of Nazi men, we believe that we are the ancestors of future generations, for the eternal life of the Germanic Volk." (BA NS 19 / 1454)

In a short text entitled "Ewig ist das Blut", an SS author made that point, the substance of which could be summarized as follows:

Blood is immortal. We live in a community the borders of which are made of blood. And that community is where our soul survives, in our children and in our works. We exist through time, today, as we existed yesterday and will exist tomorrow. What flows inside of you is the blood of free Germanic peasants, who have always been the pillars of higher culture, due to the outstanding creativity of that blood. This is the blood of the *Ostlandfahrer*, who have conquered by the sword and brought the ploughshare to foreign lands. Fight for the future of that blood! In this way, you were, you are, and you will be, from eternity to eternity. You are immortal in your Volk. (BA NSD 41 / 77 b)

Through blood and for eternity, the Volk is the visible effect of God's will to order the world. And by belonging and getting committed to the Volk, the individual accomplishes God's true law. Besides, if the Volk is the highest good given to humanity, families and clans are part also of God's order, as subsets of the Volk.

The SS must build up an order of life that guarantees the Volk's eternity. Such an order requires that good and valuable blood be maintained and promoted. Conversely, what is *minderwertig*, foreign, or estranged must be suppressed or eliminated (BA NSD 41 / 75). In other words, scientific reason must play its role as surgeon of Being, and SS ontology leads directly to biological engineering, for the sake of the Volk's security.

referred to his ordinary values inherited from his past and to the duty structure that integrated them. On that basis, the moralization of ideology would comprise three particular dimensions: the elaboration of a doctrine of virtues actualizing Nazi ideology, the use of moral arguments to justify the consequences of ideology, and the pre-eminence granted to this duty structure that was to make ideology so efficient.

- The Treatise on Virtues

The speech pronounced by Himmler on 4 October 1943, before an audience of *SS Gruppenführer* gathered in Posen, contained an extensive discussion on virtues: the *Reichsführer SS* dwelled at length on the issue, as he had done in several speeches before (IMT, 1919-PS). In substance, Himmler's virtues roughly corresponded to the ordinary values of his youth time, and they also reconfirmed the axiology of the *SS-Kateschismus*, faith being implicit. Here, I do not claim that Himmler himself always abode by the values he taught and defended. But he believed in these values, to the point of conceiving of them as the necessary passage from ideology to practice.

First comes faithfulness, which, according to the speaker, must impregnate totally his auditors as well as their underlings: sins against such a cardinal virtue, even in thought, should in no case be forgiven. To Himmler, faithfulness represents an attitude of belonging to the system and of openness to ideology, presupposing and conditioning at the same time the destruction of subjectivity. It expresses a psychology of constancy ensuring individual reliability and, as such, it must be considered as capital. Furthermore, it has practical implications insofar as it generates secondary virtues allowing for an appropriate determination of action: with regard to the Nazi system proper, it entails obedience, whereas it fosters courage as soon as it deals with the outside or the enemy. Next, Himmler turns to truthfulness, in which he includes respect for contracts and for the given word, to honesty, and to the sanctity of property about which he had previously enacted a "law" (IMT, 2825-PS b). To conclude, he briefly reviews comradeship, the "joy" of responsibility, expediency, and self-control regarding alcohol. Although these virtues may look minor, they allow for efficiency in action, and Himmler saw fit to mention them as he had done many times before.

As these lines show, moral virtues are ways of actualizing an ideology the ultimate reference of which lies in the Volk. More specifically, virtue is entirely contained in the *Volk* as a function of blood: by definition, the "10,000 Russian women" who die at work for Germany are excluded from its scope. The SS trooper, Himmler says, must display decency, honesty, faithfulness, and comradeship to members of his race but to nobody else (IMT, 1919-PS). And the officer, so we read elsewhere, must be a model of faithfulness and an educator (BA / MA RS 5 / 327). \*

- The Moral Justification of the Holocaust



psychical experience. In fact, sentiments related to compassion continue to appear at least sporadically on Himmler's conscience, as his reactions show upon witnessing extermination scenes, and he takes for granted that his subordinates also experience the same sentiments (Breitman, 1991, pp. 195-196; Fest, 1970, pp. 120-121). But sentiments have become nothing but psychological difficulties to overcome, for the sake of morality, as they must not interfere with the decision-making process aimed at determining the appropriate action.

We can find another expression of the same pattern in Himmler's speech to Navy officers. In substance, as he insisted on the necessity to proceed against partisans, villagers, or Jewish commissars, he had this explanation:

I have given the order to kill also the women and children of these partisans and commissars. I would be a feeble guy and a criminal for our descendants and for others later to come, if I allowed the hateful sons of these *Untermenschen*, killed in the fight of *Mensch* against *Untermensch*, to grow and to become adults. Believe me: it is not always easy... (BA NS 19 / 4011, fol. 106-153)

This was a struggle of races and a struggle for selection, as he said. His formulation laid out, in good logic, the ethical consequences of SS ontology and anthropology.

## 2. SS Conscience and Nazi Values

When discussing the Holocaust in front of different audiences, Himmler was proud to declare that the moral principle of duty had prevailed, within the SS, in spite of quite normal sentiments of disgust. The latter, however, could not and did not determine the course of action: for that reason, SS conscience stayed clear. This was the message on which Himmler insisted, when he spoke to top SS and Party leaders in 1943. In 1944, he delivered the same moral explanations to Wehrmacht superior officers.

On 5 May, for example, he declared emphatically that the Jewish question had been solved without compromise. It was hard for the SS men and police officers who had to do it: that they could get through all this without having suffered damage to their morale or soul was the most difficult (BA NS 19/4013). But if psychological damage of some sort represented a theoretical possibility, it would result from the virtue of harshness, in pursuit of the highest Nazi values. SS conscience, thus, remained unscathed.

By turning mass murder into a pure act of virtue, Himmler's principle of harshness offered a convenient moral justification for the killing of civilians in general, including the Jews. Consequently, his subordinates found it quite useful. Whenever this principle was applied to moral inhibitions, it provided the individual SS man with a moral scheme that enabled him to silence his

possibly split conscience, and to carry out apparently immoral orders (Leleu, 2007, p. 494).

In fact, the SS man's conscience was educated to consider moral inhibitions as misplaced, whenever action was necessary against evil-doers who were threatening the moral good as embodied in basic Nazi values. In Nazi ethics in general, according to Philippe Burrin, the three key values were health, power, and culture, bound to each other and seen in a racist perspective (Burrin, 2004, p. 57). But the Jews and only the Jews represented the exact opposite of these three values.

Health meant racial purity and cleanliness, as well as work and performance. Here, the Jews were one target among others. Power included the themes around the Reich and the *Volkgemeinschaft*: the Jews were at the center of the problem, as best enemies. With regard to culture, once again, the so-called Jewish culture was the exact opposite of anything German (Burrin, 2004, pp. 58-60). Basing themselves on such premises, the SS leaders would consider themselves as morally justified to translate these Nazi values into practice, regardless of the consequences for the Jewish people.

### 3. In Summary

To a large extent, SS ethics depended on the readiness to change oneself as a moral subject. As Heydrich wrote:

We, the SS, we must work on ourselves. We must keep and anchor to ourselves the eternal foundations of our Weltanschauung, given to us by the Führer. ... In order to protect our Volk, we must be hard toward the adversary. (Heydrich, 1935, p. 18)

And Heydrich emphasized the necessity of reinforcing German heredity, of being fair and faithful, of becoming the best ones in all domains, and of increasing the body of knowledge about Germanic ancestors. "This is the knowledge of all the values that God has given to our Volk: our blood, our nature, our true historical past." (Heydrich, 1935, p. 19) Armed with this knowledge, SS people should become living examples of the eternal principles given by the Führer. In Heydrich's words: "we, the SS, want to be the ideological *Stosstrupp* and the *Schutzstaffel* of the Führer's idea." (Heydrich, 1935, p. 20)

In fact, SS ethics relied on SS ontology and anthropology, so as to make up the morality that legitimized practical Nazism, or Nazism as praxis. It streamlined a resulting program of racial engineering that culminated in the Holocaust.

