

THUS SPOKE ADOLF: NIETZSCHE AND THE PERPETRATORS OF HITLER'S GENOCIDES

Abstract: This paper is an attempt to analyse the influence that Nietzsche's philosophy had on the Nazi bureaucratic apparatus that conducted important parts of the Holocaust. Bauman's sociological interpretation of the Holocaust will be used to argue that Nietzsche, as a committed anti-moralist, had a profound effect on the bureaucratic perpetrators of the Holocaust. Thus, Nietzsche became the ideological swastika of the Nazi party.

Resumen: Este artículo intenta analizar la influencia que la filosofía de Nietzsche tuvo sobre el aparato burocrático Nazi encargado de conducir partes fundamentales del Holocausto. Se asumirá la interpretación sociológica de Bauman para sostener que Nietzsche, como comprometido antimoralista, infuyó profundamente sobre dicho aparato, convirtiéndose así en la esvástica ideológica del partido Nazi.

Life is hard to bear: but do not pretend to be so tender! We are all of us pretty fine asses and assesses of burden! What have we in common with the rosebud, which trembles because a drop of dew is lying upon it? It is true: we love life, not because we are used to living but because we are used to loving. There is always a certain madness in love. But there is always a certain method in madness.
Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Z*, p.68.

History has not recorded any meeting between the persons of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Adolf Hitler. When Nietzsche died in 1900, a recluse gone insane (who, if he had lived forty years later, would almost certainly have been a victim of Hitler's 'T4' euthanasia campaign of 1939-41), Hitler was an unremarkable 11-year-old living in Leonding with "poor and mediocre" prospects at the Linz *Realschule*¹. It would take another twenty years after Nietzsche's passing until the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), Hitler's vehicle for ascendance to power, would become an official political movement. It would also take almost another decade until the Nazi party gained widespread *national* support. In fact, it is not known for certain whether Hitler read any of Nietzsche's work². Thus, direct parallels between Nietzsche and the Nazi movement are difficult to make. Certainly, whether Nietzsche would have been a Nazi or not is beyond the capacities of an historian to predict.

Ideologically, the Nazi movement departed from Nietzsche in several fundamental respects. Although Nietzsche speaks often of the war-making qualities of the Superman, he never advocates 'useless violence'. In fact, "the greatest events — those are not our loudest but our stillest hours" (*Z*, p.142). His 'aristocratic radicalism' must also be seen in light of the fact that he viewed the empowered elite as far from idolatory or propagandist. Rather, it was indistinguishable from an enlightened cultural elite. Furthermore, it is important from the outset to point out that Nietzsche was neither an antisemite nor a German nationalist. He was distinctly opposed to the contemporaneous antisemitic and racial-biologist intellectual movement in Germany



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¹ Ian Kershaw, 1998, p.16. The famous Leondig school photo of Hitler, aged ten, appearing taller than the rest and standing in the top-middle in an eerily premonitory, determined and regal pose with his nose firmly in the air, is the most telling document of the nature of the young Hitler's life at the time of Nietzsche's death.

² *Ibid.*, p.41. It is generally recognised that there is a significant 'gap' between what Hitler proclaimed to have read and what he actually had read. Hitler's boyhood friend August Kubizek claimed that Hitler had read "Goethe, Schiller, Dante, Herder, Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche" during his Vienna years, though Kershaw argues that this "has to be treated with a large pinch of salt" (*Ibid.*, p.41). Hitler later told Hans Frank that he had read Nietzsche during his imprisonment at Landsberg (*Ibid.*, p.240). This cannot be confirmed or denied.



³ Nietzsche shared a distinctly uncertain relationship with the fiercely antisemitic composer. At first comradely, their relationship broke in 1876 when Nietzsche called him a “sickness... epitomising all that is bad in Germany.” It must be stressed, though, that his main work of criticism of Wagner does not specifically mention his antisemitism. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *NCW*, pp.10-17 & pp.64-5.

⁴ Elisabeth Foerster-Nietzsche, married to a fanatical antisemite, employed her “considerable propagandistic talents in the service of that Teutonic ‘Christianity’ and chauvinistic racism which Nietzsche had loathed as ‘scabies of the heart’” (Kaufmann, 1950, pp.4-8).

⁵ For example, Oehler quotes Nietzsche as saying “No *new* Jews any more! And keep the doors toward the East closed,” but takes it out of context. He “fails to mention that Nietzsche himself puts these words within quotation marks and proceeded: ‘—thus a wise consideration might counsel the German Jews themselves’ because it is ‘their task to grow into the German character’ and continued immigration would impede the process of intermarriage and assimilation” (Ibid., p.264). Also, the Nazis used Nietzsche’s phrase “splendid blonde beast” as an Aryan concept, when it was actually meant to encompass Asians

that included Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Heinrich von Treitschke, Theodor Fritsch and his one-time friend Richard Wagner³. He was more closely aligned to the thinking of the late 19th century historian Theodor Mommsen, who was “[a]lmost alone of the historians of his generation” in summarily deploring antisemitic nationalism (Pulzer, 1988, p.249).

