

The Third Reich in Power

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The serious historian, who has ambitions of not just being a chronicler of events or a simple antiquarian collector of facts, faces an almost insurmountable dilemma. He or she needs to strike the right balance. Hindsight is essential to the task of the interpreter of history, yet as soon as you avail yourself of it, you inevitably put yourself in the immediate danger of succumbing to anachronism the cardinal sin *par excellence* of a historian. In fact the fullfledged ambition of putting yourself into the shoes of contemporaries of the past is ultimately impossible. Knowing how things eventually worked out invariably colors your view. In fact writing about the past you concentrate on those aspects that have relevance to the present, while to the contemporaries of the events, there were so many aspects, that it was far from certain which ones would survive into the future. (And strictly speaking, the view of the past naturally changes with time as different aspects of it come to the forefront.)

The time of the Third Reich is close to us, many of the people who lived through it are still with us; yet it appears to us strange and distant, and its evolvment close to being inexplicable. That Nazism was bad, not to say evil (whatever is meant by that in a secular age), has become almost something of a platitude (and like most platitudes solidly grounded in fact), and any account that concentrates to reiterate this over and over again runs the risk of becoming rather tedious, and liable to raise the suspicion that the main issue of the author has been to prove to the world the depth and sincerity of his own disapproval. Evans in the introduction to the first volume in his trilogy warns against this, but it is hard to write about Nazism in a morally detached way and treat it technically as you would do say the emergence of hurricanes over the Atlantic, and thus his own account is not entirely free of the incessant pounding of a dead horse, only intermittently making a startling commentary to challenge conventional views.

The book treats the period of consolidation following the seizure of power in 1933 from a variety of different aspects each of them in a more or less chronological way, thus trying to combine the chronological and thematic structuring of the material. The shortcomings are inevitable as the understanding of A needs the understanding of B which in its turn needs the understanding of A; shortcomings that are general rather than particular to the work. The effect on the reader can at worst be rather numbing as he or she is constantly being taken back to the starting point again to explore yet another theme.

First and foremost there is the question of the distinction between Nazism and Germany with an ultimate view of allotting guilt. Obviously the two cannot be confused, Germany existed long before Nazism, and continues to exist after it has been wiped out; on the other hand Nazism was manifested by Germans, and its deepest forces lay in the appeal to some mythical Germaness. At the time of the Second World War the regime was more or less identified with Germany, the spirit of which Hitler was the foremost incarnation; after the War there was an understandable desire on the part of the population to

distance itself from its former regime aspiring to the status of victims of which the Second World War had been so generous in creating. Some theories tend to demonize the Germans, others on the other hand treat Nazism as if it was an invasion from outer space with no intrinsic ties to Germany only accidentally coming to power. The truth is usually to be found between extremes. Evans belongs to neither, although like most modern historians he tends to lean towards the latter view, and thus he is always careful to make a distinction between an anonymous Nazi presence (occasionally given the well-known face of a Hitler, Gring, Goebbels or a Himmler) and the common German people. Thus the book is not to be seen as a diatribe against the German people but an attempt to affect an analysis of a tyranny.

The Third Reich was a dictatorship replete with the oppression that goes with it. Indoctrination and propaganda, as well as the suspension of human rights and the exercise of wilful and often arbitrary terror, were inescapable consequences. Yet as far as dictatorship goes it was on the face of it no worse than many other dictatorships, some of which we happily tolerate to this day. It is only with hindsight we are able as well as tempted to view its actions in a particularly ominous light. What makes it stand apart is the military adventures it embarked upon¹, and during which its main atrocities were committed. Hitler was at the time of the Second World War seen as a global threat bent on world-domination, to be opposed or appeased according to the means at your disposal. This is a simple and elementary fact that tends to be forgotten in the contemplation of the marginal aspects of the regime. Of what comport was really its denigration of modern art, its expulsion of intellectuals, yes even its divestment of the civil rights of minorities, compared to its overriding ambitions? The period of its consolidation of power had as its overarching purpose its rearmament with the view of conducting an all-out war of conquest. Evans tells us that everything it did in that period was with that ulterior motive in sight, and thus should ultimately be explainable in that light. Germany had suffered national humiliation at Versaille, this should be righted, and the German spirit should triumph. Those were sentiments that had a wide appeal to Germans of all social classes and among a wide spectrum of political persuasions. And remarkably enough this drive for vindication met with understanding and sometimes even sympathy outside Germany as well. It is noteworthy that anti-German feelings in Britain were far more virulent during the outbreak of the First World War than at the outbreak of the Second, as Orwell noted. Orwell also pointed out that in the trenches of the First World War the British learned to admire the Germans and despise the French. And after the punitive sessions that lead up to the Versaille treaty they belatedly regretted the harsh terms that had been imposed²