## THE POLICE OF NAZI PRAXIS

The SS was the “architect” of genocide, as part of its function as the biologically knowledgeable and modern-minded gardener of Germany’s social and political garden. Its thinking provided the theoretical framework for justifying a radical form of praxis. This praxis lay in the field of general bio-engineering, which included positive engineering (the creation and sponsoring of health and fitness), as well as its negative counterpart (the weeding out of unfit or noxious elements).

There is no question, here, of reviewing in detail all SS practices: a huge amount of books and articles have already described the workings of SS endeavors. For the same reason, it would be pointless to summarize the series of events and processes that have constituted the Holocaust proper. My purpose would rather be to stress the points of passage from theory to practice, in SS thinking, and to identify the SS ideas that have fueled SS praxis.

### 1. Going East

The spirit of SS praxis was anchored to a particular view of Germanic history, and it was summarized in a few sentences pronounced by Himmler, in 1936. In that year, he organized a ceremony to honor King Heinrich, on the occasion of the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, on 2 July 1936. He praised King Heinrich as an example, as a model, as a great Führer of Germany, who had fought the Slavs. And he easily assumed that King Heinrich had viewed the world in a racist perspective. In substance, Himmler expressed himself as follows:

He [King Heinrich] has never forgotten that the strength of the German Volk lay in the purity of its blood and in the peasant implanting in free soil. He was aware of the fact that the German Volk, in order to survive, had to turn its eyes above its own clan and above its own space toward something larger. He already knew about the laws of life... (BA NSD 71 / 43, p. 14)

The key elements of SS praxis were bundled together in these sentences: blood, peasantry, space in the East, and the laws of biology. And they would have a maximal historical impact, thanks to the special envoy Adolf Hitler, appearing in the wake of King Heinrich. Himmler pledged to serve Hitler,

who, 1000 years later, was taking over King Heinrich's human and political legacy (BA NSD 71 / 43, p. 20).

To the SS, in the twentieth century as it was before, Ostraum (the stretch of space in the East) was the land of Europe's destiny. It called European youth to commitment through the soldier's weapon or through the peasant's ploughshare. The SS, indeed, turned the idea of Europe into practice. It went out of the narrow national borders, and it invited the blood-related Germanic peoples to fight for a common future (BA NSD 41 / 61, pp. 18-19). As Himmler said: "This Reich will be a holy myth, the ordering power of Europe, the leading Volk for the whole Germanic Reich." After the war, it would put its stamp on Europe and assemble the white race (BA NSD 71 / 44, p. 10). At that time, a process would be introduced and promoted, that would lead from the Great German Reich to the Germanic and Great Germanic Reich (BA NSD 71 / 44, pp. 13-14).

As Himmler continued, for this global Germanic Volk, "we" will have a space in the East, where we will have at last some air to breathe and a place to live, a space prepared to become the German Germanic land of settlement. That means the creation of a garden to nurture Germanic blood, so that we can be again a Volk with numerous children. It is not a matter of any vision or opinion: it is a matter of life for our Volk. The East must and will become the garden of the purest brand of Germanic blood, the crucible of all German and Germanic stems (BA NSD 71 / 44, p. 14). It is worth noting, here, that Himmler himself used the gardener's metaphor.

Himmler described the East as the basis on which the Germanic Reich would be able, in the upcoming centuries, to contain and to defeat the shock waves that would always come back, sooner or later, from the interior of Asia. "We", so Himmler said, want to prove worthy of that gift from destiny that sent us the Führer. We have to build up the Germanic Reich created by Hitler, to gain settlements in the East, to win soil in the old German way, to protect it with the sword, "and to conquer new soil over again ... for the eternal youth and for the future of the German Germanic Volk." (BA NSD 71 / 44, p. 15)

In SS thinking, as well as in Nazi ideology at large, the general good always comes before private interests. As a matter of principle, the individual is nothing, but the Volk is everything. A Volk, obviously, needs space where to live. Consequently, "the growing, healthy Volk alone has the moral right to expand its Lebensraum, and, if necessary, to fight for it." (BA RD 18 / 19, p. 6) In this respect, survival and self-defense provide the justification.

The *SS-Leithefte*, which served educational purposes, dwelt at length on the *Lebensraum* issue, in a historical perspective. The point was to justify present practices in reference to the past and to a sort of historical necessity. For example, in an article published in 1937, an author wrote that King Heinrich I had conquered Lebensraum in the north and, mostly, in the east. His eastern policy had been made of a series of wars against the Slavs, in an effort to extend and to consolidate his kingdom's eastern boundaries. He had

colonized the conquered areas with German peasants, as the safest protection wall against the Slavs. Heinrich had inherited the soul traits of the Nordic-Phalican (*Fälisch*) race. He had erected his Reich on the same pillars as Hitler's: a soil-rooted Germanic peasantry and a powerful army (BA NSD 41 / 77 e).

Another author went further back in time. According to him, the East had been Germanic: in prehistoric and early ancient times, the areas around the Oder and the Weichsel had been populated with Germanic tribes. The Slavs entered these territories later. But King Heinrich (919-936) drove his forces east, and the way for a German reconquest of the East was open. In the late Middle Ages, the German princes pushed northeast and east, in the Baltic area. A precondition for winning back the East was the superiority of German culture. The German peasants who colonized the East were racially valuable people, of course (BA NSD 41 / 77 f).

Elsewhere, an article about the Goths is remarkable in its genre. The Goths, so one reads, rode east and Germanic settlers were in the East a long time ago. In the Antiquity, there was a Germanic Reich in the steppe, a first bulwark of Europe against the racially foreign eastern areas. Then came the Vikings, the *Waräger*, and the Teutonic Knights. Given the racial contamination of eastern peoples, the Jews felt strong enough to organize that *Untermenschentum* and to create the Soviet Union. But where the Goths, *Waräger*, and others did not succeed, a new Germanic cohort was now moving east again. *Wieder reiten die Goten*, since 22 June 1941 (BA NSD 41 / 77 g).

This Germanic cohort would open up new possibilities for SS people interested in becoming free peasants in the East. A new German peasantry would arise in the East, and a human eastern wall would stand up, guarded by SS peasants-soldiers. Thanks to reliable and seasoned SS men, the conditions would be met, at last, for the creation of a fit, healthy, and indestructible peasantry in the East (BA NSD 41 / 127, p. 68).

## 2. Cleansing the East

Officially, the conquest of vital space was the prerogative of the Wehrmacht. But the SS could and did participate directly in this venture, through the contribution of Waffen-SS units, which reached the front lines in increasing numbers. However, SS praxis was mostly concerned with the organization of conquered territories, in terms of population engineering and security, which required surveillance and cleansing operations.

On Himmler's order, *SS-Standartenführer* Dr. Konrad Meyer prepared and submitted a general settlement plan for the East. He foresaw three main areas of settlement: the *Ingermanland* (the region of Petersburg), the *Gotengau* (the Crimea and Kherson), and the region of Memel and Narev (Bialystok and Western Lithuania), in addition to more than 36 "support

points". Germanization was to unfold over 25 years. According to Meyer, 4.85 million people would be needed to populate these settlements (including the areas directly attached to the Reich), and he was confident that he could recruit 5.65 million settlers, from the old Reich, from overseas, and from Europe in general. In a letter to Meyer dated 12 January 1943, Himmler pleaded for the inclusion and for the total germanization of more territories, such as the three former Baltic states, White Russia, and the Crimea as a whole (BA NS 19 / 1739).

In these areas, security and cleansing would lie on an anthropological concept, the essentials of which were provided by Himmler, in his Stettin speech of July 1941. As he said on that occasion, Germany is now engaged in a war of ideologies and in a fight between races, a fight against a 180-million people, a mix of races and peoples, whose form (*Gestalt*) is such that they can be shot mercilessly. This Volk is organized by the Jews under Bolshevism: they are out to take control of Germany and Europe. It is the same fight against the same *Untermenschentum*, the same lower races, as had taken place one thousand years ago. Fortunately, Hitler made the decision to crush the power of Bolshevism and Jews (BA NS 19 / 4008).