Nietzsche himself complains that “I have not met a German yet who was well disposed toward the Jews” and wrote that whilst the German race is a “monstrous mixture” of races and types, the Jews “are beyond any doubt the strongest, toughest, and purest race now living in Europe.” Deepening the irony and further showcasing his contempt for the nationalists and antisemites, Nietzsche continues thus: “It might be useful and fair to expel the anti-Semitic screamers from the country” (*BGE*, section 251). The tragic irony is tangible. In addition, he views the Slavs and Poles in a particularly favourable light and simultaneously seems to advocate racial mixing: “The Poles I considered the most gifted and gallant among the Slavic people; and the giftedness of the Slavs seemed greater to me than that of the Germans— yes, I thought that the Germans had entered the line of gifted nations only through a strong mixture with Slavic” (*EH*, p.300). Nietzsche yearned for a society devoid of nations, statism, mediocrity and false morality.

In defence of Nietzsche, it is also important to point out that his posthumous prominence in the literary world of Nazi Germany was largely due to the distortion of his works by his sister, Elisabeth, who held distinctly pro-Nazi views. Her careful and ideologically motivated editing of Nietzsche’s work created a direct link between his philosophy and that of Hitler’s Nazi movement⁴. In his impassioned defence of Nietzsche, Kaufmann recognises the disservice done to his work by Nazi editors: “The Nazis’ quoting of Nietzsche in their own behalf depended not on whole aphorisms, nor on arguments which contradict the position here propounded, but only on the briefest excerpts which, torn from their context, might appear to have a meaning which was plainly never intended by Nietzsche” (Ibid., p.267)⁵. Thus, Nietzsche’s thought seemed more Nazi-like than it actually was, and he became one of the most widely read and highly respected thinkers of Nazi Germany. Writers commented as early as 1941 that “*Mein Kampf*...could hardly have been written without the aid of two of the great names in the cultural heritage of the West- Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche” (Brinton, 1941, p.xv). What most of the German population did not know was that they were all reading distorted versions of the original works.

Posthumously, Nietzsche’s amoral approach to philosophy had a profound influence on the generation of distinguished modernist writers immediately following him: Keith May recognises that this is particularly true with respect to Yeats, Rilke, Mann and Lawrence. William B. Yeats emphasises the ‘supra-moral’ nature of mankind which allows for an exalted dark side. Rainer M. Rilke writes about ‘angels’ that are natural animals and distinctly resemble the Supermen of Nietzsche’s writings. Thomas Mann argues that the biblical Fall was not an event contrary to the will of God; thus, to sin is not morally condemned by God. D.H. Lawrence condemns the feebleness of the modern ruling classes and identifies a Nietzschean will of power that can overturn the female-like leaders. The intellectual environment of nihilism and moral

ambiguity was thus firmly entrenched in a new Nietzschean literary movement. This was Nietzsche's immediate heritage, but his association with Nazis was looming; indeed, Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche's self-proclaimed philosophical heir, became an ardent Nazi sympathiser.

It is not difficult to see what attracted Hitler and the Nazis to Nietzsche. Nietzsche's writings about the destiny of the Superman, noble races, and the power of the will ~~over the rational, suited Hitler's dogma as perfectly. Hitler's genocides~~⁶ can be seen as an attempt to mould the Third Reich into a Nietzschean master race. He used the distorted version of Nietzsche's philosophy to legitimise his own authoritarian regime. In effect, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* became the 'Bible' for Nazi Germany, forming a bedevilled partnership with *Mein Kampf* in most ordinary German citizens' bookcases.

Whether Hitler had read Nietzsche's works extensively or not, he knew enough of his ideas to hand a copy of the collected works of Nietzsche over to Mussolini as a sixtieth birthday present (Kershaw, 2000, p.597). Hitler made sure that all German soldiers in World War II were issued with a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Also, Kaufmann notes that "hardly any educated German after 1900 was not 'influenced' somehow by Nietzsche, for it is the mark of a truly great personality that it subtly affects the whole atmosphere and climate of contemporary life— a change which no can escape altogether" (Kaufmann, 1950, p.366). The popularity that had eluded Nietzsche in his own lifetime finally came decades later during the most bloody and ferocious time of German, European, and World History. After World War II, this popularity turned into notoriety, as his name became the swastika of German philosophy— tainted by a clear and present association with the brutal Nazi regime.

The intellectual heritage of Nietzsche was one in which the conventional morality was at the very least called into question, if not totally inverted. His writings created the intellectual foundation and mindset that allowed Hitler's genocides to transpire and they are fundamental to understanding the workings of the perpetrators. Distorted or not, Nietzsche's works boldly and repeatedly proclaimed that "God is dead!" Civilisation and modernity brought an increased capacity to destroy; it also brought, with Nietzsche, an environment of intellectual *amorality*. The rise of the modern, sprawling, goal-oriented bureaucracy of ordinary citizens in Nazi Germany became susceptible to this societal moral norm. Thus, the moral consequences of their jobs became unimportant in the face of the need for efficiency and productivity.

