

**NIETZSCHE,  
GODFATHER OF FASCISM?**

ON THE USES AND ABUSES OF A PHILOSOPHY

EDITED BY

JACOB GOLOMB AND ROBERT S. WISTRICH

**Nietzsche and the Fascist Dimension:  
The Case of Ernst Jünger**

David Ohana

**The Nietzschean Revolution: From Ethics to Aesthetics**

What was the nature of the intellectual revolution instigated by Friedrich Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century? Why were both left-wing and right-wing groups inspired by this revolution? Why does it still continue to disturb so many people? It is impossible to separate out any one element of Nietzsche's thought as the answer to these questions—the death of God, the critique of morality and religion, the “Overman” or the will to power. It is rather the revolutionary combination of the consciousness of nihilism and the will to power that brings Nietzsche so close to us at the beginning of a new century: When the “new Man” rebelled against the burden of the past and rejected the contents of Western history, he became the midwife of his own world. Thus the nihilistic revolution is necessarily linked with the aesthetic one: Nietzschean nihilism<sup>1</sup>—having gone beyond the traditional criteria of good and evil, truth and falsity—led to the new creative principle of the will to power. Traditional ethics was replaced by a new aesthetics.

Nietzsche made use of a philosophy of unmasking that attempted to dig down to the root of things and eliminate the disguises worn by Western culture throughout history. But his critique itself led to a historicism that examines concepts along the continuum of time. This method

became a nihilistic unmasking that undermined the origins of traditional values. Even the basic notions behind what is generally considered Nietzsche's positive philosophy—self-overcoming, eternal recurrence, the "Overman," the will to power—expose the Janus-faced aspect of Nietzsche's method: on the one hand, the compulsory nihilism of the notion of "the eternal recurrence of things," yet on the other, the love of fate (*amor fati*) and the total affirmation of life as the implication of the Overman's will to power. The primacy of nothingness and the primacy of life are mutually linked.

Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* played a vital part in the essential task of clearly separating Nietzsche from Nazism.<sup>2</sup> Yet this influential book left Nietzsche without teeth and deprived him of his philosophical hammer. He was given a place of honor among other humanist thinkers. But we must not ignore the fact that in the twentieth century fascist thinkers seized upon different aspects of Nietzsche's nihilism, painting it with their own political colors. Nietzsche's philosophical radicalism presaged various forms of *political* radicalism.<sup>3</sup>

Those thinkers, culture critics, and artists who were close to fascism seized upon various elements in the existentialist approach of the Nietzschean school, but added a political dimension. This approach repudiated historical and romantic assumptions just as it rejected the philosophy of progress and Enlightenment. While historicism was guided by the past, the Enlightenment stressed the openness of the future, from which it derived the concept of progress. In contrast, the fascist intellectuals ignored both the guidance of the past and the open future in favor of the dynamic present. This led to the rejection of the concept of progress, since historical continuity, in either the open rationalist sense or the rigid determinist one, was broken, and the dynamic present was detached from the cultural context with its centuries of accretions.

The existentialist approach is centered around the Nietzschean assumption that the enhanced concept of humanity can be given a variety of interpretations, and is continually developing and self-creating. The historical, romantic, determinist and progress-minded approaches described the individual as a culture-dependent and tradition-dependent historical entity; Nietzsche, however, created an original, unique anthropological image of the individual as affirming his fate (*amor fati*), yet also shaping it with his own hands by using the will to power as a creative principle.<sup>4</sup> No longer must the individual blindly follow the heritage of the past; from now on the continually evolving world is identified with the continually evolving self, as the essence of the existentialist idea. Since the world is dynamic and self-creating, the individual must not remain fixed, but rather identify with the world's rhythm.

The existentialist approach to history thus served as a revolutionary

turning-point by rebelling against the Judeo-Christian ethic and the classical tradition, and adopting the notion that the (nonrational) self must shape aesthetically the (nonrational) reality. This aesthetic view of reality is not subject to the domination of reason and goes beyond the accepted ethical distinctions of good and evil to adopt new distinctions based on creativity, stagnation, or degeneration. The implications of this view are far-reaching: sanctifying the here and now, affirming activism, and adopting a clear modernist approach that is neither teleological nor ethical, and that does not constitute a necessary link in the chain of progress or an accretion to the achievements of humanity that are passed on through cultural experience. This view thus disqualifies the concept of culture as the consolidation of historical continuity, consciously annihilates the continuity of time, and affirms the dynamic moment in the present.

Nietzsche was also the prophet of modern secularism—not the kind that claims, with Spinoza, that the sacred is within us, but the sort that reveals the secular without the sacred, a new humanity sovereign over the world.<sup>5</sup> This world has no universalist pretensions, whether sacred, rational, or moral. Perspectivist philosophy thus reached nihilist conclusions. It is not searching for the truth as the primary ambition of philosophy, but instead seeks to create the world as a new myth. At the same time, there arises a dynamic and creative conception of time. This modern concept, which creates myth, is not a reactionary call to return to our mythical roots in the past, but a claim that only the future will permit the rise of myth.<sup>6</sup>

Underlying this modern mythology was Nietzsche's genealogical approach and philosophy of unmasking, which were intended to remove all moral, utilitarian, and directional camouflage from culture—whether this disguise took the form of a messianic paradise in the secular progressive vision, or a golden age in the religious version. Nietzsche was committed to a cyclical concept of a nonteleological history, and Zarathustra is the personification of the myth of eternal recurrence.<sup>7</sup>

The revival of myth paradoxically constituted the conclusion of philosophical inquiry. In place of the philosophy of reason Nietzsche sets up the myth of the will to power; in place of the search for objective truth, he extols subjective creativity; in place of universal rationalism he urges creative aesthetics. The traditional philosophers had hitherto offered interpretations of the world or attempted to justify its existence; in contrast, the new philosophers—including those of fascism—were trying to create a world *ex nihilo* in their own image. This style of mythical creation, which has profoundly shaped modern civilization, is a product of the kind of aesthetic imagination first embraced by Nietzsche.

The "new Man" is the crown jewel of the myth-creating fascist ideol-

ogy. He is an individual who identifies with the rhythm of the modern world, who is tested in action rather than contemplation, through initiative rather than continuity, and creativity rather than the preservation of culture. Such a person considers the reality of conflict to be the natural arena and the necessary condition for the creation of authenticity. Nietzsche's "new Man" is a source of inspiration for the future, while the "old Man" is a historical type who has been defeated by the past. Out of the mass society of "old persons" Nietzsche hoped to create an "Overman" who would look soberly at the world with a modern awareness of nihilism, and would activate and enhance the will to power.<sup>8</sup>

It was this Janus-face of nihilism and the Overman's will to power that attracted radicals like Ernst Jünger, who created the "totalitarian nihilistic syndrome."<sup>9</sup> They considered nihilism the litmus test for distinguishing between the weak and the powerful, while the will to power distinguished between the degenerate and the authentic. Nihilism of the negative-type pattern—to use Nietzsche's language—frightens the weak and makes them flee to their refuge of passivity and paralysis; while nihilism of the positive or active variety—again in Nietzsche's terms—provides a challenge for the powerful, who create a new reality *ex nihilo* in the process of coping with it.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, there is a degenerate will to power that is the province of the weak, while the will to power of the powerful is an authentic one.