Published by hundreds of thousands of copies, the album *Der Untermensch* developed that thesis further, by means of texts and photos intended to support the SS anthropological framework for population engineering in the East. The concept of *Untermensch* played a pivotal role, in an ideology that established a close connection between biological sub-humanity, Bolshevism, the Soviet Union, and Jewry, in a way that called for a global solution to what happened to be a single and unique problem. For example, one can read that the *Untermensch* looks human, although he or she is an abyss of cruelty and chaos, filled with boundless passions, the will to destroy, hatred, and desire for murder. He or she is nothing but a beast, ruled by the Jews. The term "beast" plays a key role in the text, all the more so that it enhances the notions of non-humanity and danger, thus legitimizing any and all possible protective measures. Once again, rhetoric depends on the display of photographs emphasizing the contrasts between the noble Aryan fighters and the "beasts with a human shape" (BA NSD 41 / 131).

Within the global context of Nazi ideology, SS praxis kept in line with Hitler's concept of German colonialism in the East. As the Führer said, the war in the East was not a purely ideological war, in the sense that it was a struggle for life and survival. If Bolshevism was to be victorious, that would mean the flooding of Europe by Asian "human raw materials" (*Menschenrohstoff*). The victory of Bolshevism would entail the hegemony of Asian human races over European ones, and the latter would be exterminated or dominated through racial mixing. In other words, Germany was threatened with racial flooding by Asian races: therefore, the battle had to be conducted with extreme harshness, and German soldiers knew that there was no forgiveness, since the stake was life or death. Besides, gigantic stocks of raw

racial tracks leading to the summit of mankind. But the growth of Nordic blood demanded an increase in Germany's birth rate, and the way to world hegemony was open to peoples who had many children. Himmler claimed that his views about demography were the results of his practical experience as a police chief. He could realize, then, the damage done to the birth rate by homosexuality and abortion (Lilienthal, 2003, pp. 20-21, 25).

In fact, the *Lebensborn* was initially conceived as a positive complement to the ban on abortion. The appeal of abortion could be reduced by offering protection to unwed mothers and to their children, who had to face social reprobaton. But Himmler's main motivation, although it entailed the protection of unwed mothers, lay in racial politics: according to him, any healthy life of good blood to be born had to be maintained and protected at all costs. This being granted, the *Lebensborn* actually focused on helping single mothers, while the homes connected with it were open also to married women. Himmler's idea was to curb the drop in the birth rate, in a way that offered extended care to pregnant single mothers, so as to make them renounce their eventual intents to have recourse to abortion (Lilienthal, 2003, pp. 28, 45-46).

SS racial thinking showed quickly whenever defective children were born in the *Lebensborn* homes. In compliance with official policies, children with defects were expelled from the homes. When these defects were severe, they were sent to institutions in which "euthanasia" would be performed (Lilienthal, 2003, p. 102).

#### 4. The Tasks of the SS

A photo essay describes the SS as a community of Nazi fighters for the idea of blood: "this is why the SS has the particular task to protect Adolf Hitler's Reich against all interior dangers, which spring mostly from the lack of understanding for our Weltanschauung and for our political goals." Within that community, every SS man must shape up his life in the Nazi spirit and be a model for the Volk (BA NSD 41 / 86, p. 8).

Before anything else, SS praxis is concerned with fighting, and it must be interpreted through the category of struggle as a way of life, literally, since fighting is part of Nature and given as an ontological reality. Insofar as the SS represents the best blood selection of the Volk, its task is to fight against the interior enemies of the Nazi Weltanschauung, who are still waiting for their chance to destroy the Reich (BA NSD 41 / 86, p. 9). And this task is conceived as an antibiotic operation. For instance, in reference to general guidelines laid down in a speech by Hitler, one learns that the task of the police is:

to help strengthen the Volk's body inside, to help purify this Volk's body from the noxious elements that do not belong to him, and to

Consequently, he sponsored archeological and linguistic research about Germanic ancestors. He encouraged the return to Germanic natural religion, and he instituted SS rituals based on a mix of ancient and medieval culture.

By and large, the SS repossessed to a large extent the ancient and medieval Germanic culture, in order to use it internally as a structuring scheme of beliefs, values, and practices. It did so as an open challenge to some modern notions that had developed in the wake of the Enlightenment.

## 2. The End of the Enlightenment

In SS minds, the woes of twentieth-century Germany were closely connected with Enlightenment thinking, from which stemmed Volk-damaging concepts such as individualism, humanitarianism, liberalism, international socialism, and the like. SS authors considered Enlightenment ideals as dangerous for Volk and race, and they strived to put an end to what they saw as a tragic parenthesis in intellectual history, by means of theoretical critique as well as practical action.

Modern thinkers had promoted a vision of the world centered on individuals, free and equal to each other, through concepts such as the Cartesian *cogito*, a priori transcendental subjectivity, adhesion to a social contract, and universal human dignity. To SS authors, the individual was nothing but a member of the Volk, a temporary link in the chain of life that ran from ancestors to progeny. The ontological primacy was granted to the Volk, whose reproductive success was the individuals' *raison d'être*. To make the meaning of life revolve around individuals would be contrary to the laws of life and would invite national and racial catastrophe.

Against universal humanity, the SS would posit the Volk once again. To SS thinkers, humanity carried no ontological value per se and generated consequently no moral obligation. Human value was conceived as differential and unequal, in function of racial characteristics, and it was inseparable from the Volk as the source of value. SS thinking challenged the notion of human dignity, because it denied any value to humanity qua humanity. Value was conferred by race and Volk, by fitness and by health: this would generate an ontological and moral hierarchy within humanity, thus nullifying the very notion of humanity, by depriving it of its necessary universality. The denial of universal human dignity paved the way for rejecting any politics based on the foundational character of human rights, on the notion of social contract, and on liberal or republican institutions.

On numerous occasions, directly or indirectly, SS authors criticized the philosophy and politics of the Enlightenment. They saw the *Aufklärung* ideals as the ruin of Volk and race. Given that Germany had once succumbed to these ideals during the years of the "System" (the Weimar Republic), with almost fatal consequences, the SS felt concerned with blocking off any political resurgence of Enlightenment values.



### 3. The Trauma of 1918

The SS was out to revisit a posteriori the course of World War I and, so to speak, to erase the year 1918 from German history. Obviously, 1918 had been the matrix of Nazism, and the events that had taken place in and around November were constantly replayed in SS minds, thus fueling the incessant SS paranoia for security.

To Nazis in general, the year 1918 had marked the nadir of German history, that point of humiliation and helplessness dangerously close to the Volk's political death. Now that the Führer succeeded in defeating the System and in reversing the course of history, it was incumbent on the SS to protect Germany's renaissance and to secure her victory in the inevitable wars of the future.

In fact, the task number one of the SS was to prevent 1918 from happening again. The events of that tragic year, including their continuation in the postwar years, should never be repeated in Germany. The home front had to be secured at all costs, to make sure that the continuation of World War I, through future campaigns against Germany's enemies, would lead to a happy ending.

In order to carry out efficiently its primary task, the SS had to focus on two basic events or series of events, which had been presumably pivotal in Germany's collapse, and which would soon polarize SS thinking and action. These two basic subsets of the German trauma had been the blockade and the *Dolchstoss*.

The *Dolchstoss* designated the alleged stab-in-the-back of the German Army left undefeated on the field. This myth became very powerful in military, nationalistic, and right-wing minds in the 1920s. Ironically, it was significantly amplified by a statement made by Socialist President Friedrich Ebert, who had declared to troops, at a Berlin parade in December 1918, that they had not been defeated at war. The blockade, however, bore a more direct connection with reality. It referred to real action aimed at isolating the seaports of Germany, although the conclusions to which this episode led after the war were largely mythical as well.