Nietzsche envisaged a world in which men and women retreated from the moral outpourings of Christian civilisation into a self-dominated existence of *dangerous* individuals dominated by a supreme master race. Thus, he denounced pity as the emotion of the weak while justifying selfish and 'immoral' behaviour on the grounds that such actions are based on original human desires. In the bureaucratic apparatus of Hitler's regime, this meant the sentencing to death of millions of Jews without any moral inhibitions.



and other races. (Ibid., p.260).

⁶ I make a distinction between 'Hitler's genocides' and the 'Holocaust', while I have no desire to call the mass murders part of a 'Final Solution'. The Holocaust, for me, encompasses the entire post-World War I period until 1945. During this period, Germany grew vociferously as an antisemitic society; this was reflected in governmental legislation and increasing legal and social discrimination, and culminates in the largest and most bloody aspect of Hitler's genocides. By Hitler's genocides, I refer to the disparate policies waged against the populations of conquered territories. It pertains solely to the 1941-5 period in which concentration, transit and death camps were set up to deport and kill Jews, Poles, Soviet POWs, Gypsies, Jehova's witnesses, homosexuals, political opponents and a wide variety of other social 'undesirables'. The genocidal task was set from above by a core group of fanatical Nazis but, importantly, implemented from below by a faceless bureaucracy.



⁷ The phrase “men without chests” is taken from C.S. Lewis but used by Francis Fukuyama in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s ideas (Fukuyama, 1992, p.188).

⁸ Schopenhauer saw the issue of the will as “metaphysically fundamental” but “ethically evil”, “wicked” and “the source of all our endless suffering.” Nietzsche agreed that it was ‘metaphysically fundamental’ but went one step further in denying the negative moral implications of the will. This created the moral vacuum of the Superman (Russell, 1961, p.722 and 724).

NIETZSCHE AND THE DEATH OF GOD

What is the great dragon which the spirit no longer wants to call lord and God? The great dragon is called ‘Thou shalt’.
But the spirit of the lion says ‘I will!’
Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Z*, p.55.

The *direct* responsibility of the intellectual community in the rise of antisemitism and the murder instinct in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been variously described by Peter Pulzer and Omer Bartov. Pulzer recognised that “[t]he cloak of academic respectability which was being thrown over antisemitism helped to secure its growing acceptance among *bien-pensants*” (Pulzer, 1988, p.240). Thus, figures such as Treitschke and Lagarde played an important role in reinforcing the general populist feeling of antisemitism with intellectual credibility. Bartov notes that the literature about World War I in the 1920s often glorified the role of the common soldier and the image of warfare. Writers such as Mann, Barbusse, Remarque, Junger and Celine absolved the killers from any guilt of the act of killing. For Bartov, this “leads us directly to Auschwitz” (Bartov, 1996, p.46). It made the ‘industrial killing’ of Jews, Gypsies, Poles and others twenty years later morally imaginable.

Nietzsche’s writings reinforced these intellectual forces with a robust denial of God, extreme moral relativism and love of the power of the will. When Zarathustra states that “*God is dead*” (*Z*, p.41), Nietzsche does not essentially mean that God has physically died, but that the Christian civilisation and its values have perished. He loathed the proponents of “superterrestrial hopes” (p.42), “heavenly things” (p.60) and “eternal walls” (p.102). For Nietzsche, there was no after-life the nature of which could be dependent upon an individual’s previous terrestrial life. The world of Zarathustra is flesh and bones, governed by the self, and nothing but the self, of every individual. It is the “mighty commander” (p.62). Nietzsche’s Dionysian individualism must overturn the conventional world which is ruled by “men without chests”⁷. Each individual has his very own morality in an ever-changing metaphysical world that is similar to that described by pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (Ackermann, 1990, p.23).

Callicles, whom Plato depicts with such disdain in *Gorgias* over two thousand years earlier, describes the Nietzschean transition from what he perceives to be the slave mentality of conventional morality to an enlightened godless world of moral wilderness. Callicles argues that “it’s the weaklings who constitute the majority of the human race... But I’m sure that if a man is born in whom nature is strong enough, he’ll shake off all these limitations, shatter them to pieces, and win his freedom” (483a and ff.). This man of whom Callicles speaks is, for Nietzsche, the Superman, who is “hard” (*Z*, p.114 and 231) and unrelenting in his will to power. Thus Zarathustra speaks: “My Ego taught me a new pride, I teach it to men: No longer to bury the head in the sand of heavenly things, but to carry it freely, an earthly head which creates meaning for the earth!” (*Z*, p.60).

