

who know their nation as well as I imagine that I know mine hold the same view. In all the discussions upon the state of Europe, of course, in all the efforts to ease the rigors of the international situation, France puts in the foreground the thesis of security, the indisputably precious security of France. Now I am well aware that the walls of this hall have ears, and that perhaps even some Frenchmen, out of respect for the intellectual life of Germany, are listening to my words. And therefore I say that the best, the most realistic security for France is the mental health of the German people; and all the world sees that this health is upset by a general political and economic crisis, rendered for Germany more dangerously acute by the unwisdom of the peace conditions. Then let France ask herself what is fitting, as between civilized and reasonable peoples, upon the crucial points of a treaty born of a mental state that never could produce a genuine one, a treaty that from the beginning has worn its transient character on its forehead.

Every foreign policy corresponds to a domestic one that is its organic complement, together forming an indissoluble intellectual and moral whole. When I state my conviction—and I am so convinced that I am ready to set not only my pen but my person upon the issue—that the political place of the German citizen is today with the Social Democratic Party, I am using the word *political* in the sense of the foreign and domestic union of policy which I have defined. Marxism aside, it is precisely the intellectual tradition of the German citizen which shows him where his place is; for only to a foreign policy that envisages a Franco-German understanding can any domestic program correspond which has a chance of satisfying the claims of the German citizen to the blessings of freedom, culture, or intellectual well-being. Any other must result in a cramping and penury of the nation which would mean a frightful conflict between culture and the fatherland, and therewith calamity to us all.

Such a morbid and destructive struggle we must all abhor. Peace without is one with peace within. The last word of the lawyer in Leipzig in asking for the conviction of the young officers was: "I have no rancor against the accused." No, there must be today no question of rancor. The word full of love and sorrow which binds us together, which after years of lesser tension moves us today as it did in 1914 and 1918, setting free our hearts and our tongues, is for us all the same: Germany!

58

WALTER BENJAMIN

Theories of German Fascism

First published as "Theorien des deutschen Faschismus. Zu der Sammelschrift 'Krieg und Krieger.' herausgegeben von Ernst Jünger," *Die Gesellschaft* 7 vol. 2, (1930), 32-41.

Without approaching the surface of the significance of the economic causes of war, one may say that the harshest, most disastrous aspects of imperialist war are in part the result of the gaping discrepancy between the gigantic power of technology and the minuscule moral illumination it affords. Indeed, according to its economic nature, bourgeois society cannot help but insulate everything technological as much as possible from the so-called spiritual, and it cannot help but resolutely exclude technology's right of codetermination in the social order. Any future war will also be a slave revolt of technology.

Today factors such as these determine all questions of war and one would hardly expect to have to remind the authors of the present volume¹ of this, nor to remind them that these are questions of imperialist war. After all, they were themselves soldiers in the World War and, dispute what one may, they indisputably proceed from the experience of this war. It is therefore quite astonishing to find, and on the first page at that, the statement that "it is of secondary importance in which century, for which ideas, and with which weapons the fighting is done." What is most astonishing about this statement is that its author, Ernst Jünger, is thus adopting one of the principles of pacifism, and the most questionable and most abstract of all its principles at that. Though for him and his friends it is not so much some doctrinaire schema that lies behind this as it is a deep-rooted and—by all standards of male thought—a really rather depraved mysticism. But Jünger's mysticism of war and pacifism's clichéd ideal of peace have little to criticize each other for. Even the most consumptive pacifism has one thing over its epileptically frothing brother for the moment; a certain contact with reality, at least, some conception of the next war.

The authors like to speak—emphatically—of the "First World War." Yet how little their experience has come to grips with that war's realities—which they refer to in an alienated exaggeration as the "wordly-real"—is shown by the altogether thoughtless obtuseness with which they view the idea of future wars without any conception of them. These trailblazers of the *Wehrmacht* could almost give one the impression that the uniform represents their highest end, most desired by all their heartstrings, and that the circumstances under which one dons the uniform are of little importance by comparison. This attitude becomes more comprehensible when one realizes, in terms of the current level of European armaments, how anachronistic is their espoused ideology of war. These authors nowhere observe that the new warfare of technology and material (*Materialschlacht*) which appears to some of them as the highest revelation of existence, dispenses with all the wretched emblems of heroism that here and there have survived the World War. Gas warfare, in which the contributors to this book show conspicuously little interest, promises to give the war of the future a face that permanently displaces soldierly qualities by those of sports; all action will lose its military character and war will assume the countenance of record-setting. The most prominent strategic characteristic of such warfare consists in its being waged exclusively and most radically as an offensive war. And we know that there is no adequate defense against gas attacks from the air. Even individual protective devices, gas masks, are of no use against mustard gas and Levisit. Now and then one hears of something "reassuring" such as the invention of a sensitive listening device that registers the whirl of propellers at great distances. And a few months later a soundless airplane is invented. Gas warfare will rest upon annihilation records, and will involve an absurd degree of risk. Whether its outbreak will occur within the bounds of international law—after prior declarations of war—is questionable; but its end will no longer be concerned with such limitations. Since gas warfare obviously eliminates the distinction between civilian and military personnel, the most important basis of international law is removed. The last war has already shown that the total disorganization imperialist war entails, and the manner in which it is waged, threaten to make it an endless war.