¹ And as such it stands out among all the repressive and dictatorial regimes of the 20th century. The imperial ambitions of the Italians were risable in comparison; and even Sovietunion, despite all the fear subsequently generated by the Cold War, never did try to make good on its rhetorics of international ambitions in a grand way. In fact Stalin retreated from such aims already in the 30's preferring to concentrating on the vast problems of the empire itself

² As testified by Mary McMillan in her book on the same topic. Keynes scathing critique of the Versaille treaty is another case in point. A critique that was not entirely based, I suspect, on purely objective economic objections, although those certainly were justified by themselves, but also on a general sympathy with Germany and its culture, shared by many English liberals at the time.

During the tumulous Weimar republic Germany acted the part of an exemplary convict, gradually getting out of the cold and welcomed back into the international community, as testified e.g. by its successfully renegotiating reparation terms.

Nazism was not, as noted above, an alien invasion from outer space, but evolved out of political ideas and prejudices that were *en curreant* at the time. It certainly was inspired by Communism and its manifestation as Bolshevism from which it learned a lot. Populism including the virulent anti-semitic element, so tempting to focus on retroactively, constituted another obvious influence. And more significantly, as Evans is at pains to emphasize, Nazism should not be seen as a reactionary movement bent on turning the clock back to some mythical medieval past, but as a movement that embraced modernity and its concomitant technology. I think the point is to be well-taken. In its unsentimental espousal of modernity and technological progress lies, as we will see below, the roots of its worst atrocities as well as the effectiveness of their implementations. We tend to put too much emphasis on its Wagnerian rhetorics, as in all ways of life one should pay less attention to what people say than to what they actually do³. Thus in particular one should be wary of thinking of politics in terms of right and left, and seeing Nazism as just an extreme form of Conservatism, darkening blue to brown. Although admittedly Conservative politicians initially made common cause with the Nazis, naively thinking that they could control them, their (temperamental) estrangement were often as deep as that of other politicians⁴.

Nazism offered people stability and the promise of prosperity after the trauma of the Weimer years⁵. It also offered a vision of greatness and pride. It was a populist movement inweighing against class-barriers, and of course in the idea of a master-race it offered an elegant incentive in making social divisions obsolete. Its far-reaching ecological legislation⁶ could serve as a source of pride, and Aly in his book on Nazism and Plunder

³ This does not contradict the fact that many of its top brass, including Hitler himself, displayed sentimentalist attitudes. In particular during the very end, when the supreme commander indulged in pathetic phantasies about Fredrik the Great, revealing the ultimate hollowness of his ambitions.

⁴ Right-wing aristocrats viewed the plebeian attitudes of a Hitler with disgust. Admittedly the only active political opposition against Nazism was undertaken by Communists and Social Democrats. But that opposition was speedily rendered ineffective, and a not insignificant number of especially Communists joined the movement which seemed to be on the side of the future.

⁵ One should perhaps be a bit careful of attributing too much weight to those years, just as one should be leary of assigning poverty as an explanation (and ultimately as an excuse) of crime; when the great majority of those deprived, be it individuals or nations, never graduate into criminal behaviour. It has been persuasively argued that the rise of Hitler to prominence was the result of a sequence of fortuitous circumstances, and thus in no way an inevitably outcome ordained by fate. The problem with such an analysis is that all particular manifestations of history are indeed coincidental and contingent, while there are, and the identification of which it is the notoriously difficult role of the ambitious historian to effect, underlying principles that exert their influence irrespective of individual manifestations.