### 4. The Blockade

During World War I, as a matter of fact, the German civilian population had suffered from food shortages, the severity of which had increased during the last two years of war. Although the Allied blockade of German ports had obviously contributed to German misery, its real impact on the German economy would be debated for years and decades after the armistice. Many other factors had to be taken into consideration, such as the modified structure of wartime economy, the shortage of German manpower brought about by massive conscription, and the possibly comparable situation in other European countries. However it might be, as Michael Wildt puts it:

The blockade trauma was a basic reference point in SS thinking, all the more so that it stimulated SS agrarian utopias, which called Germans to return to the land as much as possible, as well as the will to conquer the East. The solution to the blockade trauma was *Lebensraum*.

### 5. The *Dolchstoss*

Immediately after the armistice, a viewpoint quickly spread according to which the German army, undefeated in the field, had been stabbed in the back by the German revolutionaries who were mostly Jews, Socialists, and other adepts of Jewish-inspired ideologies. The *Dolchstoss* legend was the most powerful and the most dangerous trauma generated by the conclusion of the war, all the more so that, contrary to the blockade memory, it would unleash a huge amount of anger, resentment, outrage, and hatred, against specific groups inside Germany. The *Dolchstoss* scandal was a key drive in the genesis of Nazism: In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler referred to it as an origin, a seminal moment, that had shaken him out of his torpor, at the Pasewalk hospital (Hitler, 1971, pp. 202-206).

According to Pierre Jardin, who has carefully searched the *Dolchstoss* syndrome, a legend began to circulate, in the winter of 1918-1919, to the effect that the armistice had resulted from a series of subversive maneuvers leading to an upheaval: in all this, the army had not been defeated. This legend allowed for a heroic reconstruction of the war's final episode, which had been anything but glorious. In reality, that army had reached "the terminal stage of a physical and moral disintegration process", in the context of the stalemate in which Ludendorff's spring offensives had ended. In November 1918, the German army was "in a state of clinical death". But the trauma delivered by the catastrophe was such that the only possible explanation would see it as the result of a revolutionary plot. To Hitler and others, defeat had been caused by a revolutionary process that had sacrificed the army to the benefit of a few criminals. Thus, they could maintain a sense of continuity in the Reich's history. Germany had not been defeated in her military confrontation with external enemies: she fell victim of her political confrontation with herself (Jardin, 2005, pp. 12-13). Reality, however, was something completely different.

In August 1918, after the disappointments created by the failed offensives, the will to fight began to wear out. Soldiers would increasingly disappear in convoys, and whole units would now refuse to be transported. The army was increasingly suffering from the lack of recruits, but material resources were also lacking, including wheat and fuel. By and large, the troops were distrustful and weary, and the authorities tried to put a stop to desertion and to disobedience. Obviously, the troops could no longer hold the front, and they were worn out to such a point that enemy breakthroughs could succeed rapidly (Jardin, 2005 pp. 185, 398).

The legend of the undefeated army began with the armistice. On 12 November, Hindenburg declared: "We have borne our arms with honor", and we have kept the enemy far from our borders. In a communiqué about the return of troops, on 13 November, the emphasis was put on pride and dignity: the returning troops had to behave in a way that would be worthy of an army that had gloriously held back the whole world for four years. The idea of pride was close to that of victory. On 11 November, the Kronprinz had declared that his army group had not been defeated by weapons but by hunger and distress. On 18 November, General von Hutier, who commanded the 18<sup>th</sup> Army, said that his army had repelled victoriously the assaults of an enemy largely superior in numbers. "Undefeated, it is coming back home, after having faithfully accomplished her duty." And on 23 November, the *Kölnische Zeitung* called on local population to welcome a division with all due honors, "for the army has not 'lost the battle'..." (Jardin, 2005, pp. 435, 442)

The notion of the undefeated army evolved quickly, in November and December. The press soon developed that view one step further: not only was the army undefeated, it was close to victory. On 3 December, a newspaper reported about troops who were entering Koblenz and who, allegedly, were unanimous in blaming the country for falling on their backs. Thus, the army was now almost victorious. It was deprived of its righteous victory, because of surrender and revolution, brought about by treason and subversion (Jardin, 2005, p. 464).

On 2 December, the obvious conclusion appeared in some papers, using the terms attributed to an English general: "the German army has been stabbed in the back by the civilian population..." In fact, the view according to which defeat had not happened for military reasons, but had been caused by a *Dolchstoß* by the revolutionary country against its army, had "appeared almost immediately after November 1918" (Jardin, 2005, pp. 468, 607). But there was a thin line between the notion of an undefeated army and that of a betrayed army. The right-wing press crossed the thin line late in November and early in December of 1918, in the continuity of army accusations against the "councils". Hindenburg accused the Socialist Party of systematic and secret subversion within the army, before and during the war, thus introducing the idea of a plot involving human intentions.

This was what Hitler would retain from the *Dolchstoß* legend, which represented a sort of matrix of his own thinking, because it pointed to the culprits for the 1918 defeat, and because it provided explanations about how they could have provoked the catastrophe. Hitler would aim at neutralizing the subversion forces, through radical methods.

Commenting on the manner in which Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, reacted to the news about the armistice, Richard Bessel believes that, if there was any moment that could be identified as the birth of Nazism, it would be November 1918, at the Pasewalk military hospital. Confronted with the collapse of their

world, many Germans, like Hitler, were looking for scapegoats on whom to blame the national catastrophe. The western powers should be held accountable, of course, because of the infamous Versailles *Diktat*, but also all those who, from inside Germany, had stabbed the country in the back (Bessel, 2004, pp. 4, 6). ✓

In Pasewalk, a wounded and bitter Hitler, although he was helpless and isolated, expressed his "determination" to see to it that the *Dolchstoss* scene could never be repeated in Germany. The home front should never be allowed to betray the soldiers again. And "non-German" elements should lose for ever their freedom to spread their poison through the German population (Bessel, 2004, p. 10). This was later to be the task of the SS. ✖

### 6. Mein Kampf and Its Aftermath

Through history, emotions and imagination have often combined with politics in a very lethal way. In this sense, politics has little to do with reality. It relates to perceptions and to representations of reality to which some belief is attached, in a process in which people establish a connection between their emotions and a line of political imagination, which they assume to be necessarily right. This gives birth to powerful political myths, the strength of which bears no relationship to their scientific validity. And this gave credibility, prestige, and power to Hitler in particular. ✓

Throughout the 1920s, in Nazi minds, the *Dolchstoss*-blockade syndrome refueled and stimulated more ancient myths revolving around racial theory and *Lebensraum*. By the time Hitler authored *Mein Kampf*, it was clear to the Nazis that the *Dolchstoss* had happened for racial reasons, whereas the German vulnerability to the blockade had been caused by European geopolitics. In order to build up a future for Germany, some lessons had to be drawn from the conclusion of the Great War. On the one hand, the Jews, who were responsible for everything, would have to go somehow, although it was still too early to speculate on how they would go. On the other hand, the blockade reinforced the necessity for Germany to obtain *Lebensraum*. In Hitler's mind, it came out clearly from the war that Germany had no vocation overseas, since she could not afford to challenge the British in the tropical world. Her empire lay in the East, in the regions spreading beyond her eastern borders, and the conquest of needed *Lebensraum* would sooner or later necessitate a war with the Soviet Union, which required the maintaining of peaceful relations with Britain (Hitler, 1971, pp. 611-625). But huge Jewish populations happened to live east of the German borders, under, or close to, Bolshevism as their most lethal ideology. At this point of thought, the fusion was possible, in Hitler's mind among others, between the *Lebensraum* issue and racial purity. And the geographical focus of all German hopes and problems would soon shift to the East, since both *Lebensraum* and huge ✓

Jewish populations happened to be there, in addition to racially inferior Slavic people.

By and large, from 1938 to 1944, Nazi Germany undertook the conquest of the East, in a process that combined positive geopolitics with negative demography. This process targeted two complementary goals: the inclusion of new territories, coupled with the exclusion of local populations. In this way, it prolonged the World War I syndrome and the two foundational myths of Nazism. In this venture, the SS played a key role, mostly with regard to population engineering, in order to anticipate and to ward off any *Dolchstoss* threat.