The Overman is the challenge of the intellectual revolution which Nietzsche instigated in Western civilization—destroying the classical heritage, historical culture, the Judeo-Christian ethic—and at the same time strengthening the will to power as an existential, aesthetic, and metaphysical principle. Destruction and rebuilding are the methods of the "new Man," who is continually creating and destroying his own world. He is destroying super-illusions and striving for comprehensiveness. He is not interested in categorizing or defining his values, but only in creating them and continually overcoming them. He does not sanctify permanent values as such, and contradictions do not frighten him. He is therefore considered a master of deceit and a legislator-king. Since the authentic individual—the crown of existential thought—emerged from the Nietzschean school, the will to power is his human and cosmological principle. The individual as will to power is characterized by self-overcoming, while the world as will to power is characterized by the eternal recurrence; neither has any ethical aspect, both are lawless and meaningless. Therefore neither the existence of the individual nor the world—both of which have been revealed as nihilistic—requires any particular content or meaning, and they can be actualized and bestowed with meaning only in an aesthetic context.<sup>11</sup>

The world's eternal recurrence and humanity's self-overcoming con-

sist of development without any goal, which implies a cyclical process that continually annihilates itself, or by the same token reconstructs itself. Either way the result is the same: there is neither direction nor goal.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche affirms energy for its own sake, and so the Janus-faced aspect of the "Overman"—who annihilates all values and affirms existence as it is—has no force. After all, the "Overman," who strives to be a sovereign individual and attempts to enhance the will to power, lives with "empty energy"—energy that consumes itself. Nietzsche calls this energy "the world" and demands that we accept it as it is. The change in values therefore consists of replacing the value of the goal by that of the process, the value of reason by authenticity, and ethics by the principle of the will to power; moreover, ethics is no longer a social issue but an issue between the individual and his world. The concepts of good, rational, and true are abandoned in favor of the concept of the authentic identity of the individual and the world (that is, the will to power) as a new unified conception.

Nietzsche's concept of the new Man is totally subjectivist and thus open to various interpretations. If there are no universal, objective criteria, then the whole basis of Western civilization is called into question. Each human being is a force of separate will to power, which means that he exists for his own sake and is validated by his own power. Thus all the foundation stones of Western civilization topple one after another; Judeo-Christian morality, rationalist philosophy, historical tradition. In legitimizing all interpretations, Nietzschean perspectivism also includes its own weak points, since objective explanations, moral norms, and rational validity are no longer possible. Nietzsche uses history as a point of departure for reconstructing Western philosophy.<sup>13</sup> After rejecting whatever has become redundant in history, what is left is the affirmation of existence—not out of historical conditioning or inherited custom, but out of a *heroic* existential approach, which embodies the exaltation of freedom and power in its "Yes." The will to power—as the central manifestation of the subject, and an existential, intuitive cognitive assumption—replaces the old criteria with new distinctions that affirm the authentic rather than the degenerate, the strong rather than the weak, the individual rather than the collective. Nietzsche's radicality stems from the fact that he rejected the traditional criteria of Western thought and placed a new philosophical principle at the helm to drive the "new Man": the will to power.<sup>14</sup>

The will to power displaced reason from its central position. If Kant is the outstanding representative of the "classical aesthetics" of the eighteenth century, then Nietzsche is the exact opposite: In his view aesthetics, as the "critique of judgment," is not parallel to morality, as the "critique of practical reason," but rather replaces it. This is indeed

Nietzsche's great revolution—substituting the will to power, as a particularist aesthetic principle, for the universal moral imperative. Separating aesthetics from morality, which means raising creativity from a normative to a metaphysical level, was the central axis of the revolt against bourgeois norms in the late nineteenth century. The Nietzscheanism of the radical Right led in the end to the aestheticization of philosophical thought and moral principles: Although the concept of “the aesthetic education of humanity” had already been formulated by Schiller, Kant, Schelling, and Schopenhauer, the principal innovation of the intellectual trend under discussion was the interweaving of the political dimension, existential experience, and the aesthetic conception as complementary manifestations of the new Man.

### The Burden of Responsibility

Half a century after the vanquishing of European fascism, as we gained an increasingly clear insight into the causes of fascism's rise and success, we can identify that nihilism is hidden at the core of fascism—in its essence, its nature, its genes. The roots of the fascist mentality lie in its utopian view of the “community of experience” and the quest for the new man. As a cultural phenomenon, fascism accords pride of place to action rather than to thinking, to experience rather than to awareness, to style rather than to content. Its political acts are performed for the sake of the action itself, divorced from the social context. Fascism is not interested in social change, but in a *perpetuum mobile* that creates the illusion of change on the road to some utopian destination.

The importance of the European thinkers, cultural critics, and writers like Ernst Jünger who were informed by Nietzsche's existential credo, lies in their fabrication of a modern political mythology that inspired politicians and leaders of mass movements.<sup>15</sup> They created a new terminology and political dictionary of modernism, based on such key concepts as the “new man,” “political myth,” “dynamism,” “will to power,” and “community of experience.” This new style signified a transition from the centrality of ideology to that of myth. The modern political style of “anti-intellectual” intellectuals, who gave myth precedence over reason, became the heart of a dynamic political culture that created the “generation of 1914” and shaped the fascist mentality that arose in its wake.

What is the intellectual mainspring of the *bellicose* enthusiasm of the 1914 generation? In a chapter entitled “The Impulse of Nietzsche,” in *The Heritage of Our Times*, Ernst Bloch answers that it is “Dionysus as a symbol of abstractly fantastic escape into anarchy: only here do we grasp Nietzsche's serious impact on the age.”<sup>16</sup> The danger, as Bloch sees

it, is inherent in the Nietzschean theory of the “eternal recurrence of the same,” which he qualifies as “a strange doctrine,” “banal,” and so on. This cyclical notion, when added to Nietzsche's “boundless willpower,” is an explosive mixture. “That is why,” Bloch writes, “super-fascist Nietzsche interpreters, such as Bäumler, for instance, seek to eliminate Dionysus.”<sup>17</sup>

Even if Nietzsche is not directly responsible for fascism, he certainly had an intellectual influence on the 1914 generation that metamorphosed into fascism. As Ernst Bloch wrote,

The struggle for existence rages on endlessly . . . with the “eternal natural right of the stronger” as its sense and content. This kind of activism, evil activism of course, obviously derives from Sorel and also from Nietzsche. . . . Yet neither Sorel nor Nietzsche consciously intended their use by fascism: to this extent their wishful images of power are still ante rem. . . . Nonetheless, both philosophers were usable by fascism.<sup>18</sup>

The utopian visions of German Nietzscheans such as Alfred Rosenberg, Möller van der Bruck, and Ernst Jünger contributed to the myths that helped shape fascism as “community of experience.” The demagoguery of Ernst Jünger's imagined unity of workers and soldiers ultimately comes down to something comparable to the blood and flames of Rosenberg. Fascism utopized the dynamism anchored in the myths that stimulate experience.<sup>19</sup> This syndrome first appeared in the intellectual climate of the fin de siècle and the 1914 generation, in the cultural milieu of the interwar decades, and in the fascist movements and regimes that constituted its political zenith.