⁶ To some extent rendered moot by its committal to war, if anything an ecological outrage, and as such an example of the intrinsic contradictions ravaging the movement, and to which Evans repeatedly refers without ever giving explicit examples

stresses a variety of social reforms, like paid vacations, introduced by the regime⁷. The regime certainly enjoyed a wide popular support, as was its aim. In fact in the view of its ulterior plans, it needed a large and healthy population to serve its armed ambitions. To ensure it, it had to both humour it, as well as educate it ideologically. Evans chooses to highlight one aspect of the purchase of popular support the 'Kraft durch Freude'⁸ movement, that initiated the area of mass-tourism⁹. An initiative which many recalled fondly after everything was over.

Evans remarks that during the six year period he is treating, the actual number of victims of the regime, was rather modest, compared to what was happening in Stalinist Russia. For all the propaganda and the cultural revolutions, the regime did not seriously attempt to revamp society in the same drastic ways as the Bolsheviks attempted to do¹⁰. Basically people were left alone free to retreat to their private spheres (and this also included until 1938 the Jewish population as well). Its overriding purpose was to get the production of arms going and thus had to rely on the extant economical and industrial facilities. True in their quest for production they brushed aside many of the fundamental capitalist tenets, like the pursuit of profit. Armaments supposedly made the wheels turn again and setting the economy going. This I was told already in elementary school. However, it is a basic economical paradox, that the production of useless things actually can have a beneficial effect on economic growth¹¹. In reality the matter is rather delicate. The accelerated rearmament did put strains on the German economy¹², and fellow travellers like the economists Schacht, who initially instigated radical and unconventional economic policies, eventually had enough, fearing that the one-sided focus on armament would destroy the economy. His objections predictably cut no ice and was forced to resign, and instead Gring was put at the helm of an ambitious Four-year plan¹³. It has been suggested¹⁴ Another project, grand by itself but compared to the general armament, a

⁷ Whether or not the majority of those social reforms were actually pioneered is a delicate question. As noted before, Nazism was in many ways a child of its times, and the contemplation of such measures were in the air all over Europe at the time, occasionally leading to implementations

⁸ Evans has, in spite of the title, a regrettable habit of using English translations (maybe because the publisher may have so insisted), thus consistently speaking of 'Hitler Youth' and 'Strength through Joy'. Translations that tend to emasculate.

⁹ First involving vacations within Germany for people to get to know their own country, and later to include visits to neighbouring countries.

¹⁰ This assessment can to some extent explain the remarkable fact that German civil society survived the catastrophe of the War, and that it so easily (and eagerly) rebounded, becoming a model democratic society as well as a flourishing economical one as well, only years after the end of the war.

¹¹ It is tempting to substitute armaments for self-destructing machinery to highlight the absurdity of the claim.

¹² According to Aly, the inherent contradictions, could only be addressed ultimately by war and plunder, thus closing the circle. Explicitly: the only way of paying for the weapons were to use them aggressively and thereby creating an increased demand for them

¹³ The parallels with the Five year plans of the Sovietunion are almost too obvious to be pointed out. This could not have escaped the authorities changing five into four.

¹⁴ By Aly as well as Judt (in his recent book Postwar) that the groundwork for the West-German

mere subsidiary distraction, was the building of the Autobahn system, one of Hitler's most conspicuous among his surviving achievements¹⁵. Originally conceived as of military use, it did in the end not amount to more than a manifestation of the power of the regime cutting wide slashes in the landscape. As Evans informs the reader, Germany at the time had a remarkable small private autopark, in fact the per capita possession of cars was significantly smaller than that of neighbouring Denmark.