The ‘earthly head’ is driven by an earthly will. Nietzsche’s conception of the will, derived largely from his predecessor Schopenhauer⁸, is seen as the very definition of

the desires of man; it is all-powerful and amoral, concerned solely with looking inwards towards the individual self. Nietzsche inverts the Christian definitions of good and evil, and, like Thomas Mann's interpretation of the Fall, uses a biblical concept in an antithetical manner. Thus, for Nietzsche, man's "Original Sin" is that he "has enjoyed himself too little" (Z, p.112). All men have their own personal moral code and they can use it in any way to satisfy their pleasures. Describing his moral relativism, Nietzsche argues that "if you have a virtue...you have it in common with no one" (Z, p.63). There is no overarching, definite Christian morality which is the same everywhere all the time. Zarathustra proclaims: "All names of good and evil are images...He is a fool who seeks knowledge from them" (Z, p.101).

For the Superman, his will of power must be ruthless along Machiavellian principles of opportunistic malignity. The prince, says Machiavelli, must "know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity"⁹. Thus, for Nietzsche, "the wickedest in man is necessary for the best in him" (Z, p.235). Zarathustra beats a "trembling old man" who asks for compassion and pity (p.264-6). Nietzsche argues that when man rids himself of happiness, reason, virtue, justice and pity, it will be "the greatest thing you can experience" (p.42). They should be replaced by earthly virtues that Christianity deems corrupt: "sensual pleasure, lust for power" (p.206) and the "healthy selfishness that issues from a mighty soul" (p.208). Man's will is "[u]ntroubled, scornful, outrageous" (p.68) and "[h]ungered, violent, solitary, godless" (p.127). For Nietzsche, the death of Christianity occurs through *good evil*; evil is, after all, "man's best strength" (p.299).

Seemingly advocating euthanasia, Nietzsche writes: "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness...The weak and the failures *will perish*: first principle of our love of man. And they shall be given *every possible assistance*" [my italics] (A, p.570).

Nietzsche's society must be rid of "superfluous people"; they "must perish" in order to create a "beautiful new race" of "laughing lions" (Z, p.77, 299 and 294). In a moral vacuum, warfare is the most honourable means of achieving power over the 'weak and the failures'. Man needs to go to war, and in war, "[o]ne kills, not by anger but by laughter" (p.68 and 324). This passage, shrilly reminiscent of Ernst Junger's morbid pleasure at participating in the "universal feast of death" (Bartov, 1996, p.45), predicts the manner in which much of the Jewish population was exterminated from Nazi Germany¹⁰. Nietzsche sees joy in terms of "mutilation" and "suffering" because these are deep human impulses (Rosset, 1993, p.31). For Nicholas Rescher, Nietzsche implicitly implies the following maxim: "Man is by nature given to cruelty, and therefore cruelty —being a natural and congenial tendency of ours— is not something bad, something deserving condemnation." (Rescher, 1994, p.55).

Nietzsche and Hitler's antipathy and indifference towards the common masses, particularly the weak sections of it, is paralleled in their respective works. Those who attempt to absolve Nietzsche from any connection to Hitler's dictatorship rarely fail to point out that the NSDAP was a mass movement which adored Hitler, while Nietzsche loathed such movements in his search for individualism. Nonetheless, whilst the NSDAP was indeed a mass movement, Hitler showed nothing but the



⁹ Niccolo Machiavelli, 1992, p.70. Nietzsche thought of Machiavellianism as "perfection in politics." From an unpublished note in: Detwiler, 1990, p.4.

¹⁰ Many pictures of the perpetrators of the Holocaust in action show the gleeful callousness of their responses to what they are doing. One of the pictures to which I am referring is picture 14 in Kershaw, *Nemesis*, showing smiling passers-by of a Jewish shop after Reichskristallnacht. Also, I am referring to the pictures in: Goldhagen, 1996, p.93, showing laughing Germans cutting a Jew's beard, p.245 and 260, showing amused members of Police Battalion 101 humiliating Jews, and p.287, showing a "gleeful crowd" watching Jews scrubbing Viennese streets with small brushes.



¹¹ In a preceding passage, Hitler says: “[O]ur bright boys do not understand...how mentally lazy and conceited they are...The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous” Adolf Hitler, 1999, p.165-7.

same contempt for it that Nietzsche would have done: “The people in their overwhelming majority are so feminine by nature and attitude that sober reasoning determines their thoughts and actions far less than emotion and feeling”¹¹. Similarly (and reminiscent of the style of Hitler’s later speech-making), Nietzsche cries vehemently: “What is womanish, what stems from slavishness and especially from the mob hotchpotch: *that* now wants to become master of mankind’s entire destiny—oh disgust! disgust! disgust!” (Z, p.298).