### A Man for All Seasons

Ernst Jünger, born in Heidelberg in 1895, was the eldest of four sons in a typical German bourgeois family.<sup>20</sup> In his early years, his family moved to Hanover, following the decision of his father, the owner of a chemical factory, who was concerned for his children's economic welfare. However, dissatisfaction with a comfortable bourgeois existence caused the seventeen-year-old Jünger to seek out a life of danger and adventure. He crossed the French frontier at Metz and burnt all the money in his possession in order to sever his connection to the past. He then made his way to Africa where, like Marinetti, the founder of the Italian Futurist movement, he discovered what he called “the promise of happiness.”<sup>21</sup> After he had stayed a few weeks at Sidi-Bal-Abbas in North Africa, his father brought him home, but he did not remain there for long. Later, Jünger described the reasons for his frequent flights from home: “We

grew up in the atmosphere of a materialistic epoch, and we all consequently had a taste for something out of the ordinary, for situations of great danger."<sup>22</sup>

In 1914, before the outbreak of war, he volunteered for the 73rd Hanover Fusilier Regiment, in which he served for four years. He began as a private, and a year later was appointed a junior officer. He did not volunteer for ideological or nationalistic reasons, but in the hope of finding in the army what he had sought in Africa: a life of existential significance, of danger, of spontaneity and vitality. He finally found his Africa in the fields of Flanders. The primitivism he longed for changed in content but not in essence, and his myth of Africa was now replaced by the myth of the war. In those years in which he dwelt in the trenches of northern France, Jünger was in charge of platoons of commandos and was wounded seven times. Like Rommel, he received the highest decoration for valor in the German army. After the war, he returned to his defeated country, and began to take his first steps in civilian life. His sojourn in the trenches had given birth to an exhaustive battle diary documenting his experience in the war. The diary, which appeared in 1920 under the title *Stahlgewittern* (*The Storm of Steel*), won its author immediate fame and was an instant best-seller. Jünger became the spokesman of the generation of the trenches that had sacrificed all without receiving anything in return.<sup>23</sup>

From 1927 onward, Jünger lived in Berlin and imbibed the atmosphere of intrigue and machinations, clubs that spawned utopias, subversive agitation in beer cellars, violence in the streets, and corruption in high places. Jünger declared in the spirit of that time (as Thomas Mann had done a dozen years previously) that all democratic regimes were in contradiction to the essentially tragic nature of the human destiny. His interest in botany and zoology was not scientific but metaphorical: he wished to study the sphere of animals and vegetation as a language of symbols for an understanding of the metaphysical essence of the world. In the 1930s, he traveled a great deal in Brazil, Morocco, Scandinavia, and France, and in his travel notes there was still a sense of nostalgia for the primitive and a feeling of hostility to the compromises and adjustments of the world in which he lived. In 1932, Jünger published *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*), a technological utopia of the modern world that was the high point of his intellectual achievement.<sup>24</sup>

Jünger took the "nihilistic-totalitarian syndrome" to its ultimate conclusions. He used the myth of the "masculine community" of the trenches and the public memory of the first mechanized war in order to construct a utopia in which technology directed, guided, and molded man and his role in the new hierarchical society. Indeed, the Jüngerian technological utopia would be prophetic of a new political form of totalitarian nihilism.

For Jünger, the Second World War was a completely different experience from the first one. If the First World War was a hell in the trenches, the second was for Jünger a pleasurable experience in the streets of Paris. As an officer of the German occupation, he spent his time in the French capital in the company of "collaborationist" authors and cultural critics, visiting artists like Picasso and Braque and in frequenting literary clubs and cafés on the boulevards. All this is described in his wartime notes, the first part of which was published in 1942 under the title *Gärten und Strassen* (*Gardens and Streets*).<sup>25</sup> Toward the end of the war (1943), his book *Der Friede* (*The Peace*) appeared and was popular among the young German soldiers on the western front. When the war ended, his books were banned in the British zone of occupation in Germany, but at the same time were freely available in London. In November 1944, when he lost his eighteen-year-old son Ernestal on the Italian front, he wrote that "the only true community of the war" was the community of the bereaved. His stay in Paris was interrupted by a six-week journey to the Caucasian front, but the quiet places he visited there in no way recalled his experiences in Flanders. These landscapes were later described in his utopia *Heliopolis* (1949), which developed the theme of *Auf den Marmorlippen* in which the representatives of anarchy and the representatives of nihilism confront each other in the person of the hero, Lucio de Gir.<sup>26</sup> After his commander General Heinrich von Stülpfnagel was executed, Jünger was sent back to Germany, and in October 1944 he was discharged from the army. His diary (1949), which covers the period of the Second World War in detail, ends with the entry of American tanks into a village near Hanover in April 1945.<sup>27</sup>

After the war, there was talk of him being placed on trial in Nuremberg. Seeking to preserve his honor, Jünger refused to be tried by the de-Nazification court, although clearance would have enabled him to publish his books freely. However, Jünger lived on to become the most important cultural figure in Germany after Heidegger. His long life and his many books, which appeared in successive editions, caused the character of his youthful writings to be forgotten. In 1982, he received a dramatic rehabilitation when he was awarded the prestigious Goethe prize in a splendid ceremony in Frankfurt. Three years later, the chancellor Helmut Kohl made a pilgrimage to the village of Wilfingen, where Jünger lived, to congratulate him on his ninetieth birthday. He died in 1998, at the age of a hundred and three.

### The Aesthetics of War

In the writings of his youth, Jünger seized on the war as an "existential moment" in terms derived from Nietzsche. Unlike many other

betrayed Nietzsche when they took Zarathustra into the trenches, he had a profound understanding of the Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* and an intense sympathy for the progenitor of the "will to power." When Jünger fused his interpretation of Nietzsche with his sense of the aesthetic attraction of the war and the experience of the trenches, he was no longer one more author writing about the war but had become its most enthusiastic advocate. Jünger saw the First World War as the most concrete manifestation of Nietzsche's existential, aesthetic, and nihilistic vision. He did not look for the most "exalted" moment but for *the* moment. One cannot prepare oneself for a mystical moment of this kind, for such a moment is like an earthquake that overtakes a man unawares. According to Jünger, the experience of the war was not relative but absolute, enabling a man to discover himself and finally understand the meaning of life.<sup>28</sup>

*Stahlgewittern* is a realistic description of the soldiers in the trenches. Jünger strikes an admirable balance between the perspective of the soldier who feels horror when going into battle and that of the detached observer who tries to perceive the real meaning of the scenes of the war. In his battle diary, the private and later the officer Jünger noted everything that took place and "what he thought about it at the time it happened."<sup>29</sup> The war was depicted soberly: columns of soldiers filled with their bodies a battlefield that was like a desert of the insane; the dug-outs, trenches, and holes that served as shelters and homes for millions of soldiers were a sort of microcosm of Dante's *Inferno*. The war changed its character after the Somme offensive of 1916, and it was now clear to many young people that it would not be a temporary affair and a joyous youthful adventure, but was something with which they would be burdened for weeks, months, and years. What was the value of men's lives when the eye became accustomed to the daily sight of thousands of exploding bodies flying in the air? Nothing existed except a frenzied crescendo of mutual slaughter. Noble feelings ceased having any significance at a time when the machine dominated humanity. Men were hardened and became atoms, and their outward appearance reflected this: this was the first time that German soldiers wore steel helmets. In the shadow of death, stiffness and rigidity became a way of life. The soldiers became a laboratory for the production of death on a massive scale and for the exploitation of means of destruction.