It is impossible to discuss the spectre of Nazism without touching upon its anti-semitism. Its importance certainly looms very large in retrospect, but it is not quite as certain that it actually did so at the time. To discuss it one needs to put the matter in perspective. Anti-semitism was in no way restricted to Germany, in fact one can successfully argue that its manifestations were less virulent in Germany than in many other countries notably France, not to mention Eastern Europe. Poland had a large Jewish minority against which it drafted punitive legislation reminiscent of that of Germany. The Hungarians and the Rumanians took similar measures. The difference between Germany and the Eastern European countries was that in Germany the Jews were very well integrated and did in no way constitute a well-defined community, a fact that caused much logistic problems to the authorities; while in Eastern Europe they formed despised minorities¹⁶. Unlike Eastern-Europe the Jews in Germany formed a tiny slice of the population (we are speaking about at most one percentage of the total) and a sizeable number of them were Christian converts since generations and not even aware of their Jewish ancestry, the unearthing of which came as an unpleasant shock as it deprived them of the opportunities of say joining the SS in particular and serving the Reich in general¹⁷. Many Jews had distinguished themselves in the First World War proving themselves as patriotic as Germans as anyone else. Hindenburg, although happy to go along with anti-Jewish measures thought that the veterans of the War, especially those that had distinguished themselves, should be exempt from the anti-semitic strictures. To some extent they also ended up being more leniently treated during the thirties. The official definition of a Jew was someone who had three Jewish grandparents (this of course only reduced the definition to that of previous generations) or somebody who practised the faith. Then there was a gray zone of half-

'Wirtschaftswunder' was laid in the 30's, the industrial infrastructure surviving relatively unscathed during the war, as well as (perhaps more significantly) a general 'know-how'.

¹⁵ According to Evans, Hitler himself designed the VW beetle. If so, unbeknownst to most people, he created one of the most characteristic of car designs, putting his mark on the visual culture of the first postwar decades

¹⁶ The parallels with gypsies should be instructive. Gypsies still suffer from discrimination and disparagement, which would be unacceptable would it be levied against Jews. Their lack of assimilation is a problem to many people in Eastern Europe as well as fears of their assumed proliferation like vermin. The notion of a ghetto was still alive in Eastern Europe. Poor Jewish refugees in Vienna inspired shame and embarrassment among the assimilated ones. It is reasonable to speculate that classical indigenous anti-semitism was similar to that with which gypsies still are being viewed, and the groundwork for more modern delusions of conspiracy, ranging from international finance to socialism.

¹⁷ no doubt with the same patriotic enthusiasm and engaging in concomitant atrocities. Jews cannot by definition be Nazis, due to the explicit anti-semitic element, but there is of course no genetic or historical reason why they should be exempt of the excesses of their gentile neighbours, especially if they are secular

and quarter Jews, with corresponding degrees of restriction on civil rights. Jews who were married to 'Aryans' and had children being raised Christian were to some extent protected. Still the classification had no scientific basis¹⁸ and its arbitrariness was highlighted by the fact that the Führer had the power to grant exceptions¹⁹. Evans also speculates that the relative leniency towards Jews married to Aryans was the fear of antagonising a large number of their in-laws. All of this makes one wonder as to the genuinity of the anti-semitism of the leaders. Was it a true obsession or simply a matter of political expediency? On the other hand in practice the distinction turns out to be moot.

Anti-semitism certainly was part of the political rhetorics of the Weimar years, and in the first year after the Nazi seizure of power, Jews were openly harrassed in the streets and many made to suffer violence at the hands of political thugs. The reaction of the general public was one of disgust and embarrassment, on the other hand there were no concerted measures of opposing it²⁰ The harrassment died down, especially after the internal confrontation with Bhm and his SA gangs, and for many years there was a stabilization, both of street-violence and anti-Jewish measures, as the most enthusiastic part of the Nazi movement had been severely curbed. And in fact many Jews were convinced that normality would eventually return as the regime after consolidation would shed its excesses and become more responsible and normal. Still the anti-semitic rhetorics continued, and the Jews were subjected to the one petty restriction after the other, the purpose of which was to eventually create what was not originally present, namely a well-defined Jewish minority²¹. In fact most people can readily accept general prejudices, but it is quite another thing to have those applied to people you personally know. The ultimate expression of this was to be found in the Nuremburg laws which forbade not only marriage but any kind of sexual relation across the 'racial' barrier. (Still, unlike many other laws the Nazis introduced this was at least not applied retroactively, possible for fear of antagonization as noted above.) And not to be forgotten the 'Aryanization' of Jewish big-business continued, this obviously reflecting the idea of Jews as Capitalists oppressing the little people.²². Still there were concerns among the economically responsible that Jewish business was

¹⁸ The notion of Jews constituting a special race is spurious not only specious

¹⁹ The doctor that treated Hitlers mother was appreciated in the family and apparently Hitler saw to it personally that he was whisked away in safety after the Anschluss.