The modern, ‘civilised’ bureaucracy in Europe in general, and, in particular, the Nazi bureaucratic apparatus of the Holocaust became particularly susceptible to the thoughts of Nietzsche and his successors. The intellectual environment of lack of pity towards the weak in a society without morals created killers without any deeper feeling towards what they were doing.

THE DEATH OF GOD IN THE NAZI BUREAUCRACY

Suddenly, with straight aim,
 Quivering flight,
 They pounce on lambs,
 Headlong down, ravenous,
 Lusting for lambs
 Angry at all lamb-souls,
 Fiercely angry at all that look
 Sheepish, lamb-eyed, curly-wooled,
 Grey with lamb-sheep kindliness
 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, Z, pp.309-310.

With the end of the Nuremberg trial, the Allies had identified a select and limited group of Holocaust perpetrators and war criminals. As Cold War tensions rose and Germany was divided, the issue of looking deeper within German society to find other perpetrators equally responsible for the set-up of the Holocaust apparatus was overlooked. Although Fraenkel and Neumann had identified as early as 1941 a messy substructure of Hitler’s dictatorship as essential to the understanding of the workings of the regime, it was Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* that was the first substantive analysis of the bureaucracy and its role in the Hitler’s genocides. He wrote that “[i]t must be kept in mind that most of the participants did not fire rifles at Jewish children or pour gas into gas chambers...Most bureaucrats composed memoranda, drew up blueprints, talked on the telephone, and participated in conferences. They could *destroy a whole people by sitting at their desk*” [my italics] (Hilberg, 1980, p.1024).

The bureaucracy was heavily involved in the construction of, and coordination of the mass deportations to, the concentration and death camps, as well as the general day-to-day running of the whole Holocaust apparatus.

Before Hitler’s genocides, the German bureaucracy had developed *unremarkably* along similar lines to the countries of the modern Western civilisation, regardless of Germany’s more authoritarian socio-political traditions. In the industrialised age, bureaucracy played an integral role in developing new organic socio-economic systems.



Along with the technological achievements of industrialisation, which saw the development of the train, airplane, telephone and the machine gun, the very organizational principles of modern society were shaken to the core. The Fordist ethos of mass production, mass lines and identity-less division of labour created a new, normal and inconspicuous, working man.

The ethical implications of these changes created the brutally rational conditions in which the Holocaust could happen within a bureaucracy of *normal, non-ideological citizens*. Stillman and Pfaff argue that “there is more than a wholly fortuitous connection between the applied technology of the mass production line, with its vision of universal material abundance, and the applied technology of the concentration camp, with its vision of a profusion of death. We may wish to deny the connection, but Buchenwald was our West as much as Detroit’s River Rouge— we cannot deny Buchenwald as a casual aberration of a Western World essentially sane” (Stillman and Pfaff, 1964, pp.30-1).

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman expands on this notion in his conception of the Holocaust in relation to modernity. Modernity, for him, “is an age of artificial order and of grand societal designs, the era of planners, visionaries, and- more generally- ‘gardners’, who treat society as a virgin plot of land to be expertly designed and then cultivated and doctored to keep to the designed form” (Bauman, 1989, p.113). It is accompanied with a growth of bureaucratic culture. For Bauman, the bureaucracy’s emphasis on rationality and efficiency is an essential starting point for any analysis of the Holocaust. Indeed, “the very idea of the *Endlösung* was an outcome of the bureaucratic culture” (p.15).

Bauman asserts that 1 October, 1941 marks the beginning of the staggered plan to exterminate the Jews and other peoples. Though Heinrich Himmler made the crucial decision on this day, it was a faceless bureaucracy apparatus that ultimately conducted the rest of the day-to-day functioning of the Holocaust. Thus, “[w]hat the bureaucracy needed was the definition of its task. Rational and efficient as it was, it could be trusted to see the task to its end” (Bauman, p.106). Various plans had been discussed; the Nisko plan, Madagaskar plan and *Generalplan Ost* were all conceived of as an ‘*Endlösung*’ to the Jewish question. Eventually, the rationality of the amoral, faceless bureaucracy spewed out the *easiest*, most *obvious*, (and yet most unthinkable) solution. The procedures that would within a few years kill six million Jews and countless other people were a matter of “dull bureaucratic routine” (p.16).

Thus, Bauman advances from a distinctly functionalist interpretation of the road to Auschwitz. The coordination (or lack thereof) of the various agencies and personal empires that had emerged under Hitler was central to the emergence of the Holocaust. Once the decision had been taken from above to extirpate the Jewish population, it was up to these agencies and empires to define the most appropriate policy-solution that would fall in line with the Nazi elite. Many came up with their own solution to the Jewish question. Ultimately, Himmler’s SS empire, Heydrich and Kaltenbrunner’s RSHA, Goering’s 4-year-plan ministry, Goebbels propaganda ministry, Organisation Todt, Rosenberg’s *Ostministerium* ministry and Speer’s Armaments ministry (not forgetting the important roles of the various bureaucratic agencies of the



¹² Ibid., p.22. Although not a bureaucrat, Oehlendorff's defence of his actions is indicative of the mentality of the bureaucracy of modernity.