Jünger's description of the war reached its climax in his account of the great German offensive of March 1918. The moment approached for the last supreme effort. The fate of nations was to be sealed in blood and steel, and the destiny of the world hung in the balance. Jünger was aware of the historical significance of this moment and was convinced that each man felt that his individual existence was rendered insignifi-

cant by the weight of the historic responsibility placed on his shoulders. Such moments made him feel that in the final analysis, the history of nations and the fate of the individual were decided in battles. On the eve of the battle, the tension in the air could be cut with a knife. The officers gathered in a circle exchanged nervous jokes and were unable to preserve their clarity of mind as the artillery bombardment proceeded. Nerves were paralyzed, and people were no longer even frightened. Death lost its meaning because "the will-to-live passed collectively to the nation." This made everyone indifferent to his personal fate. This jumble of feelings mixed with alcohol as the army advanced toward the enemy aroused both the bestial and the godlike in man. The army was infused with a blood-lust.

In *Der Kampf* also *inneres Erlebnis*, the war was also described as an aesthetic and existential phenomenon:

All goals are past, only movement is eternal, and it brings forth unceasingly magnificent and merciless spectacles. To sink into their lofty goallessness as into an artwork or as into the starry sky, that is granted only to the few. But who experiences in this war only negation, only inherent suffering and not affirmation, the higher movement, he has experienced it as a slave. He has no inner, but only an external experience.<sup>30</sup>

Jünger experienced the reality as a mysterious movement of spirit: "We are confronted with a riddle: the mystery of the spirit that pours out now and then across the world, seizing whole multitudes of men together. No one knows where it originates."<sup>31</sup> Ernst von Salomon also wrote of the thread binding together the loyalties of a single race, in which each person shares the same sufferings and is subject to the same penetrating vibrations.<sup>32</sup> Jünger described the riddle and at the same time provided the interpretation: he was a barometer who experienced the present within himself but who also discerned the significance of his era and his place in it. Men of action like Salomon and Jünger described themselves in their books as reflecting the things that were taking place in their time.

### The Vanguard that Precedes the Reich

According to Josef Goebbels, the overriding aim of the radical nationalists in the time of the Weimar Republic was to transform the masses into a people. In the war, order had been universally imposed: the masses disappeared overnight, and an exultant, enthusiastic mob had

been transformed into a people marching into battle. Jünger describes how this mob became a people and an army:

New gods were raised to the throne of the day: strength, the fist, and virile courage. The long columns of armed youth thundering along the asphalt embodied all of these qualities: the crowd was suffused with jubilation and reverential awe.<sup>33</sup>

This was the vanguard that preceded the Reich. The mob was organized into a fighting formation, and the moral Jünger drew from it was, "This is how things should be!" The anarchic nature of existence should be molded by the will into strength, audacity, and courage. After the war, with the defeat of Germany, the people had split apart into a disorganized mass as it had been before. According to Jünger, the subculture of the Weimar Republic now raised up the masses from the dunghill and made them the arbiter of cultural norms in place of the elite. Jünger expressed his patrician disdain for this phenomenon in language reminiscent of the Nietzschean contempt for the "herd":

Since the mass is unable to emulate the few, the few are being called upon to emulate the mass. Politics, drama, artists, cafés, patent-leather shoes, posters, newspapers, morality, tomorrow's Europe, the world of the day after tomorrow: all this is to become thundering mass. The mass is a beast of a thousand heads, it obstructs all movement, crushes anything it cannot swallow or engulf; it is envious, parvenu, common. The individual has once again been defeated, betrayed most savagely by men born to represent him.<sup>34</sup>

Jünger advocated a nationalism of a new kind—one based on the individual rather than social beliefs or traditions. The existential outlook that connected the individual with his universe automatically identified nationhood with the individual.

It [nationalism] is more than just one idea among others. It does not seek out the measurable, but the measure. It is the surest route to the maternal being that gives birth to new forms in every century. And we have seen that there are still men who can create after the fashion of the warrior.<sup>35</sup>

Jünger's existential nationalism was based on an affirmation of the instincts, a merging with the cosmos and the creation of a new man, ex nihilo, entranced by the rhythms and "bestiality" of war.

The subject of Jünger's article "On Pain" was this man of steel or "new man." According to this article, bourgeois culture tries to disregard poverty and servitude by creating a whole world of political and

technical "comfort." This was exemplified by Nietzsche's "last man," who was bourgeois, hedonistic, and comfortable. The meritorious man, on the other hand, is the one who is full of contempt toward the world of bourgeois mediocrity, and who is able to bear the pain of the technological era. An elite group or an artist or hero knows the value of self-discipline and realizes that it is pain that directly creates the power of life. The body is not regarded as having any value in itself, but is an object or tool for the attainment of higher values that are achieved through the technological impulse. Man must therefore be transformed into a machine. Discipline is "the means by which man connects himself to pain."<sup>36</sup> For the bourgeoisie, a "good" man is one who can be influenced, who is changeable, mobile, somewhat restless. By contrast, "the disciplined man is closed up: he has a stern mentality—one-sided, objective, hard." Above all, a man must learn the value of self-sacrifice. From this aesthetic starting point, man can achieve a complete objectivization of his own body. This self-objectivization can take place only in a world in which the concepts of space and time have radically changed.<sup>37</sup>

The battlefield was the progenitor of the "new man." Jünger's patrician Nietzscheanism led him to the conclusion that the masses who invaded the battlefield destroyed the image of an organized army of select individuals. In his opinion, the bourgeoisie had opened up the trenches to the masses and made a business out of the war, which is the only place where a man can be truly a man: "Only one mass-phenomenon is not ridiculous: the army. But the bourgeoisie has made even the army ridiculous."<sup>38</sup> According to Jünger, the man who was not militaristic was "bourgeois." Jünger attacked Marxism at a sensitive point by depicting its mentality as bourgeois and antimilitaristic, or, in other words, as degenerate. The answer to degeneracy was dynamism. The "new man" paved the way for a society, culture, and nation that existed on a permanent war-footing. This model had been forged in the trenches.

The mentality of the soldiers at the front was exemplified not only by Jünger but in the *Freikorps*, private armies that sprang up after the First World War. Klaus Theweleit's study *Male Fantasies* (1978) seeks to examine their psychology.<sup>39</sup> These "white troops"—hence the name "white terror"—were used by the socialist government of Friedrich Ebert to suppress the communist insurrection of the years 1919–20. They saw the radical German working-class movement as the greatest threat to their image of the German nation. Theweleit's study, which covers about 250 novels and memoirs by the members of the *Freikorps*, investigates their hopes and fears as well as their glorification of war and violence. A literature of recollection was popular in the 1920s, and there were hundreds and thousands of books giving an obsessive description of feelings of violence, male fantasies, and experiences of the

war. This mass phenomenon paralleled the flowering of a protofascist literature in France and Italy in the 1920s reflecting the rise of militarism and a longing for male comradeship and nostalgia for one's lost heroic youth.