²⁰ To a large extent this can be laid at the door of civil cowardice, abetted by the repression of a police state. Still one should not exaggarate the latter, in fact the secret police was contrary to popular myth much less intrusive than its counterpart in other dictatorial regimes. The meddling of the East-German Stasi was far more extensive than that of the Gestapo. One reason may be the general docility of the population.

²¹ A special Jewish Cultural association was formed (incidentally under the 'protection' of Gring) intended to cater to the needs of Jews and Jews only, as they were increasingly banned from taking part in the general cultural life, such as attending theatres, concerts and cinemas. Gradually the repertoire of what their orchestras were allowed to play or their theatres perform became more and more limited, thus artificially creating a Jewish culture apart from the mainstream.

²² Department stores were a case in point, they were part of the modern consumer movement with roots in the late 19th century. But not surprisingly they were not abolished with their Jewish owners, simply appearing under other names and leaderships.

necessary for recovery, and hence by implication for re-armament, the overriding concern of the regime. Also the army was not too happy with the matter, there obviously were very many able Jewish officers eager to serve Germany. It is tempting to speculate that would the Jewish minority have been larger in number, the irrationality of it all would have made it impossible to implement.

Appalling as all of this may strike us, one should keep in mind that the status of Jews as second class citizens was in an international perspective not particularly remarkable, one only needs to consider the status of the American Negro, especially in the South at the time (as well as twenty or thirty years thereafter). What was different was simply that the division had not been there from the start but forcibly created and affecting people who had had no previous experience of such deprivation²³. Also the unrelenting anti-semitic propaganda was thus necessary as opposed to the American South where the sense of the inferiority of the 'Nigger' was deeply ingrained. True, matters became worse in 1938, with the Kristall-Nacht of November 9 being the epitome. This so called spontaneous outburst of outrage was in fact carefully orchestrated by the regime, setting their thugs (mostly young impressionable people warped by years of propaganda and indoctrination) loose. Not only were shop-windows smashed and synagogues, up to then providing a sanctuary, set alight. But gangs broke into private homes, destroying property and beating up the inhabitants²⁴. The whole thing was meant as intimidation and to expediate the process of emigration.

Emigration was possible and actively encouraged. Initially only the elite left. Internationally known scientists and writers as well as wealthy businessmen. For the majority this was, however, not an easy option. For one thing the state of affairs was seen by many as temporary, but more importantly with a strong German identity and no contacts abroad what could they do? However, as the screws were being turned, desperation became the overriding factor, and in fact a significant percentage of the German Jewish population did leave the country, if often only to neighbouring countries thus only postponing the inevitable²⁵. Emigration to the Palestine was actually very much encouraged by the regime, and those who decided to do so, were given favourable terms, meaning that they could, unlike most other emigrants bring most of their assets²⁶. All of this provokes an interesting question. To what extent was the Final Solution preordained? Was it in the books from the start, or did it only emerge as matters evolved? Would the regime have been satisfied by physically expelling the Jewish population, preferably to non-European locations²⁷? It

²³ Towards the end of the 30's, Jews started complaining about being treated almost as bad as Negroes

²⁴ Occasionally, Evans reports, more decent SS-men were content by going through the motion and smashing up the token wase or two in order to be able to file a report to their superiors. The notion of a decent SS-man is a persistent phantasy, as can be illustrated by a recent movie by Polansky. But like most persistant phantasies it clearly is not entirely unfounded. More interesting though is the need for it.