¹³ Procrustes is an innkeeper with one small and one long bed. When a tall traveller passes by, he offers him a small bed; if it is a short traveller, he offers a long bed. Procrustes proceeds to cut the tall traveller's feet and stretch the short traveller to make them fit the long bed. In the fable, he is eventually overcome by Theseus.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt argues that no rational impulse can be identified in the Holocaust. Ian Kershaw seems to agree; he asserts that the Holocaust represents "the perverted usage of modern technology... [I]t showed how a modern, advanced, cultured society can so rapidly sink into barbarity, culminating in ideological war, conquest of scarcely imaginable brutality and rapaciousness, and genocide such as the world had never previously witnessed... [I]t amounted to the collapse of modern civilization—a form of nuclear blow-out within modern society" (Kershaw, 1998, p.xx.)

collaborator regimes) formed a potent *dangerous* bureaucratic polycracy with various private sector firms such as Volkswagen, I.G. Farben and Topf & Sons.

For Bauman, the rise of bureaucratic culture in modern civilisation prevented any reliable safeguards against something as catastrophic as the Holocaust from happening. He asserts that "[p]hrases like the 'sanctity of human life' or 'moral duty'" are alien to "the smoke-free, sanitized room of a bureaucratic office" (p.29). The bureaucratisation of politics in the age of modernity created a vast faceless apparatus that discussed solutions to various demographic, strategic and economic problems with little human emotional input. In the savage high politics of World War II, the tendency to view humans and conquered populations as cattle became habituated. The effects of modernity created the moral environment in which the following response to the brutality surrounding an non-ideological soldier such as Oehlendorff became the norm: "I do not think I am in a position to judge whether [my superior's] measures... were moral or immoral... I surrender my moral conscience to the fact I was a soldier, and therefore a cog in a relatively low position of a great machine"¹².

When the rare occasions of dissent were shown within the bureaucratic ranks with regard to the fulfilment of deportation tasks, punishment was *not exacted*. Thus, although the Third Reich operated under an authoritarian system, the genocides were not a definite task that was to be implemented fully on the fear of death. The Holocaust and Hitler's genocides operated largely without any sign of complaint or dissent from within the ranks of the lower-echelons of the Nazi bureaucracy. For someone like Oehlendorff, the gap between the leader and normal human beings was as great as that between the Nietzsche's Superman and his subjects. Thus, orders were orders, work was work—the jobs had to be done. The concept of 'business as usual' had been initiated within the new bureaucratic culture; it did not encourage the calling into question of the moral righteousness of the task-setters, who were invariably more fanatical and committed Nazis.

The Nazi regime, according to 'dissident' historian Gotz Aly, relied heavily upon "academically-trained advisors" (Aly, 1996, p.140). These advisors had been raised on the amoral intellectual tradition established by Nietzsche, as well as the dull, bureaucratic mechanization of their profession. In their jobs, there was no room for pity. Thus Zarathustra had spoken, and thus the bureaucracy acted. For Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor, Nietzsche is "profoundly repugnant" not because he is "insane" or promotes "*Schadenfreude*" but rather because of his moral "indifference" (Levi, 1999, pp.84-5). Nietzsche's importance lies with his influence over the normal people, not the fanatics, who are an historical aberration. The manner in which the German agencies approached the Jewish question is reminiscent of the amoral problem-solving technique of the ancient Greek fable of Procrustes¹³. Thus, the Nazis killed off so called 'incurable patients' in asylums because there was a need for "vacant bed space for all sorts of important military purposes" (Aly, 1996, p.143).

The optimum population dispersal studies by early theorists such as economist Paul Mombert and influential founding Nazi member Gottfried Feder were realised and executed with maximum efficiency. For Aly, the Holocaust can be seen in light of bureaucratic conviction that "[a] reduction of the population would simultaneously break the vicious circle of overpopulation and lead to capital accumulation necessary

for the modernization of the economy.” If you live in a Nietzschean mindset with no morals and no pity, what is wrong with the plan? It is, after all, the most efficient plan. The surplus people were killed “in a dull, mechanical fashion with no human emotions —hatred included— to enliven it. They were killed because they did not fit, for one reason or another, the scheme of a perfect society” (Bauman, 1989, p.92).

Arguing against Hannah Arendt¹⁴, Gotz Aly emerges from a Baumanian approach to the rational, modern bureaucracy; he does not see the Holocaust as “a ‘reversion to barbarism’, nor a ‘break with civilisation’, still less an ‘Asiatic deed’” (Aly, 1996, p.153). Although perhaps over-emphasising a small, specific sector of the Holocaust perpetrators, his analysis on the economic-bureaucratic apparatus of economists, agronomists and planners is nonetheless compelling. He emphasises that calculated economic criteria as opposed to racial-biologist fanaticism better explain the Holocaust. Devoid of moral inhibitions, this bureaucracy of ‘academically-trained advisors’ was solely concerned with calculated economic criteria as opposed to racial-biologist fanaticism. Thus, Aly notes that Nazi Ukrainian policy of negative demographics through starvation, *never mentions any racial criteria* (p.148). It is a cold and calculated policy based on killing people to solve social problems.