The writers of the Freikorps were also drawn to an existential rather than to the National Socialist ideology. Their aim was not to communicate but to totally uproot and destroy. In their writings, the self became machine-like through what Foucault once called "techniques of the self." Theweleit analyzed the discourse of the Freikorps, and *Male Fantasies* is undoubtedly a work of political symbolism. It is not an ideological survey of the subject but a study of the symbolic construction of the "other" as a mechanism for consolidating the self. Fascism, according to Theweleit, was not "a form of domination, a general ideology or a system at all"<sup>40</sup> but a sexual language, an "epistemological code," an anti-Eros in the service of nihilism. Underlying fascist propaganda, there is a constant war against anything that contains enjoyment and pleasure.<sup>41</sup> War is not regarded as a process of maturation in which the fighter passes through an initiation ceremony on the path to maturity, an event that sharpens his perception of the world. War is an experience one chooses, a mirror that reflects one's identity. War is neither an initiation ceremony nor a confrontation with the beast within us. Theweleit effects a deconstruction of these myths concerning war, which describe it as an initiation to manhood or to bestiality.

In 1925, Jünger joined the staff of the journal *Stahlhelm*, whose principles were similar to those of the *Croix de feu* in France: namely, opposition to the treaty of Versailles, to the republican regime and to universal franchise. In 1926, Jünger described war as the mother of modern nationalism: "Modern nationalism . . . needs that which is out of the ordinary. . . . The mother of the nation is war. . . . War is our mother, it infuses us with soul . . . so that our values will be heroic values, values of fighters and not of shopkeepers. . . . We do not want the useful, the private, and the pleasurable, but what is necessary and what is required by destiny."<sup>42</sup> By 1927, he was disappointed with the leagues of the *Bund* (association) of front-line soldiers (and especially with the *Stahlhelm*), which he had ceased to see as suitable models for a future society since they had become party-like structures. Jünger now conceived his "new man" in the image of the soldier-worker of the trenches of the First World War. The anonymous soldier of the war was a fitting symbol of the hero of the industrial-military process: "His positive feature is that he is replaceable, and for each one that falls there is another to take his place."<sup>43</sup> The community of "new men" came into being with the new modes of existence and new industrial forms that grew out of the war era: "This war is not the end but the beginning of

violence . . . a breaking of new frontiers. . . . The war is a great school and the new man will spring forth from our race."<sup>44</sup> The war, which produced the new communal masculine relationship, was not seen by Jünger as an experience of the past, a trauma, or something unrepeatable, but as an ever-valid model and a creative phenomenon: "Battle is not only destruction but also the masculine form of recuperation from sickness."<sup>45</sup>

### Total Mobilization

According to Jünger, the choice that faced the ordinary worker in the new era of technological nihilism was to participate of his own volition as a cog in the vast machinery or to stand aside. Only the loftier natures, the heroic worker-warriors, were fit to experience the modern work-war process. With the concept "total mobilization," Jünger meant to express the full scope of technology. In the war of the future, the country that produced the most material would win. War was a "storm of steel" because of the massive mobilization of material—an enormous work-process involving continual production and consumption.<sup>46</sup>

In his article "Total Mobilization" ("*Die totale Mobilmachung*"), published in 1930, Jünger argued that Germany was defeated in the war because it had failed to achieve total mobilization. Too many sections of the German bourgeoisie cherished ideas like safety, pleasure, comfort, individuality, private freedom, rationality, investment, and progress. The Germans did not want to risk everything for the sake of some noble ideal. In the wars of the future, however, no one would be safe. Anticipating the aerial battles of the Second World War, Jünger saw that the age of directed fire had already passed. The commander of the squadron could no longer differentiate between combatants and noncombatants, and a cloud of deadly gas would hover henceforth over every living creature. The prospect of a threat of this kind permitted neither partial nor general mobilization, only a total mobilization that would include even a baby in the cradle.

Jünger expanded his experience in the trenches into the more general conception of a work-state. From his appreciation of mechanized warfare he progressed to the vision of a society based on perpetual mobilization for total war. Total mobilization operated in the same way in a world war as in a world revolution, and it had infused the First World War with the "genius of warfare" and the "spirit of progress."

But Jünger was also one of the last representatives of the aesthetic tradition that began with Edgar Allan Poe and was developed by decadent aesthetes of the nineteenth century like Baudelaire, Wilde, and



Beardsley.<sup>47</sup> Poe's aestheticization of horror was intended to have a definite emotional effect on the bored readers of Victorian society. Wilde believed that art reveals the dark mystery of the soul, its dormant lusts and secret desires. It permitted one to see beyond the veil of everyday existence into the realm of the mysterious, the irrational. Many artists and thinkers in Germany such as Tillich and Heidegger had spoken of a revelatory experience, a "moment of truth" in which the banality of everyday life is transformed through some event that disrupts routine. A radical change of form takes place that requires a "decision" outside the sphere of normal social or political discourse. Jünger went further than his predecessors by aestheticizing war and modern technology through a kind of "heroic realism" that sought to objectivize the trauma of daily life in the modern era.

In Jünger we can find "a separation of aesthetics from morality, a raising of beauty from a normative level to a metaphysical level."<sup>48</sup> The aestheticization of political irrationalism is expressed by Jünger as follows:

Today we are writing poetry out of steel and struggle for power in battles in which events mesh together with the precision of machines. In these battles on land, on water and in the air there lies a beauty that we are able to anticipate. There the hot will of the blood restrains and then expresses itself through the dominance of technical wonder-works of power.<sup>49</sup>

Since the aesthetics of war are unconnected with its purpose or moral validity, one is left with a total aestheticism. Jüngerism as a fusion of aestheticism and militarism does not distinguish between categories of "what" but between categories of "how," between

the restoration front and the other camp determined to carry on the war by any means, and not only by means of war. We have to know where our true allies are to be found. They are not to be found in a place where people wish to be protected, but in a place where people want to attack; we are close to a situation in which any conflict that erupts anywhere in the world will strengthen our position.<sup>50</sup>

Conflict is the anvil on which the new moral dichotomy between "people who wish to be protected" and "people who want to attack" is forged.