²⁵ The family of Anne Frank is a well-known example. Leaving Frankfurt for what would turn out to be a spuriously safe haven in Amsterdam

²⁶ The diarist Klemperer, one of the few eye-witnesses sources available to Evans as well as to other students of the Third Reich, and thus frequently quoted, noted that Zionism was as detestable to him, as Nazism. More or less the same thing, but in reverse

²⁷ Madagascar being one alternative in addition to the Palestine.

is notoriously hard to look into the minds of others, especially those with whom you feel little affinity. But one thing that is often forgotten in the comparison between Hitler's atrocities and Stalin's is that the former was forcibly prevented from realising their full scope. Once again whatever the regime did during peace pales in comparison with what it did during war.

The Nazi seizure of power was swift and thorough, in fact after the first few months there were only two institutions that were not controlled by the regime, namely the church and the army²⁸. Still one may argue as to their long-term independence. The army saw opportunities in the rise of the regime, and the potential opposition of the churches, bitterly divided along the Protestant and Catholic persuasions, never came to any fruition. Yet traditional Christian Ethics was in irreconcilable opposition to the modernistic ethics of the regime with its espousal of eugenetics and euthanasia, involving the removal of the unfit. This is a feature of the regime that is usually not emphasized, and the truth is that at the time, such unsentimental sentiments were not viewed with the same amount of horror as nowadays²⁹. In fact at the time such measures met with general sympathy also, or maybe even especially, among liberals³⁰. I suspect that a large factor in the moral degeneracy of the Nazi regime, and which made the radicalism of the final solution thinkable at all, can be attributed to the erosion of traditional morality effected by those seemingly rational and liberal ideas.

In its influence on the church, the regime had most success with the Protestants. This is not surprising. After all this was a national church unlike that of the Catholics whose ultimate loyalty was not to the Führer but to the Pope. Also, ironically, the nowadays much resented rigidity of that Church worked in its favour, the loyal believer being committed to dogmas that sometimes contradicted those of the regime. As an erstwhile enthusiastic supporter of the Regime one may recall the Berlin (protestant) pastor Martin Niemöller, who eventually ran foul of it. He was a patriot and an anti-semiter, yet as Evans remarks, his anti-semitism was actually in the prevailing context an act of subversion and courage. He claimed that the Jews had themselves to blame for their arrogance at the time of Christ's crucifixion; but that the Germans were now exhibiting the same racial arrogance and would suffer the same fate. This illustrates to me that the holding of prejudices is in many ways an excusable vice, as long as the power and desire for independent thinking remains, allowing views to develop and change. Niemöller came to a bad end, brought into court

²⁸ In most other countries the army comes across as the dark aspect of society restrained only by civilian power. In Nazi-Germany it benefited from the reverse sun-spot effect as a haven of rationality. However, one should never forget that it was in war Nazism got the opportunity to express itself fully, and the army thereby played an undeniably crucial role.

²⁹ Nazism more than anything else gave a bad name to anti-semitism, similarly to the eugenetics movement

³⁰ Nowadays it is only abortion that has survived the general package. In fairness it should be emphasized that abortion is not exclusively geared towards improving the genetic fitness of the population, on the other hand, part of its motivation is to prevent mentally and physically handicapped to see the light of day, in order to relieve the resources of society as well as the emotional hardships of parents to be. The principle of sterilization of those deemed undesirable to procreate was practiced widely outside Germany, and in fact in Sweden up to thirty years after the end of the Second World War

and freed of all charges, he nevertheless suffered imprisonment upon release and became a personal prisoner of Hitler³¹. He is known to posterity for his saying

First they took the Communists, but I was not a Communist, so I said nothing. Then they took the Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat, so I did nothing. Then it was the trade unionists' turn, but I was not a trade unionist. And then they took the Jews, but I was not a Jew, so I did little. Then when they came and took me, there was no one left who could have stood up for me.