In 1939, the conquest of Poland brought the Nazis in contact with racially inferior Poland hosting a gigantic Jewish population, and they would soon establish a clear link between the desirability of the territory and the undesirability of its population. Soon, there were to be deportations and executions of Jews and Poles. The former would be pushed toward the east and confined to urban ghettos, as the latter would be expelled from the areas marked for reintegration into the Reich.

Almost two years later, Operation Barbarossa would exemplify *par excellence* that Nazi geography of inclusion/exclusion, which operationalized the two foundation myths. Operation Barbarossa, indeed, represented the unfolding of a huge military effort, on a gigantic scale, to seize a large amount of *Lebensraum* that would yield quasi-infinite quantities of food and raw materials, so as to protect Germany from any blockade in the foreseeable future. But the newly conquered *Lebensraum* had obviously to be sanitized, because of the presence of Jews and of other *Untermenschen*, that is to say, of populations of racially determined troublemakers. Therefore, Operation Barbarossa was the war of the Holocaust, as well as a war for the enslavement of the Slavs. This was mostly the domain of expertise of the SS.

The intended war against the Soviet Union was officially discussed by Hitler on 30 March 1941, during a speech to top *Wehrmacht* commanders. On this occasion in particular, Hitler made it clear that ideological enemies would be eliminated this time: there would be no *Dolchstoss* coming from the East. General Franz Halder noted the essentials:

*Clash of two ideologies. Crushing denunciation of Bolshevism, identified with a social criminality.... A Communist is no comrade before or after the battle. This is a war of extermination.... War against Russia: Extermination of the Bolshevik commissars and of the Communist intelligentsia.... We must fight against the poison of disintegration. This is no job for military courts.... The troops must fight back with the methods with which they are attacked. Commissars and GPU men are criminals and must be dealt with as such.... Embody in ObdH order. This war will be very different from the war in the west....*

Commanders must make the sacrifice of overcoming their personal scruples. (Burdick, 1988, p. 346)

Hitler and the SS thought that the inclusion of Lebensraum within Germany should go along with the exclusion of local populations from the sphere of moral responsibility, whatever the consequences. *Keine Kameraden*: potential back-stabbers could be no comrades, indeed. And World War I, at last, would be over.

### 7. In Summary

The Nazi *Kampfzeit* was the bitter continuation of World War I: because of the *Dolchstoß*, the beautiful dream of 1914 had turned to a nightmare. The Nazis were trying to overcome reality by reasserting the dream, and by turning their anger against those who had spoiled the dream and brought back the reality of reality (November 1918). In this sense, Nazism was born out of a combination of dream and disillusionment. It was conceived and designed by men who had been disillusioned by the outcome of the war, whether they had missed the fighting, like Himmler, or not, like Hitler, whose enthusiasm of August 1914 had made place to depression and anger, at the Pasewalk military hospital.

When the SS authors or speakers referred to "1918", they had in mind the downfall, the nadir of Germany, caused by the back-stabbers, the "November criminals", the Socialists, who could all be traced back to the Jews proper or to Jewish influence. And even after the new start in 1933, the 1918 syndrome continued to cling to SS minds. The brave new Nazi world was fragile, threatened by all these old enemies who were standing in the wings. In this context, the SS was essentially concerned with order in the Party, of course, but also with Germany's interior security. Its main task was to see to it that 1918 would never be repeated again. This task would ultimately expand, so as to be defined as the biological security of *Lebensraum*.

In good SS logic, however, as well as in Hitler's mind, preventing the 1918 events from happening again was soon equated with finding a final solution to the Jewish question. Early in 1939, as a new European war was near to break out, Hitler was becoming increasingly nervous about the Jews, and the SS apparatus underwent some restructuring. In his speech to the Reichstag on 30 January 1933, Hitler formulated his "prophecy" about the fate of Jews in an upcoming war. This time, there would be no conclusion in the style of 1918, no *Dolchstoß*. If a war was to erupt once again by the deed of Jews (and, in his mind, it could not break out otherwise), there would be a happy ending, this time, in the absence of the Jews. This was implicit in his message.

On 30 January 1939, the measures that would prevent a repetition of 1918 were not determined, yet, and it was still too early to engage on a

## Eight

### THE POLICE OF BEING

SS thinking opposed the Enlightenment by downgrading the individual on the scale of ontological value. It granted a higher ontological status to the Volk, all the more easily that the Volk conserved being over time, through immortality. The Volk, after all, was eternal.

Through the endless chain of reproduction, the Volk would escape death as the timely termination of all beings. But its immortality could not be absolute, since it would depend on victory in the struggle for life. SS thinking, on this point, was self-contradictory.

SS thinkers found a way out in this manner: the Volk would be eternal, provided that it cared for being over time. This entailed that the Volk could dodge death as long as "defective" individuals could not. In other words, the Volk's survival was predicated on high levels of reproduction, health, and fitness. The Volk would live as long as it selected the best and weeded out the unfit. There would be no being for the Volk outside human action: the ontology of the Volk depended on the ethic of eugenics.

#### 1. Ethics as Eugenics

Within SS thinking, ontology was prescriptive, and this made it implode into ethics. The laws of nature were to be observed in human action, and they were consequently confused with moral laws. Conversely, it was by definition morally commendable to abide by the laws of nature. There was no difference between "is" and "ought". And the observance of moral natural laws would lead to the Volk's good as the supreme good in this world.

Furthermore, SS ontology divided and ranked peoples and individuals according to race. It allowed different amounts of value to human individuals and groups in function of racial components, heredity, and health. Such an ontological concept produced an anthropology based on natural inequality in terms of intrinsic value. Consequently, it could do without the notion of universal moral obligation, and people who had low scores on the scale of value could be weeded out in a moral way, since no inherent dignity would protect them.

Now, SS thinking was meant for application, that is to say, for police action in the sphere of being, so as to regulate human existence in compliance with recognized standards of ontological and anthropological value. If many Nazi thinkers and officials had said that Nazism was applied biology, Nazi

practical philosophy or the application of biology amounted in fact to eugenics. And as the rational application of the laws of nature, eugenics merged with ethics. The weeding out of the *Minderwertige*, thus, was nothing but the accomplishment of the laws of life, which would confer moral respectability to the operation.

This way of reasoning carried the intended effect of nullifying any connection between eugenics and violence, regardless of the consequences on life and reproduction for human beings. Any conceptual trace of violence would be erased by invoking science, the Volk's survival, and the laws of life in support of eugenics. Consequently, there would be no moral issue with preventing the genetically defective from reproducing, or with terminating lives "unworthy of living". Eugenics as practical philosophy or applied biology would lead to the morally dignified killing of human beings.

## 2. The Biological Security of Lebensraum

The main task of the SS was to guarantee the biological security of the German *Lebensraum*. And to SS thinking, security was biological by definition, since all threats posed to the Volk were biological by nature, as they could all be traced back to biological agents. Indeed, in the struggle for life, the Volk could be dragged down to decay by declining rates of reproduction, in terms of quantity and quality, by faulty heredity materials conveyed by reproduction, as well as by the presence of foreign races and *Untermenschen* in the Volk's body. To the SS, human beings were biological beings and nothing else, whose quality and value were biologically determined. Assuming that Aryan people would be the yardstick of the best, different humanity would be *prima facie* suspect, and it could be dangerous as soon as it would degrade into sub-humanity.

By and large, the Volk's *Lebensraum* was populated in part with dangerous *Untermenschen*, who, because of their particular biological make-up, could ruin the Volk's reproductive health. Furthermore, insofar as soul and mind qualities were also the result of biological determinism, these *Untermenschen* had soul characteristics and frames of mind that would make them work against the German Volk. They would use their mind and conscience to set up ideological systems that could destroy Germany and ruin the racial quality of the Volk.