More than a curiosity, it is symptomatic that something written in 1930 about "war and warriors" overlooks all this. It is symptomatic that the same boyish rapture that leads to a cult, to an apotheosis of war, is here heralded particularly by [Wilhelm] von Schramm

1. *Krieg und Krieger*, ed. Ernst Jünger (Berlin, 1930).

and [Albrecht Erich] Günther. The most rabidly decadent origins of this new theory of war are emblazoned on their foreheads: it is nothing other than an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l'art pour l'art* to war itself. [. . .]

The point is this: War—the “eternal” war that they talk about so much here, as well as the most recent one—is said to be the highest manifestation of the German nation. It should be clear that behind their “eternal” war lies the idea of cultic war, just as behind the most recent war lies that of technological war, and it should also be clear that these authors have had little success in perceiving these relationships. But there is something rather special about this last war. It was not only one of material warfare but also a war that was lost. And in that special sense it was the German war. To have waged war out of their innermost existence is something that other peoples could claim to have done. But to have lost a war out of their innermost existence, this they cannot claim. What is special about the present and latest stage in the controversy over the war, which has convulsed Germany since 1919, is the novel assertion that it is precisely this loss of the war that is characteristically German. One can call this the latest stage because these attempts to come to terms with the loss of the war show a clear pattern. These attempts began with an effort to pervert the German defeat into an inner victory by means of confessions of guilt which were hysterically elevated to the universally human. This political position, which supplied the manifestoes for the course of the decline of the West, faithfully reflected the German “revolution” made by the expressionist avantgarde. Then came the attempt to forget the lost war. The bourgeoisie turned to snore on its other side—and what pillow could have been softer than the novel. The terrors endured in those years became the down filling in which every sleepyhead could easily leave his imprint. What finally distinguishes this latest effort from earlier ones in the process involved here is the tendency to take the loss of the war more seriously than the war itself. What does it mean to win or lose a war? How striking the double meaning is in both words! The first, manifest meaning, certainly refers to the outcome of the war, but the second meaning—which creates that peculiar hollow space, the sounding board in these words—refers to the totality of the war and suggests how the war’s outcome also alters the enduring significance it holds for us. This meaning says, so to speak, the winner keeps the war in hand, it leaves the hands of the loser; it says, the winner conquers the war for himself, makes it his own property, the loser no longer possesses it and must live without it. And he must live not only without the war per se but without every one of its slightest ups and downs, every subtlest one of its chess moves, every one of its remotest actions. To win or lose a war reaches so deeply, if we follow the language, into the fabric of our existence that our whole lives become that much richer or poorer in symbols, images, and sources. And since we have lost one of the greatest wars in world history, one which involved the whole material and spiritual substance of a people, one can assess the significance of this loss.

Certainly one cannot accuse those around Jünger of not having taken this into account. But how did they approach it, monstrous as it was? They have not ended the battle yet. They continued to celebrate the cult of war when there was no longer any real enemy. They complied with the desires of the bourgeoisie, which longed for the decline of the West, the way a schoolboy longs for an inkblot in place of his wrong answer. They spread decline, preached decline wherever they went. Not even for a moment were they capable of holding up to view—instead of doggedly holding onto—what had been lost. They were always the first and the bitterest to oppose coming to one’s senses. They ignored the great opportunity of the loser—which the Russians had taken advantage of—to shift the fight

to another sphere until the moment had passed and the nations of Europe had sunk to being partners in trade agreements again. [. . .]