In comparison with everything above the cultural revolution of the Nazis fades in significance. It was not propitious times for the intellectuals, unless they decided to prostitute themselves, and even then success was not assured³². Enrolment dropped in universities and higher education, and academic standards were seriously eroded³³ as primary education suffered from a general anti-intellectual bias, in which the activities of the Hitler Jugend took precedence. Also many quack sciences were being promulgated, racial theories being the most obvious³⁴ Furthermore the regime had ideas about what constituted real German science. Admittedly the academic community played along, relegating such follies to special departments where they could be ignored; yet the steady erasure of prestige took its toll. One may see parallels here to our own times. Yet, as Evans points out, when it came to the military, modernity was the norm, the armed forces demanding the very best. And indeed in those specialized and applied regions of science, as well as in industrial matters related to the armament project, excellence still reigned. This is puzzling, and the author provides no explanation for this seeming paradox. What made Germany stand out among fellow fascist states was its supreme technical competence, the reasons for that never to my knowledge satisfactorily explained³⁵

As far as culture, many of the most German of authors, Jews as well as gentiles were driven into exile. And such relatively harmless authors like Hans Fallada³⁶ were reduced to obscurity in spite of attempts to accommodate himself. The regimes taste in modern art was undeveloped, and as such no doubt shared with the great majority of people, inside or

³¹ which implied certain privileges

³² According to Evans Heidegger is a case in point, thus that morally ambiguous thinker comes off very easily in the book, meriting hardly a mention.

³³ In fact Germany was up to 1933 a leading, maybe the leading nation in science. It has never remotely recovered that prominence, which may be the most enduring effect of the Nazi period.

³⁴ One may, if in malicious mode, compare the imposition of racial considerations propagated by the regime to the current fad for gender studies and the importance of presenting a gender perspective.

³⁵ in military matters it the Allies realised that they could only get the upper hand if they enjoyed a significant material advantage. Whenever resources were stocked fairly there was never any chance. What could be the explanation? Racial superiority? Hardly a serious contention. Ruthless indoctrination? Some people still argue, no tongue in cheek, that the German predisposition for military valour and sacrifice gave them the edge. Or could it be that the Regime did something right after all? Typically only to serve the vilest of aims. Normally such performances would be a source of pride to a Nation. For obvious reasons the very ambiguity of the situation acts as a strong inhibition. Yet one may speculate as how matters will be viewed in the more distant future.

³⁶ The nom de plume of Rolf Ditzen, a popular chronicler of the Weimar years

outside of Germany. The late exhibits of so called 'Entartete Kunst' have received much attention but as symptoms of cultural oppression they should be considered marginal. Typical though is that the regime, with its narrow view of visual art, antagonized artists, who otherwise naturally might have proved to be sympathizers, Nolte being one example. Still Nazism and Art is often being connected, some people claiming that the essence of Nazism was in its confluence of politics and aesthetics. Hitler was a failed painter³⁷ and he had a passion for architecture, the most ostentatious and primitive of the arts, according to Orwell. It is also true that the mass rallies were carefully orchestrated and masterly filmed; yet as Evans point out, those exhibits were very much in the spirit of the times, sharing many features with similar ones pioneered by the Italian fascists and the Soviet communists. Also in the arts, with the emphasis of the new heroic man, striking parallels can be discerned between the two totalitarianisms which have influenced the 20th century more than any others. It is important to realise that this does not mean that one is entitled to draw facile comparisons with actual contents, only that similar forms betray deeper affinities, the nature of which are not always easy to discover.

The essence of Nazism certainly was not aestheticism, nor I would claim, anti-semitism per se, but war. War was inevitable and provided the *raison d'être* for the regime, without which it probably would have foundered. Clear steps towards war can in retrospect easily be made out. First and foremost, the treaty of Versailles did limit the size of the German armed forces to 100'000 men, supposedly enough to maintain domestic stability. Also it was not allowed to have an airforce. A treaty is one thing, and practice quite another, and with some minimal ingenuity it is always possible to get around such strictures, provided there is a will. And if ever there was a will there was one then. Furthermore a large part of Western Germany was demilitarized, initially patrolled by the French army, which was naturally a source of national humiliation, regardless of political persuasion. Thus the first step Hitler took, no doubt with certain trepidations, was to reclaim the Rhine zone. Evans noted that at the time, the German army was weak, and the French could easily have stymied the effort, had they had the will. But of course they had not, and why should they? To most foreign observers the move seemed eminently reasonable, the regime was simply taking possession of its own territory. The rejoining of the Saarland during the same time through a plebiscite also added to the propaganda victory³⁸. The second crucial step was the Anschluss of Austria. Such a measure was at first opposed by Mussolini, who thought of it as being within the Italian sphere of influence, but as Hitler rose in prestige, Mussolini changed from being a mentor and a source of inspiration to a junior partner, and very soon got around to it. Austria had actually wanted to join Germany after the First World War, and should have been allowed to do so, had the guiding principles of ethnic self-determination been consistently applied. The fact that Germany and Austria was separated was due to the latter's prevailing status as an Eastern imperial power during Bismarck, making impossible a truly pan-german unification. The dissolution