Since the biological threat to the Volk could be reduced to attitudes and actions of humanity or sub-humanity living within the *Lebensraum*, biological security was political at the same time. And since *Untermenschen*, because of their particular heredity and racial make-up, would be necessarily the Volk's back-stabbers, political security was ultimately a biological matter. To SS thinking, biological evil and political enmity merged into one another. The Volk's enemies were somewhat biologically determined people, and biological characteristics *per se* would turn these people into enemies.



*Untermenschen* and Jews in particular were necessarily political enemies through biological determinism.

The SS concept of enmity went further than racial issues, so as to include people with physical or mental handicaps. Significantly, in a report from *Einsatzgruppe B*, we can read that forty-seven people were arrested by *Sonderkommando 7c*, including one mentally ill person and three *other* (my emphasis) enemy elements (BA R 70 SU / 9 a). Therefore, the mentally ill were enemies of the Reich. Likewise, in another report in particular, mention was made of victims including five mentally ill persons and forty-four *other* (my emphasis again) enemies of the Reich (BA R 70 SU / 9 b). On this issue, SS thinking was consistent with itself.

By and large, as Richard M. Lerner writes: "it is clear that, in the Nazi world view, disease and immorality were mutually defining."

This conception of disease allowed Nazi ideologues to view biological goals (of racial survival and purification) and political goals (of destroying enemies of the state) as interchangeable. (Lerner, 1992, p. 33)

To SS thinking, the quintessential locus of the fusion between biological evil and political enmity was the Jewish race. As a matter of fact, a debate was going on among SS authors, with regard to the proper racial designation for Jewry. Some of them thought that Jewry was a race in the strict sense of the term, while others sometimes used concepts such as "quasi-race" or "special race", so as to suggest that Jewry was to be considered as a race for all practical purposes, whatever the theoretical difficulties inherent in the definition of race. At any rate, they all agreed that the essence of Jewry was biological.

But with regard to Nazi security, the so-called Jewish race represented the basic problem to be solved, because of the magnitude and immediacy of the danger for the Volk's health and for the Reich as the political vehicle of the Volk. In reference to the biological models through which their ontology was structured, SS thinkers conceived of the very existence of Jewry as a virulent poison or as a lethal bacteria, threatening the Volk's body with short-term decay and ruin, as evinced by the events that had taken place in 1918. Action of some sort was mandatory.

### 3. Total War For Total Health

In this context, action could only be war, since it constituted a response to the presence of an enemy whose enmity was radical, immutable, predetermined, and implacable. War was legitimized on the basis of ethics (since self-defense should always prevail in matters of survival), of anthropology (given the non-human or less human nature of the enemy), and of ontology (because war was inseparable from the nature of reality, as the most natural way of advancing for survival). Besides, the German *Lebensraum* had to be conquered through

war, before it could be sanitized. As Richard Bessel writes in substance, war was central inside Nazi ideology: it represented the first goal of any nation, as well as the yardstick for measuring racial health. Nazi ideology was in fact an ideology of war, predicated on the eternal struggle of races, and aimed at reshuffling the distribution of races through Europe. Within Nazi thinking, war was the essence of Nazi political intentions, as well as the precondition for their achievement (Bessel, 2004, pp. xi-xv).

As a matter of fact, as soon as ontology and ethics implode within nature, as they are or can be nothing but the expression of nature, whereas nature is war, it becomes obvious that war cannot be construed as a state of exception or as a form of moral evil. To the contrary, war is considered as life, therefore, as something morally acceptable, as normality in all senses of the term. And according to the law of nature, nothing may legitimately have precedence over survival as victory in this war. In this sense, the ultimate value, in a world made of bodies at war, is vested precisely in the body, in the conditions for victory and survival, that is to say, in health. And the noblest body of all, whose health is the most precious, is the *Volk*.

Nazism appeared as a condenser that brought this conceptual evolution to paroxysm. To Nazi ideology, war was the actualization of an ontology of nature. It expressed the normal state of nature as well as of culture, since nature represented the ultimate justification to which culture had to conform. Therefore, war became absolutely and completely boundless, for it knew no limitations of space, time, morality, or law, as it encompassed the supreme law of supreme reality: nature. It preceded any value and pervaded any reality, as it conveyed the basic reality of nature along with the moral duty attached to the sanctity of the cause. In this sense, it carried inevitably a dimension of totality (Mineau, 2004).

Within Nazism as a war praxis, Operation Barbarossa represented the practical apex of an ideology, to which SS thinking contributed a great deal. As a matter of fact, it was the war for *Lebensraum*: it was the military effort, on a gigantic scale, to seize a huge living space that would yield quasi-infinite quantities of food and raw materials, so as to protect Germany from any blockade in the foreseeable future. But the newly conquered Lebensraum had obviously to be sanitized, because of the presence of Jews and of other *Untermenschen*, that is to say, of populations of racially determined troublemakers and potential back-stabbers. Therefore, Operation Barbarossa was the war of the Holocaust, as well as a war for the enslavement of the Slavs.

The invasion of the Soviet Union aimed at solving Germany's geopolitical and racial problem, by accomplishing a much more radical version of the incomplete Great War. Like the military operations of 1914, Barbarossa was presented as a defensive war. As had happened during World War I, the war was pictured as a struggle in which the very existence of the German Volk was at stake. But this time, Nazi racial determinism

reinterpreted the stakes in terms of biological survival for the Aryan race. In this perspective, Operation Barbarossa could be a war of extermination, but also, at the same time, a defensive war (Ingrao, 2002, p. 226). And owing to its anti-Jewish biological nature that transcended the traditional political borders, such a defensive war would generate concern and support throughout Europe as a whole. As stated in a SS textbook: "The solution of the Jewish question has become today, beyond the Reich's borders, a question of life for Europe's peoples." (BA NSD 41 / 61, p. 77) In this way, in August 1941, the SS began to kill the Jewish women and children also, because the biological survival of the Nordic race was at stake. And the great racial war made sense in relation to the millenary Reich to be born out of victory and expansion in the East (Ingrao, 2002, p. 229).

#### 4. Operation Barbarossa and the Holocaust

The war in the East, owing to the ideological stakes and to the amount of violence generated, was in a sense already total from the start. And its total or totalizing character had its roots in warfare as experienced in World War I, all the more so that Operation Barbarossa lay at the end of a cultural spectrum that had originated to a large extent in the events of July and August 1914. World War I with the 1918 collapse remained a focal point of Hitler's thought, as exemplified in numerous speeches. And typically enough, when Hitler had to explain the necessity of Operation Barbarossa to his soldiers, he recapitulated a story that had begun in 1914 (BA/MA RH 27-7/156).

The World War I syndrome was present also in other Nazi leaders as well as beyond the Party proper. Heinrich Himmler, for instance, was proud to feature himself in a speech among the "young soldiers of 1917" (BA NS 19 / 4009 a). Technically, what he said was true, since he had received his long-awaited call to duty late in 1917. But he was to spend 1918 in camps at Regensburg, Freising, and Bamberg: the "soldier" would never leave Germany (Smith, 1971, pp. 49-60). World War I and its aftermath, however, would stay with him throughout his career: for example, in an article authored by him late in 1942 and intended for a Hungarian newspaper, we read that the SS must see to it that the Jewish-Bolshevik revolution be prevented from breaking out again in Germany (BA NS 19 / 1454). And a sketch, on the front page of *Das Schwarze Korps*, pictures a SS trooper stopping the *Dolchstoß*, by grabbing the threatening arm of a Red Army officer identified as "the Red International 1918-1941" (BA NSD 41 / 137 d).

By and large, World War I was a form of ethics to the Nazis, in that it encompassed and summarized the meaning of life to them, and Nazism epitomized the theoretical and practical continuation of World War I through official peace and within the Weimar Republic. Indeed, not only was Nazism based on an ontology positing the continuity of war as a normal and desirable state of affairs, but it never put an end to World War I and continued to

consider itself at war with people formally designated as enemies and practically fought with all means available, then, to paramilitary groups engaged in street skirmishes and in theatrical insurrections. This process lasted until it transformed itself into World War II as the culmination of efforts aimed at terminating at last World War I. And the continuation line from the first to the second war lay in Jewry. As Hitler had declared in substance in one of his earliest speeches: "we will never forget what Jewry has done to us." (Jäckel, 1980, p. 128) This entails that measures would have to be taken in order to ensure the ultimate happy ending of the continuum, and Hitler gave some hints in this direction during the often-cited speech of 30 January 1939: World War II would be World War I not repeated, but revisited.