Browning puts the emphasis more on ‘careerism’ among the “lower-echelon perpetrators” (Browning, 1996, p.58) in the development and production of the Nazi gas vans. Technical experts such as Walter Rauff, Friedrich Pradel, and Harry Wentritt as well as normal welders (!) such as Willy Just were not unaccustomed to the language of “process[ing]” 97,000 in the trucks or discussing the changing “weight distribution” of the “cargo” as a result of the “struggle toward the back door during the operation”¹⁵. Whether based on careerism or simply an apathetically amoral approach to the bureaucratic workload, the conclusion that Aly, Bauman, Browning and Hilberg arrive at is nonetheless the same; racial ideologues and Nazi fanatics do not sufficiently explain Hitler’s genocides. Whilst there were committed, fanatical ideologues such as Arthur Greiser, head of the Warthegau region, the Holocaust perpetrators also included such cold and calculated (but not as ideological) leaders as Albert Forster, head of Danzig-West Prussia. To the intense despair of Greisser, Forster was not overly concerned over the ethnic origins of his population and would falsify statistics to make it seem as if his region was more successful in achieving the goal of germanising the population¹⁶. Thus, the perpetrators of Hitler’s genocides were the product of a new society that had gone through the process of ‘civilisation’ to reach a stage of modernity in which division of labour and bureaucratic culture had killed emotional responses to task-setting and goal accomplishment.

With the process of technological industrialization, man discovered more ‘efficient’ and less psychologically damaging ways of waging battles. Even Hitler was daunted by his experiences in World War I; the Battle of the Somme was “more like hell than war” (Hitler, 1999, p.173). In the age of modernity, killers had more tools at their disposal to fight their enemies. These tools distanced the perpetrator from the act of killing, thus simplifying the act, and also increased their capacity to kill *en masse*. Bauman perceptively points out that “[l]ike so many other things which we have been trained to abhor and detest, violence has been taken out of sight, rather than forced out of existence” (Bauman, 1989, p.97). The situation where the act was probably



¹⁵ Ibid., p.64. Willy Just continues his report by analysing the process of cleaning the “fluids” and “thicker filth” left by the dying victims. He is referring to excrement and urine, vomit and blood. See: Noakes and Pridham, 1988, document 913.

¹⁶ Ibid. Greiser complains that “Right from the start I avoided trying to win cheap successes by germanising people who could not provide clear proof of their German origin...[M]y ethnic policy is threatened by that pursued in the Reich Gau Danzig-West Prussia in so far as the policy followed there initially appears to many superficial observers to be more successful” (Doc. 664). Many argue that Forster was a fierce ideologue in most respects; Kershaw sees him as “scarcely less fanatical” than Greiser (Kershaw, 2000, p.837). My point is that even supposedly committed Nazis such as Forster were not steadfast racial-biologist fanatics all the time. Careerism and cold, calculated rationality were often the motivating forces. Hitler biographer Zitelman proclaims that even Hitler himself was “a politician whose thinking and actions were far more rational than up to now thought.” Cf. Rainer Zitelman, *Hitler: Eine Politische Biographie*, (Berlin: Propylaen, 1989).



¹⁷ Kaufmann, 1950, p.366. Alan White agrees with Kaufmann, asserting that "Nietzsche has little to say that is of political importance" (White, 1990, p.137).

distanced the furthest from its consequence through division of labour was in the office of a 'lower-echelon' bureaucrat.

The combined forces of bureaucratisation, armament modernization, and intellectual godlessness created this cold killer.

NIETZSCHE'S GENOCIDE?

Intellectual disgrace
stares from every human face
and the seas of pity lie
locked and frozen in each eye
W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"

Nietzsche did not formulate a political doctrine that served in any way as a founding ideology for the NSDAP. In fact, as analysts such as Kaufmann argue, Nietzsche was largely *antipolitical*. He attacked the very foundation of what would normally serve as a modern political doctrine: the nation-state, the state, the party-system and the community. He was a pure nihilist in this sense. Instead, Nietzsche's *leitmotif* was the "theme of the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world"¹⁷. His defiance of the human emotion of pity must be seen in light of his loathing of the mediocrity of the modern masses, not any particular racial groups. If anything, he was most critical and unsympathetic toward the antisemitic and nationalist mass organisations within the socio-political environment of his own country. These would one day give rise to the NSDAP, and Nietzsche abhorred them.