³⁷ His efforts have sometimes been detrimentally compared to those of Churchill. I suspect that such comparisons have never been made blindly.

³⁸ I remember being told about the plebiscite in elementary school without reference to the actual time it took place. As with all events of the 30s, hindsight gives it an ominous turn, even when there is little need to.

of that power after the First World War removed all previous obstructions. Thus the fusion was considered by most people, the Austrians in particular, as most natural³⁹ After Austria there were the Sudeten Germans. This, unlike the case of Austria, mounted into an international crisis, temporarily resolved by the infamous Munich agreement. While the First World War had been greeted enthusiastically, the prospect of a Second World war filled not only the Western Powers and their elected representatives with horror, but also the German populace in general (in contradistinction from its also elected leaders.)⁴⁰ Evans points out that Czechoslovakia was a far more wealthier country than poor Austria, and unlike the latter with a strong army in fortified positions to boot. International agreement resulted in the division of Czechoslovakia, into a Czech German protectorate, and an independent Slovak republic, under German auspices, and forced to make significant territorial concessions to Hungary. Thus Hitler has, as conventional wisdom teaches, tried the resolve of the Western Powers and gotten away with more than he had initially asked for. The next step was Poland, but here for the first time military force was used. One will probably never know whether or not Hitler had expected yet another tacitly accepted division of Poland (this time with the Sovietunion) or whether he had accepted that this would be the war for which he had so long prepared.

Reading about the rise, triumph and eventual collapse of Nazism is ultimately a rather depressing enterprise, which too easily can degenerate into mere voyeuristic pornography⁴¹. To counter this one may ask what could one learn from such a study? History repeats itself, and those who do not bother to learn its lessons are condemned to that endless repetition. This is common wisdom, but what does it really mean? History never repeats itself as far as particulars are concerned, only on a deeper plane, far harder to identify. Thus the obvious lessons are really too trivial to have any relevance. Any political movements using the same symbols and displaying nostalgia for that particular past are politically stillborn. Nazism was never a revival of a discredited movement, on the contrary; thus by the very act of emulation, you make emulation impossible. On the other hand it is somewhat naively argued that people of today are better educated, especially in matters pertaining to democracy, to be susceptible to the charms of fascism. This is a reassuring idea, would

³⁹ Hitler considered himself as the greatest German. The fact that he was originally an Austrian national was a mere technicality. Clearly the notion of Germanity was not restricted to the vagaries of political borders. After the Second World War Austria split off again in order to be able to claim its status as the first victim of German conquest, a hypocritical stand if ever there was one. This division is bound to persist although rather arbitrary in nature.

⁴⁰ It is easy, as well as imperative, to censure Chamberline. Still the horrors of the First World War were very fresh in memory, and especially the diplomatic blunders that had brought it about. What would be more natural than to avoid falling in the same trap? While the prospect of a war in 1914 had engaged public enthusiasm, none existed for a repeat

⁴¹ As testified by the great popularity of books on the subject, as well as TV-documentaries, not to mention fascination with old Nazi regalia. The emergence of so called Neo-Nazi movements should not be seen in a political light but as the logical conclusion of the fascination, which normally takes more innocent forms. This incidentally rises the uncomfortable suspicion that extended interest in the period belies a latent sympathy.

it be true, but I personally doubt it⁴². Education is never an ethical guarantee. Courage and integrity cannot be taught. Thus future dangers are bound to be of a more insidious kind, never to be recognised in any obvious way.

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⁴² Recent reactions of a dithering kind to the freedom of speech, reveal how shaky the command of basic democratic principles is, even among people who would be expected to know better