To be sure, World War II was to be the continuation of World War I not so much by other means as with different purposes, linked to the ideological radicalization of war in Europe as it exacerbated existing tendencies up to paroxysm. And if the 1939-1941 period was to some extent a reenactment of the year 1914 (except in Poland), Barbarossa would be the apex of World War II, in the sense that it opened the door to the most radical aspects of Nazi ideology, in a way that pushed to the extreme the potentialities inherent in the new war. In other words, World War II may be characterized as the ultimate radicalization of World War I. It began more or less as a follow-up but shifted, under the empire of ideology and especially within Barbarossa, to an absolute form of civil and civilian war.

A war for the sake of Nazi ideology tended to be absolute by nature, since the stake was not a particular pool of resources that could be shared somehow, but Truth and Good about which no compromise was possible. And given that the enemy, then, was nothing but the embodiment of corresponding anti-values, of error and evil, the demand for his or her eradication became absolute. Operation Barbarossa was by itself total in its concept as an ideological war, aimed at fighting civilian populations in a way that would exclude any compromise. It was total in that it was conceived as the ultimate venture into social hygiene, in that its goal was total health.

Within the Nazi perspective, the permanency of war makes sense in relation to the permanency and virulence of threat, whereas modern trends of thought in Nazism tend to reduce the threat to the existence of biological substrates and the response to threat to a purely rational problem-solving matter. Ironically, although Nazi thinkers were filled with contempt for contemporary materialism, they had thoroughly assimilated the philosophical trends that had reduced being to nature. In a world where being has imploded into nature, where life has no other dimension than biological, and where war is the normal state of affairs, the ultimate value can be but survival, whereas evil becomes what calls survival into question. Such a world is characterized by the biological transfiguration of evil, in the sense that evil has lost any and all metaphysical references, so as to designate almost exclusively what

jeopardizes legitimate aspirations to survival, namely, disease. But evil and disease designate not only the faulty functioning that threatens organisms from within, but also the existence of organisms (such as viruses and bacteria) representing a threat by virtue of their sole existence.

The crucial point, here, is that evil, as a threat to this ultimate value, is not only conceived as disease, but also reified in the biological constitution of a category of beings, in such a way that the threat, finally, lies in these beings' existence. And since the *Volk* is the ultimate locus of ontological value, or of healthy and fit existence, disease and biological unfitness gradually set in as racial distance from the *Volk* increases. In other words, the more being or existence is seen as biologically different from the *Volk*, the more it is perceived as inimical and threatening, as the mind progresses through the spectrum of *Untermenschum* down to the limit represented by the Jews. Thus, given that the ultimate good consists in preserving the body politic or the *Volk* against threats understood in terms of disease, politics becomes the accomplishment of social hygiene, which could be defined as a set of theories and practices aimed at weeding some individuals and groups out of the sphere of moral reciprocity, out of society, or even out of existence, because of some of their characteristics accounting for their marginality and identified with uncleanness or disease. And if, for more than a century, social hygiene was a deep trend at work in Western culture in general, nowhere did it "flourish" to the point it did in Nazi Germany. Confronted with the pervasiveness of biological evil, Nazism was the politics of hypochondria.

In Hitler's speeches and writings, biological or biologizing notions taken from popularized scientific culture were everywhere and, given Hitler's unique influence, they would soon spread to other Nazi thinkers, as well as to like-minded individuals and beyond. In general, such notions were characteristic of the Nazi and Nazi-related discourse to the point that they were always present in it, from the movement's beginnings in the early 1920s until late in World War II. Examples abound, here, apart from the well-known descriptions, in *Mein Kampf*, of Jews as bacillae and parasites. For instance, in a speech pronounced late in 1943, Himmler depicted the *Volk* as a body in which human beings can be like poison (BA NSD 71 / 44). Or, as in the photo album *Der Untermensch*, the Jewish-led struggle of the *Untermenschen* against human beings was presented as something natural, like the attack of pest bacillae against healthy bodies (BA NSD 71 / 44). In a particular speech, by the way, Himmler developed as usual the notion of decency (*Anständigkeit*), identified with cleanliness, order, and the fight against vermin. Although he was talking literally in this occasion, he obviously believed that this approach was valid also in a more global perspective. And he harped on the notion of "russification" (*Verrussung*), in connection with lifestyle excesses to be condemned as morally reprehensible and health-destructive (BA NS 19 / 4009 b).

Thus, Operation Barbarossa proceeded from this paradigmatic cultural trend of which it represented the ultimate fulfillment. To be sure, it was the military accomplishment of the Nazi ideology of health or, more specifically, a large-scale and multi-faceted sanitary operation in the sick and evil world of *Untermenschen*. It represented an effort to secure the basic conditions for the *Volk's* survival, within the global geopolitical context as perceived by the Nazi leadership. And survival, for an organism living in a Social Darwinian world, depended on access to scarce resources as well as on immunity as the capability to repel threats from other organisms. In this sense, Barbarossa was the Nazis' major and most crucial attempt at securing needed *Lebensraum* and at eliminating threats and sources of disease, the most lethal one being Jewry. Here, if the war for *Lebensraum* is easy to understand because of its obvious connections with "classical" imperialism, the immunity function attached to Barbarossa as a concept was essential to it and was indissolubly bound to the first aspect. On the one hand, *Lebensraum* was indispensable to the survival of Germany, since her 1919 and even 1914 borders had made her vulnerable to Jewish-led international schemes, as World War I and the Allied blockade had shown. More generally, resources were needed so as to build up an efficient immunity system. On the other hand, occupying *Lebensraum* made sense provided that its environment contained no source of disease that could nullify the expected benefits. For that reason, the territories occupied as *Lebensraum* had to be cleaned up and kept clean.

In all this, for racial reasons, the peoples inhabiting the eastern space were prime suspects as health hazards, with regard to the potential contamination of the *Volk's* blood. The Slavs in general were seen as embodying evil to a significant extent, and their blood had to remain strictly separated from the *Volk's* bloodstream. However, if their ontological value was too low to provide them with a genuine right to life, the amount of threat attached to their existence was not sufficient to justify their total and immediate eradication. Consequently, they might stay to some extent on Germany's conquered *Lebensraum*, within a political framework designed for ensuring their enslavement. But as far as the Jews were concerned, the matter was totally different. As Hitler, late in March 1941, made it plain to the top-ranking military officers, Operation Barbarossa would be no ordinary military operation, precisely because it was to be grounded on ideology as makeshift biology. The Holocaust, then, would be and was intended to be an essential dimension in the upcoming war: in other words, Barbarossa would be the war of the Holocaust.

With regard to the Holocaust, it is extremely difficult to evaluate exactly what Hitler's intentions were, before the regime actively engaged in preparations for waging war against the Soviet Union. But regardless of what was on Hitler's mind, and although the invasion and occupation of Poland had triggered an ambiguous "diffuse Holocaust" phase in which the Nazis had created conditions ensuring that large numbers of Jews would die, the direct

and systematic murder of the Jews was no official policy yet. Murder policies were made in connection with Case Barbarossa, through a series of informal decisions ranging, in all likelihood, from the early spring to the late summer of 1941. And the situation cannot be understood in terms of a sheer window of opportunity provided by secrecy and by the closing of borders in wartime: killing the Jews was part of Barbarossa as a concept, as evinced by the orders and agreements involving the *Sipo-SD* (*Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst* or Security Police and Security Service), the *OKH* (*Oberkommando des Heeres* or High Command of the Army), and the *OKW* (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* or High Command of the Armed Forces), as well as by the quick evolution of practices.