The First World War, in which the lethal weapons of modern technology were used for the first time, was the crucible of the "new man." What motivated the "new man" was "the attraction of the machine" and the challenge of "existing without feelings." Here, Jünger's observa-

tion, "Technology is our uniform," was apt. The machine, which had formerly been seen as functional and utilitarian, was now viewed as expressing the true essence of the modern man:

Yes, the machine is beautiful. It must be beautiful for him who loves life in all life's fullness and power. The machine must also be incorporated into what Nietzsche (*who, in his Renaissance landscape, still had no place for the machine* [emphasis added]) meant when he attacked Darwinism. Nietzsche insisted that life is not only a merciless struggle for survival but also possesses a will to higher and deeper goals. The machine cannot only be a means of production, serving to satisfy our paltry material necessities. Rather, it ought to bestow on us higher and deeper satisfactions. . . . The artistic individual, who suddenly sees in technology the totality [*Ganzheit*] instead of a functional assembly of iron parts and thus grasps a strategy that seeks to break off from the path of production by seeing that totality and that strategy in war, this artistic individual is as involved in finding the solution, that is, finding the deeper and more elevated satisfactions in the machine, as the engineer or the socialist is!<sup>51</sup>

This "aestheticization of technological form," with its invocation of Nietzsche, is indicative of the direction in which Jünger's critique of modernism was moving. As Jeffrey Herf pointed out, Jünger became the most prominent spokesman of "reactionary modernism," a cultural trend "which reconciled the anti-modern, romantic and irrational ideas present in German nationalism with the clear, rational functionalism of modern technology." They (the reactionary modernists) combined political reaction with technological progress. At a time when German conservatives spoke of technology *or* culture, the reactionary modernists taught the German Right to speak of both technology *and* culture." This school of thought included thinkers like Oswald Spengler, Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer, and Werner Sombart, many of whom had been influenced by Nietzsche.

Unlike the reactionaries of the *Volksgemeinschaft* who rejected industrialization and technology as harmful to the spirit of the people, these thinkers of the "conservative revolution" came to the conclusion that Germany had to adopt modern technology and at the same time create a socio-economic system that was capable of mastering it. The aim was to consolidate German national power through the embrace of modern industrialization, to create an authoritative national socialism that would constitute a "third way" between capitalism and communism. They hoped to encourage a spirit of self-sacrifice and a love of danger in place of the Enlightenment spirit of calculated rationality.

This outlook cultivated the qualities of masculinity, bravery, hardness, discipline, and honor. The reactionary modernists sought to embrace technology within the framework of culture—which they identified with community, blood, will, independence, form, creativity, and race—while rejecting the characteristics of urban civilization—reason, intellect, internationalism, and materialism. These ideologues of the new radical nationalism wished to create order out of the chaos that existed in Germany after the First World War.<sup>52</sup>

### The Work-State

The Jüngerian view of man and the world is modeled on a Nietzschean vision of “will to power” overcoming the chaos. Existence had to be not only accepted, but also intensified. The will did not perform any actions and had no intentions. It was a blind Dionysian force, a phenomenon without a purpose, something irrational, without a consciousness. Unlike Schopenhauer, who wanted the will to be denied, Nietzsche wished it to be intensified. In the conditions of the universe, everything that existed was an obstacle and a stumbling block for everything else, with the result that there was no harmony. The basis of power was really the disharmonious nature of the universe. Nietzsche placed the emphasis on *existence* itself and not on relationships. In this Heraclitean situation, all beings sought power, tried to expand, and came into conflict with other beings. The principle of adaptation for survival gave way to the Nietzschean principle of the will to power. The Nietzschean revolution was that of abandoning the idea of purpose in favor of the idea of a process for its own sake.

Our technological world is not an area of unlimited possibilities; rather, it possesses an embryonic character that drives toward a predetermined maturity. So it is that our world resembles a monstrous foundry. . . . Its means have a provisional, workshop character, designed for temporary use.<sup>53</sup>

*Der Arbeiter* hovers somewhere between dream and nightmare—an impression that is enhanced by a radio broadcast of the period, in which Jünger said, “I wanted to avoid using general unifying terms such as are used by all the political parties: terms like culture, soul, ideal, personality, psychology, Goethe, Hegel, Shakespeare. . . . I wanted to describe our reality as it would be described to a man from the moon who had never seen a motor car and had never read a page of modern literature.”<sup>54</sup> After the Second World War, Jünger persistently claimed that his book

had been intended as a diagnosis rather than a prognosis. He had merely been a seismograph or barometer of his time.

In *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger takes the Nietzschean will to power to its ultimate fascist conclusion in formulating a technological vision of the modern world. Where Jünger had once emphasized the “existential moment” of war, he now envisaged a “total mobilization” in which labor had no limits and individuals could be sacrificed to the requirements of society. The “worker” was neither a nationalist nor a socialist, neither a democrat nor a revolutionary, but a technician, a member of the “ranked state,” the “new order,” or the “work-state.” The “worker” achieved personal satisfaction not through pursuing any external goal but through manifesting energy in production, transportation, and management. These three activities gave rise to a new phenomenon, the “*Gestalt* of the worker.” Originally, Jünger saw the *Gestalt* of the front-line soldier as the model for the “worker.” In the modern battlefield and in the modern work-process, the individual was a standardized phenomenon wearing a uniform, not a private person but a type.<sup>55</sup>

Jünger distinguished between the bourgeois era, which he identified with modernism, and the age of the worker, which was more modern than modernism, even postmodernist.<sup>56</sup> His starting point is the Nietzschean belief that the death of God and consequently the decline of Christianity and its secular counterpart, the bourgeoisie, were decisive events of the modern period. As Jürgen Habermas has stated, modernism was the project of the Enlightenment and the equality of man. Jünger sought to subvert this program and developed an anti-Enlightenment dialectic. According to him, there was no possibility of liberation, only the deterministic assumption implicit in his concept of “forms” (*Gestalten*)—the behavioral patterns of history—as against free will. Jünger therefore wished to “inform his time from the viewpoint of an archaeologist.” In this, he foreshadowed major manifestations of postmodernist thought like Michel Foucault’s “archaeology,” Jacques Derridas’s “traces,” and the “metanarrative” (myth) of Jean-François Lyotard.

In the metaphor of “archaeology,” which has become a synonym for Foucault’s subversive thought, one may discern the fingerprints of Nietzsche, the ultimate source both for Jünger and postmodernism. “Archaeology” meant that history was not a continuous narrative but a series of layers, of different organic cultures. This view, which conformed to Oswald Spengler’s concept of history as a succession of different cultures, posits a cultural relativity in which there are neither eternal truths nor suprahistorical values. Values change with historical circumstances. The archaeological approach meant a total historicism

whose political implications could be embraced by thinkers like Heidegger and Spengler or historians like Ernst Nolte.

It is also not surprising that ideologists of the Third Reich like Alfred Bäumler and E. Kriek employed a similar vitalistic and mythical language to Jünger in attacking the bourgeoisie. Bäumler, the author of *Nietzsche, der Philosoph und Politiker* (1931), suggested that intellectuals should train to live “the life of political soldiers.” The life of the soldier was regarded as an ideal and the “political soldier,” the man of the SS or the SA, represented the ultimate fulfillment. In *Der Mythos vom Orient und Occident* (1926), the Nietzschean Bäumler considered the relationship between myth and history: “Myth is definitely un-historical. Myth not only reaches prehistory, but also attains the ultimate foundations of the human soul.”<sup>57</sup> An illustration of Bäumler’s thesis was the Jüngerian “worker,” a myth of the modern world—a world that is a workshop, as opposed to the museum-like character of bourgeois life. The workshop, comparable to a battlefield, was perceived in terms of a myth of belligerence for its own sake. In his attack on bourgeois culture, Jünger fused creative vitalism with irrational nihilism to create a new mythical language. With Jünger, this mythical language became the very heart of a doctrine of vitalist consciousness.