Nonetheless, Hitler's genocides took place forty years after Nietzsche's death in an intellectual climate for which Nietzsche himself was largely responsible. As the contributors to Michael Berenbaum's *Mosaic of Victims* forcefully point out, the genocides were directed toward a myriad of peoples. The common denominator that ties all the victims together is the role of the massive, disparate but interconnected bureaucracy apparatus operating with little to no moral impulse against these victims. The age of modernity established a system of division and distribution of labour in which habituation of the workload became the societal norm, and the Nietzschean intellectual tradition legitimized and reinforced this amoral approach to work. The discussions, whether by letter or verbal exchange, and meetings over the contingencies of World War II dealt with the population question and ethnic issues on an largely rational basis.

Options were considered depending on changing geopolitical circumstances. The overarching task was set by a core of 'abnormal' fanatical ideologues, who George Kren and Leon Rappoport estimate represented around ten percent of the *Schutzstaffeln* (Kren and Rappoport, 1980, p.70), with Hitler at the very top but supplemented by Goering, Himmler, Heydrich, Kaltenbrunner, Eichmann and more. However, though Hitler and his clique's role are unequivocally central to the culmination of the Holocaust, the majority of the most important day-to-day work was conducted by agencies competing over particular spheres of influence. Surrounding this bureaucratic process was an intellectual environment, started by Nietzsche but continued through the works of Yeats, Rilke, Mann, Lawrence and Heidegger, of godlessness and amorality.

The legacy of Nietzsche was secure and spread across the general population, particularly within his own country (towards which he had been so hostile). Fundamentally, Nietzsche's intellectual predispositions created the basic amoral conditions that allowed the Holocaust and Hitler's genocides to happen. Primo Levi has argued that "neither Nietzsche nor Hitler nor Rosenberg were mad when they intoxicated themselves and their followers by preaching the myth of the Superman, to whom everything is permitted in recognition of his dogmatic and congenital superiority; but worthy of meditation is the fact that all of them, teacher and pupils, became progressively removed from reality as little by little their morality came unglued from the morality common to all times and all civilisations, which is an integral part of our man heritage and which in the end must be acknowledged" (Levi, 1999, p.84).

The Nazi movement seized upon elements of Nietzsche's philosophy and its moral ambiguity became engrained into the minds of its readers. Thus, the effect of Nietzsche on Hitler's Third Reich, and subsequently the effect of the latter on the former's philosophical legacy is no coincidence. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* laid the archetypal foundations for Hitler's genocides, and Nietzsche's association with the latter will never disappear.

The advance in technology created the capacity for genocide, and Nietzsche made it morally imaginable for non-fanatics to perpetrate it. The Holocaust and Hitler's genocides could only be accomplished through the combined modernising forces of machine industrialization, bureaucratization and intellectual amoralization. They conspired to create the environment in which the perpetrators of the Holocaust could conduct their business without any qualms. Nietzsche played an important role in creating the mindset of not the 'willing executioners' that Daniel Jonah Goldhagen describes, or any Nazi fanatics, but rather the amoral, bureaucratic and efficient killers under the skin of normal, modern citizens. Thus, Heinrich Himmler's 1943 Poznan speech applied particularly well for the normal bureaucrat, who had indeed, in his own eyes, "suffered no defect within [himself], in [his] soul, or in [his] character"¹⁸. Nietzsche's responsibility does not lie in the fact that he denied God, which was by no means uncommon among his contemporaries, but that he replaced conventional Christian morality with a doctrine of total egoism and pitilessness. Even one of his staunchest defenders, Walter Kaufmann, admits that Nietzsche most serious shortcoming was that he had no faith in the human capability to develop in a godless world without the need for a cruel, radical aristocratic elite (Kaufmann, 1950, p.250).

Civilisation and modernity brought a new term and concept —genocide— into its vocabulary. Nietzsche, adding academic respectability to godlessness, played an important role in creating the mentality of the Nazi bureaucracy that allowed this word to entire human vocabulary. Bureaucratization, technology and intellectual pitilessness failed to provide safeguards against Hitler's genocides, and Bauman caustically warns that "none of the societal conditions that made Auschwitz possible has truly disappeared, and no effective measures have been undertaken to prevent such possibilities and principles from generating Auschwitz-like catastrophes" (Bauman, 1989, p.11). The ruthlessness of Hitler's genocidal apparatus has been repeated in the nuclear Cold War and post-Cold War environment, and Nietzsche's role in creating



¹⁸ Heinrich Himmler, "Himmler's October 4, 1943, Posen Speech", *The Nizkor Project* (www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/h/himmler-heinrich/posen/oct-04-43).



the amoral bureaucracy that props up the modern system cannot go unnoticed. Whilst Nietzsche never singled out the Jewish population for discrimination and extermination, he nonetheless advocated a pitiless, amoral approach towards the weak masses. "We have no pity, we show no mercy towards the Jews!" Thus spoke Hitler, and thousands more under him.

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