In fact, Operation Barbarossa and the Holocaust can be understood as a single and gigantic sanitary operation. In other words, the couple Barbarossa—the Holocaust represents the apex of a culture dominated by biological values pushed to their paroxysm, by the systematic practice of Social Darwinism, as well as by the politics of antibiotics par excellence. And the one term of the couple is indissolubly bound to, and inconceivable without, the other, while something logical about the fusion of the two terms precedes the making of policies always conditioned by circumstances. To the Nazis, on the one hand, the Holocaust became feasible with Operation Barbarossa, since the Nazi apparatus would then seize areas with large Jewish populations allegedly prone to Bolshevism. On the other hand, the Holocaust became necessary because of Barbarossa, in the sense that the rational occupation and use of *Lebensraum* required its purification, all the more so that the *Volk's* health had to be seen as the prerequisite for success in the geopolitical struggles of the future.

Owing to this logical connection between *Lebensraum* and immunity, Barbarossa represented in reality the geopolitics of the Holocaust. Through the conquest of *Lebensraum* as sanitized by the Holocaust, it could at last take Germany away from August 1914 and, mostly, from November 1918. At this point, in order to avoid repetitions on a subject that has been extensively covered, I will limit myself to three statements summarizing, in my view, the essentials of the Holocaust in relation to Case Barbarossa (Bartov, 1996, pp. 23, 26-27, 48-50; Decrop, 1995, pp. 115-120, 143).

(1) The Holocaust was total war.

It was so because it aimed at accomplishing completely the essence of war, namely, murder and destruction. More generally, ideological war in the Nazi perspective cannot be seen as the continuation of politics by other means, because the agents cannot return to the situation that prevailed before the other means were employed. After state-sponsored violence has failed, politics involves normally the possibility to negotiate some sort of settlement with an adversary who has kept or can regain enough humanity to be

considered as a discussion partner. But hygiene operations do not enter this framework, and they tend by definition to be total, since the threat is so high, and the enemy's ontological status so low, as to preclude any preconditions for an agreement. In such a case, as no recognition of any type is given to the adversary, the outcome cannot be but one-sided, ranging from strictly controlled enslavement to sheer destruction, depending on the relationship between the amount of threat and the level of ontological value. With regard to the Jews, this relationship was such that murder and destruction had to be accomplished in totality and at the exclusion of any other consideration.

### (2) The Holocaust was World War I revisited.

The Holocaust took place in order to guarantee a happy ending, so to speak, to World War I. As mentioned earlier, Hitler assumed that World War I had never ended and that history, since 1914, could be explained as a single line of continuity dictated by Jewry's aggression and will to power. In this respect, the speech to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939 remains a key clue to the understanding of historical continuity as envisaged by Hitler (Domarus, 1965, p. 1058). (As he said in substance, if the Jews succeed in plunging Europe into war again, the result this time will not be the victory of Bolshevism (indissociable from Jewry), but the elimination of the Jewish race. In other words, we will see a happy ending this time, because we will be careful enough to hit the real enemy. At last, then, World War II will have rectified the course taken by World War I.

(3) The Holocaust, therefore, was at the same time the cure for, and the proper ending of, World War I.

With Barbarossa, World War II shifted from the destruction of armies and states to the destruction of humanity, intended not as a means (as had happened mostly during the first part of the war) but as an end by itself. Barbarossa represented the practical and necessary accomplishment of an ideology that revolved around concepts of total war and total health. Nazism and SS thinking came from total war and were heading for total health, through Operation Barbarossa and the Holocaust.

### 5. The Antibiotic Character of SS Praxis

The SS took at face value and accomplished Hitler's key concepts of racial purity and *Lebensraum*. In a sense, SS thinking was to a large extent the moral management of Hitler's ideological impact, as it rested on the equation of the Good with nation, empire, hegemony, race, and war. In a world where God was Nature and its laws, the supreme value at stake for the *Volk* as quintessential being in nature was the couple survival/health. In relation to this, the derivative values were purity, obtained by hygiene, and soil, conquered by war. And these values were moral, in the sense that they



commanded duty and provided legitimacy for action. More specifically, cleansing and war were natural, therefore, moral.

To the SS, space management was essentially an antibiotic operation: providing for the internal security of the German *Lebensraum* amounted to controlling the spread of an infectious disease, which lay in the existence of the Jewish people. But as compared to the situation that had prevailed in the thirties, and despite the fact that Operation Barbarossa lay in the logic of total war for *Lebensraum*, the Nazi successes soon aggravated the problem and sparked up a sense of great urgency in SS minds, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, the newly conquered *Lebensraum* was overflowing with Jews: the number of Jewish agents of contamination, within the German sphere of control, was now multiplied by many times. In Christopher Hutton's words:

The paradox of the expansion of the Nazi state was that inherent within European colonialism. The greater the area of territory annexed, the greater the hybridity of the population controlled by the state. The genocidal nature of that expansion, in particular in the east, reflected its radical settler-colonial agenda and the radical will to police the boundaries of the *Volk*. ... For Nazism, survival in evolution required the genocide of the Jews. (Hutton, 2005, pp. 206, 212)

Secondly, all those Jews of Europe, who were allegedly responsible for the current war, were waiting for an opportunity to bring about a repetition of 1918. The thought of such a "danger" looming behind the scene would soon exert some pressure on the Nazi panic button. Since preventing a repetition of 1918 constituted the basic core of the SS mission, the SS would take steps to ward off the danger and submit the German *Lebensraum* to an appropriate antibiotic treatment. Such a treatment was considered as morally justified, therefore, all the more so that the paramount values of victory and health were obviously at stake.

SS thinking was obsessed with security, especially with regard to the interior of the Reich, Volk, and blood. The task of the SS was to guarantee the ideological security of politics, as well as the political security of ideology. To SS eyes, the Holocaust appeared as the ultimate precondition for security.

### 6. The SS Rationale for Killing the Jews

The SS pictured itself as the police of being. Through police intervention, it removed from being any and all beings whose existence was deemed noxious per se to the German Volk. And it felt justified to do so, all the more so that SS thinking had worked out the proper ontological, anthropological, political, and ethical concepts that would provide legitimacy to the Holocaust.

- Ontological reasons

In support of the Holocaust, SS thinking could invoke the laws of Nature and the need to prevail in the struggle for survival. As part of life as a whole, human life was a struggle between races, and any form of weakness would be eliminated. Therefore, against the Jews, the German Volk only applied the laws of Nature, as it implemented its basic and natural right to life, by eliminating a noxious and threatening racial entity. So was life, and, consequently, there was nothing wrong in being and in staying alive.

- Anthropological reasons

Human equality and universal dignity were challenged by SS thinking. Human value was differential, in function of the biological and racial substratum of individuality: human beings, thus, could be divided into *Hochwertige* and *Minderwertige*. Since they would not have the same amount of value, they did not enjoy the same rights within the sphere of reciprocal moral obligations. On that basis, the Jews constituted an inferior and noxious race, at the lowest level of *Untermenschentum*. Even at that level, whatever humanity they still possessed could be called into question. Since they were biologically dangerous and outside the sphere of moral obligations, because of their belonging to *Untermenschentum*, they could be killed without any infringement upon rights or dignity. The Holocaust was legitimate per se, since it killed dangerous biological beings who were endowed with no value and enjoyed no human status.

- Political reasons

✓ The Holocaust was legitimate, because it represented an act of political self-defense against a dangerous internal enemy. State security could be invoked. The Jews were preparing to stab Germany in the back once again, and they were trying to throw the country into the abyss, once more, as in 1918. The Jews were enemies at war with Germany, and all enemies of Germany were Jewish or Jewish-inspired. There was nothing wrong; in wartime, with killing mortal enemies who had declared war first.

- Ethical reasons

They flew from the other categories, by covering the ontological, anthropological, and political arguments with relevant moral concepts such as correctness or decency (*Anständigkeit*), virtue, and duty. The Holocaust was legitimate from a moral viewpoint, because the laws of life were supreme for all living creatures, because self-defense was natural in the struggle for life, and because the Jews as *Untermenschen* were outside the sphere of moral obligations, while they were at the same time dangerous, busy as they were to plot the ruin of the country.