### Heidegger: The Will to Will

Martin Heidegger’s attraction to Jünger’s writings, especially to *Der Arbeiter*, no less than his friendship with the author himself, is also deserving of our attention. Heidegger wrote,

Ernst Jünger’s work *Der Arbeiter* is important because it, in another way than Spengler, achieves what all the Nietzsche literature was up to now unable to achieve, namely, to communicate an experience of the entity and of how it is, in the light of Nietzsche’s project of the entity as Will to Power. To be sure, Nietzsche’s metaphysics is by no means conceived in a thoughtful way [*denkerisch begriffen*]; on the contrary, instead of being questionable, in the true sense, this metaphysics becomes self-evident and apparently superfluous.<sup>58</sup>

In 1938–39, Heidegger gave a university course entitled “Beyond Metaphysics,” and in the winter 1939–40, he gave a private seminar at the University of Freiburg on the work of Jünger, and especially *Der Arbeiter*. The seminar aroused opposition in the National Socialist Party, and he was finally prevented from giving it. Jünger was the only writer or thinker with whom Heidegger corresponded on a regular basis and with

whom he had a close relationship. Their first meeting, which occurred only after the Second World War, took place in the heart of the Black Forest. There, Heidegger suggested to the writer of *Der Arbeiter* that he should bring out a new edition of his book. Jünger refused, and that was the end of the conversation concerning *Der Arbeiter*. Nevertheless the two thinkers shared a common desire to understand the modern world and the universal domination of technology. In 1955, Heidegger showed Jünger his article “The Front Line,” which was first published in the *Festschrift* for Jünger’s sixtieth birthday; in 1959, the article appeared as a book under the title *Zur Seinsfrage* (*On the Question of Being*).

Throughout the 1930s, according to Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger’s reflections on technology involved a constant exploratory movement back and forth—from Jünger to Nietzsche and to Hölderlin. Jünger described modern technology better than anyone else, but took his ideas about technology as an aesthetic phenomenon from Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s doctrine of art as form-giving activity that restores weight and meaning to life resonated with Heidegger’s conviction that art could save Germany from the leveling effects of the one-dimensional technological mode of “working and producing.”<sup>59</sup>

Heidegger was fascinated by Jünger’s criticism of bourgeois decadence, his elitist conceptions, and his desire for an authoritarian community. At the same time, Heidegger welcomed the National Socialist revolution as a means of preventing the realization of precisely the technological utopia envisioned by Jünger.<sup>60</sup> Heidegger viewed the advent of the new Reich as an opportunity to revitalize the German *Volk*, in contrast to Jünger’s vision of making the entire world into a single technological planet. In formulating this vision, Jünger was not only speaking to all Germans, but to all Europeans. Heidegger was convinced that Hitler’s National Socialism made possible a “third way,” an alternative to a technological conception of reality such as that which had gained acceptance in the United States and Russia. *Der Arbeiter* represented for him the best description of this new technological understanding of reality. Jünger’s Nietzsche-inspired aestheticism made an impression on Heidegger, and many of his works could be seen as a confrontation with Jünger’s thought. In this connection, it is worth mentioning Heidegger’s series of seminars on Nietzsche given from 1936 to 1940 and from 1940 to 1946. Heidegger did not compare Nietzsche to Kierkegaard, and unlike Jaspers he did not see him as an existentialist thinker, but regarded him as the last of the metaphysicians of the West.

In their contempt for mass culture, Jünger and Heidegger were influenced by Nietzsche’s analysis of the dialectic between master and slave. Mass culture was identified with the bourgeois world that aimed at

comfort, mediocrity, and security. Moreover, Jünger and Heidegger both believed that the technological era could reach fulfillment only under the leadership of an elite that would reject the shallow optimism of the masses. Both of them awaited the Nietzschean Overman who would complete the nihilistic process.<sup>61</sup>

In *On the Question of Being*, Heidegger explained the relationship between the Nietzschean metaphysics of nihilism and the will to power as well as the conclusions Jünger drew from them in *Der Arbeiter*. For him, the conclusion was clear: "Jünger's interpretation of nihilism is entirely expressed in terms of Nietzschean categories."<sup>62</sup> Total mobilization is the large-scale realization of man's domination of the world by means of technology. Total mobilization is the process whereby the type of the "worker" mobilizes the entire world, so that work, identified with Being, becomes the very style of existence and of man's domination of Being. Total mobilization is a form of active nihilism, in that it is an expression of the nihilistic will to power since man's mastery of technique has no significance, direction, value, purpose, or content. It is will to power for its own sake, mobilization for its own sake, man's way of preserving his own vitality, or, as Heidegger expressed it, the "will to will." Nihilism is no longer European or Western but metaphysical; it becomes the fate of the whole world as a normative condition: "The metaphysical character of the type of the 'worker' corresponds to the intentions of the type of Zarathustra with regard to the metaphysics of the will to power." Believing that the technological era that Jünger envisaged was the climax of Western metaphysics, Heidegger not only hoped for a new beginning for Germany but saw Hitler's revolution as a new dawn for Europe as a whole.

Heidegger believed that for Nietzsche the essence of modernism lay in the dominance of nihilism, which had three manifestations: the supremacy of science and technology, work as a universal style, and the recognition of existential nihilism as a normal condition. Nietzsche had already declared in the early 1880s that the age of barbarism had begun and that the scientists would serve it. The question that Jünger and Carl Schmitt would subsequently ask was the question of Zarathustra, which appears in the fourth and last part of the book: "Who will have the courage to be lord of the earth?" Nietzsche did not identify the lord of the earth, but in 1881–82 he had prophesied, "The time will come when the struggle over the rule of the earth will be decided, and it will be decided in the name of essential philosophical doctrines." In 1883, he again asked, "How can one rule the earth?" and a year later he added, "I am writing for a race of men who do not yet exist, for the rulers of the earth." Although Zarathustra was the prototype that personified the metaphysics that made the Overman possible, he was not

yet the Overman but rather his spokesman. Only after 1918 would Jünger and other thinkers emerge—each one fashioning his hero—Spengler's barbarians, Sorel's syndicalists, Russian Bolsheviks, and Italian futurists—each in accordance with a metaphysical model containing residues of Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

### The Jüngerian Order

By the end of the 1920s, Jünger feared that the Nazis would betray the purity of their original national-revolutionary ideals. J. P. Stern believes that Jünger's teachings had initially served as an "intellectual superstructure" for the Nazi political program and indeed, after 1933, he was the most important writer to remain in Germany.<sup>63</sup> Significantly, he hardly made any attempt to oppose or to protest against Nazi exploitation of his name as a soldier and a patriot in order to glorify their aims.