If at the beginning of the war supplies of idealism were provided by order of the state, the longer the war lasted the more the troops had to depend on requisitions. Their heroism turned more and more gloomy, fatal, and steel-gray; glory and ideals beckoned from ever more remote and nebulous spheres; and those who saw themselves less as the troops of the World War than as the executors of the postwar era took up the stance of obstinate rigor. Every third word in their speeches is *stance*. Who would deny that the soldier's position is one of stance? But language is the touchstone for each and every position taken, and not just, as is so often assumed, for that of the writer. But those who have conspired here do not pass the test. Jünger may echo the noble dilettantes of the seventeenth century in saying that the German language is a primeval language, but he betrays what he means when he adds that as such it inspires an insurmountable distrust in civilization and in the cultivated world. Yet the world's distrust cannot equal that of his own countrymen when the war is presented to them as a "mighty revisor" that "feels the pulse" of the times, that forbids them "to do away with" "a tried and proven conclusion," and that calls on them to intensify their search for "ruins" "behind gleaming varnish." Far more shameful than these offenses, however, is the smooth style of these purportedly rough-hewn thoughts which could grace any newspaper editorial; and more distressing yet than the smooth style is the mediocre substance. "The dead," we are told, "went in their death from an imperfect reality to a perfect reality, from Germany in its temporal manifestation to the eternal Germany." This Germany "in its temporal manifestation" is of course notorious, but the eternal Germany would really be in a bad way if we had to depend on the testimony of those who so glibly invoke it. How cheaply they purchased their "solid feeling of immortality," their certainty that "the terrors of the last war have been frightfully exaggerated," and their symbolism of "blood boiling inwardly!" At best, they fought the war that they are celebrating here. However, we will not tolerate anyone who speaks of war, yet knows nothing but war. Radical in our own way, we will ask: Where do you come from? And what do you know of peace? Did you ever encounter peace in a child, a tree, an animal, the way you encountered a patrol in the field? And without waiting for you to answer, we can say No! It is not that you would then not be able to celebrate war, more passionately than now; but to celebrate it in the way you do would be impossible. [. . .]

These are professional freebooters speaking. Their horizon is fiery but very narrow.

What do they see in their flames? They see—here we can entrust ourselves to Friedrich G. Jünger—a transformation: "lines of psychic decision cut across the war; transformations undergone by the war are paralleled by transformations undergone by those fighting it. These transformations become visible when one compares the vibrant, buoyant, enthusiastic faces of the soldiers of August 1914 with the fatally exhausted, haggard, implacably tensed faces of the 1918 veterans of machine warfare. Looming behind the all-too-sharply arched curve of this fight, their image appears, molded and moved by a forceful spiritual convulsion, by station after station along a path of suffering, battle after battle, each the hieroglyphic sign of a strenuously advancing work of destruction. Here we have the new type of soldier schooled in those hard, sober, bloody, and incessant campaigns of attrition. This is a soldier characterized by the tenacious hardness of the born fighter, by a manifest sense of solitary responsibility, of psychic abandonment. In this struggle, which proceeded on increasingly deeper levels, he proved his own mettle. The path he pursued was narrow and dangerous, but it was a path leading into the future." Wherever precise formulations, genuine accents, or solid reasoning are encountered in these pages, the reality portrayed

is that of Ernst Jünger's "total mobilization" or Ernst von Salomon's "landscape of the front." A liberal journalist who recently tried to get at this new nationalism under the heading of "Heroism out of Boredom" fell, as one can see here, a bit short of the mark. This soldierly type is a reality, a surviving witness to the World War, and it was actually this "landscape of the front," his true home, that was being defended in the postwar era. This landscape demands further attention.