Jünger never joined the Nazi party, but, to say the least, he did not regret the fall of the Weimar Republic. On the contrary, he felt that the Nazis' rise to power was the "metaphysical solution" that would put into practice the scheme of total mobilization in its pure form.<sup>64</sup> The many explanations that have been given as to why Jünger did not join the Nazi party all agree on one point. Jünger, with aristocratic disdain, fundamentally rejected the *plebeian* aspects of Nazism. Jünger's aloofness toward the Nazis from 1930 onward, despite his closeness to them in the previous decade, was due to his wish to preserve the idealistic purity of the new nationalism. He feared that the Nazi party was open to the same "party egoism" as he found in the other parties, and he rejected its legalistic tactics and compromises with the Weimar Republic. He believed that Nazism was only a temporary phenomenon.<sup>65</sup> Nor did his ideas really correspond to Nazi ideology, since he did not believe in a biological racism. The rejection by the Nazis of his intellectual and aesthetic criteria should also be noted.

However, the Jüngerian "new man" did foreshadow and pave the way for the men of the SS. Indeed, his ideal was not so different from the Nazi stormtrooper of the period—part ex-serviceman, part delinquent, displaying an attitude of 'heroic realism,' which meant 'fighting for its own sake.'<sup>66</sup> Stanley Rosen saw a connection between Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Jünger's views in *Der Arbeiter*, and their respective attraction to Nazism. Nihilism and fascism were linked by an umbilical cord: "Jünger is of interest because his career provides us with a series of steps similar to those traversed by Heidegger: at first, an active encouragement of the contemporary nihilistic motives; then, disillusion with the political mobilization of what was supposed to be a

spiritual purification; last, . . . waiting for new, anti nihilistic revelations of Being."<sup>67</sup> In Rosen's opinion, the nihilization of Western civilization proceeded in a straight line from *Der Arbeiter* to Nazism. In 1934, one year after Hitler came to power, one Nazi writer expressed appreciation of Jünger's contribution to the outlook of German youth in the following terms: "German youth is first of all indebted to Ernst Jünger for the fact that technology is no longer a problem for us. They have accepted the admirable views about technology expressed in *Feuer und Blut*; they live in harmony with them. They no longer need an ideology with which to overcome [technology]. Jünger has liberated us from that nightmare."<sup>68</sup> The "nightmare" in question was the hostility to the automobile, to technology, to industrialization, and to urbanism that had characterized *völkisch* antimodernism, the cultural despair of Möller Van den Bruck, and Spengler's pessimism.

Augier, a myth-maker in the service of the Third Reich, would write in 1950 that the French SS groups "were the most perfect expression of the nihilistic world order"<sup>69</sup>—a historical development he traced back to Nietzsche: in Nietzschean perspectivism, one interpretation is no better than another, and the nihilistic revolution initiated by Nietzsche left behind it ruins where wild growths flourished. If Nietzsche had been asked, he would undoubtedly have disowned his political interpreters, but that is not the point. The problem is the possible implications of Nietzschean nihilism in the absence of the universal rule of reason. The starting point laid down by Albert Camus is relevant here: "Let us recognize first of all that we will never be able to speak in the same breath of Nietzsche and Rosenberg."<sup>70</sup> But can we disregard the nihilistic inner logic that Nietzsche explicated, thus facilitating its development in the twentieth century? Can we avert our eyes from the laying of a path of directionless dynamism from Nietzsche toward the politics of Rosenberg, who wrote, "Let our style be that of a marching column, and it doesn't matter in which direction the column marches, or for what reason?"<sup>71</sup> The question continually recurs (especially with regard to Nietzsche) as to how a philosophical system comes to be distorted, perverted, and emasculated by the ideologists who speak in its name? How is it that certain "necessary" conclusions come to be drawn? Camus acutely observed, "Philosophy profanes the ideal, and tyrants come and immediately profane the philosophy that gives them the right to do so." It was the political factor that became all-dominant in the twentieth century, and when fused with nihilist and aesthetic elements, it ultimately made possible a totalitarian interpretation of the Nietzschean philosophy. Perhaps it is symbolically significant that in the year in which Hitler and Heidegger were born, Nietzsche went insane.

## Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance and advice of Robert Wistrich in editing this essay.

1. Hereby I follow Richard Schacht's definition of nihilism as "the doctrine that there is and can be no such thing as 'truth' where reality is concerned . . . [or] the doctrine that axiological principles have no objective basis in reality." See his "Nietzsche and Nihilism," in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 30. See also Arthur Danto's definition: "An essentially chaotic reality . . . (there) is neither order nor purpose, things nor facts, nothing there whatever to which our beliefs can correspond," in his *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 33. Compare other interpretations: Elizabeth Kuhn, *Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992); Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chaps. 6–7.
2. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche; Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950); and compare Walter H. Sokel, "Political Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in Walter Kaufmann's Image of Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien* 12 (1983): 429–35.
3. Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
4. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 vols. (Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1961); Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
5. Gianni Vattimo, *La sécularisation de la pensée*, trans. Charles Alunni (Paris: Seuil, 1986).
6. David Ohana, "The Role of Myth in History: Nietzsche and Georges Sorel," in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America* (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1986), 119–140.
7. For other interpretations, see also Ivan Soll, "Reflections on Recurrence: A Re-Examination of Nietzsche's Doctrine, *die Ewige Wiederkehr Des Gleichen*," *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 322–42; Arnold Zuboff, "Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence," In *ibid.*, 343–57; Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1978).
8. Compare with Robert C. Solomon's assumption that "the themes of nihilism and the will to power . . . function together as the key poles of Nietzsche's thought." See his "Nietzsche, Nihilism, and Morality," in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 203. See also Gilles Deleuze's argument: "Nihil in 'nihilism' means negation as quality of the will to power," in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 143.

9. David Ohana, "Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger: From Nihilism to Totalitarianism," *History of European Ideas*, 11 (1989): 751-58; for another interpretation, see Philippe Barthelet, "Sur deux vertus nietzschéennes," *Ernst Jünger, L'Oeil-De-Boeuf* (Special Issue), nos. 5-6 (Decembre 1994): 45-46.
10. Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 1-27; Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 131-207; Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche's Overcoming of Kant and Metaphysics: From Tragedy to Nihilism," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 16 (1987): 310-39.
11. Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 30.
12. Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 50.
13. For the psychological dimension of the will to power, see Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche's Psychology of Power* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989).
14. David Ohana, *Misdar Ha-Nihilistim (The Order of the Nihilists): Leidata shel Tarbut politit be-Europa 1870-1930* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1993), in Hebrew.
15. David Ohana, "The 'Anti-Intellectual' Intellectuals as Political Myth-makers," in *The Intellectual Revolt Against Liberal Democracy 1870-1945* ed. Z. Sternhell (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996), 87-104.
16. Ernst Bloch, "The Impulse of Nietzsche," in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. by Neville and Stephan Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press), 325.
17. *Ibid.*, 330; See especially, Anson Rabinbach in his "Unclaimed Heritage: Ernst Bloch's Heritage of Our Times and the Theory of Fascism," *New German Critique* (Spring 1977).
18. Quoted in David Ohana, "Georges Sorel and the Rise of Political Myth," *History of European Ideas* 13, no. 6 (1991): 733-46.
19. Ansgar Hillach, "The Aesthetics of Politics: Walter Benjamin's Theories of German Fascism," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 120-28.
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