It should be said as bitterly as possible: in the face of this "landscape of total mobilization" the German feeling for nature has had an undreamed-of upsurge. The pioneers of peace, those sensuous settlers, were evacuated from these landscapes, and as far as anyone could see over the edge of the trench, the surroundings become a problem, every wire entanglement an antinomy, every barb a definition, every explosion a thesis; and by day the sky was the cosmic interior of the steel helmet and at night the moral law above. Etching the landscape with flaming banners and trenches, technology wanted to recreate the heroic features of German Idealism. It went astray. What is considered heroic were the features of Hippocrates, the features of death. Deeply imbued with its own depravity, technology gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence—even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice. Instead of using and illuminating the secrets of nature via a technology mediated by the human scheme of things, the new nationalists' metaphysical abstraction of war signifies nothing other than a mystical and unmediated application of technology to solve the mystery of an idealistically perceived nature. "Fate" and "hero" occupy these authors' minds like Gog and Magog,¹ yet they devour not only human children but (new ideas) as well. Everything sober, unblemished, naive, and humanistic ends up between the worn teeth of these Molochs who react with the belches of 42cm mortars. Linking heroism with machine warfare is sometimes a bit hard on the authors. But this is by no means true to all of them, and there is nothing more revealing than the whining digressions exposing their disappointment in the "form of the war" and in the "senselessly mechanical machine war" of which these noble fellows "had evidently grown bored." Yet when one or another of them attempts to look things squarely in the eye, it becomes obvious how very much their concept of the heroic has surreptitiously changed; we can see how much the virtues of hardness, reserve, and implacability they celebrate are in fact less those of the soldier than those of the proven class militant. What developed here, first in the guise of the World War volunteer and then in the mercenary of the postwar era, is in fact the dependable, fascist class warrior. And what these authors mean by nation is a ruling class supported by this caste, a ruling class—accountable to no one, and least of all to itself, enthroned on high—which bears the Sphinxlike countenance of the producer who very soon promises to be the sole consumer of his commodities. Sphinxlike in appearance, the fascists' nation thus takes its place as a new economic mystery of nature alongside the old. But this old mystery of nature, far from revealing itself to their technology, is exposing its most threatening feature. In the parallelogram of forces formed by these two—nature and nation—war is the diagonal.

It is understandable that the question of "governmental checks on war" arises in the best, most well-reasoned essay in this volume. For in this mystical theory of war, the state naturally plays more than a minor role. These checks should not for a moment be understood in a pacifist sense. Rather, what is demanded of the state is that its structure and its disposition adapt themselves to, and appear worthy of, the magical forces that the state itself must mobilize in the event of war. [. . .]

1. Biblical personifications of the nations that, under Satan, are to war against the Kingdom of God.

Until Germany has broken through the entanglement of such Medusalike beliefs that confront it in these essays, it cannot hope for a future. Perhaps the word loosened would be better than broken through, but this is not to say it should be done with kindly encouragement or with love, both of which are out of place here; nor should the way be smoothed for argumentation, for that wantonly persuasive rhetoric of debate. Instead, all the light that language and reason still afford should be focused upon that "primal experience" from whose barren gloom this mysticism crawls forth on its thousand unsightly conceptual feet. The war that this light exposes is as little the "eternal" one that these new Germans now worship as it is the "final" war that the pacifists carry on about. In reality that war is only this: the one, fearful, last chance to correct the incapacity of peoples to order their relationships to one another in accord with the relationship they possess to nature through their technology. If this corrective effort fails, millions of human bodies will indeed inevitably be chopped to pieces and chewed up by iron and gas. But even the habitués of the chthonic forces of terror, who carry their volumes of [Ludwig] Klages in their packs, will not learn one-tenth of what nature promises its less idly curious, but more sober children who possess in technology not a fetish of doom but a key to happiness. They will demonstrate this sobriety the moment they refuse to acknowledge the next war as an incisive, magical turning point, and instead discover in it the image of everyday actuality. And they will demonstrate it when they use this discovery to transform this war into civil war and thereby perform that Marxist trick that alone is a match for this sinister runic humbug.

59

HEINRICH MANN**The German Decision**

First published as "Die deutsche Entscheidung," *Das Tagebuch* 12, no. 51 (December 19, 1931), 1964-1967.

Hitler's instructions for National Socialist speakers include the provision that gatherings are to be held exclusively in the evenings. It is easier to work the crowd and stupefy it then than during the day. Supposedly, people are already worn down by the struggle then, more likely to submit.

It is already evening in Germany, if not midnight. That gives Mr. Hitler his big chance, as he most likely knows. Were Germans able to examine their situation with a clear head, he would not win them over. The majority is still not thinking of giving in now. Nevertheless, they are losing a bit of their courage because the enemy no longer appears to have any doubts. In reality, he only acts confident. The republic is secure in the masses, and they own substantial portions of public life. The party laying siege to the state, but in particular its leaders, are seriously mistaken in this; they launch surprise attacks and they bluff, as is usual in war. Never forget that this is a mere war party! It is tailored to win with cunning and force. To make something useful with the victory afterward, aside from seizing booty—it does not even consider that.

I cannot imagine that it makes a great impression in other countries when Mr. Hitler sends his envoys as if the republic's legations were already being dismantled, or when he