Dionysian and Promethean Humanism

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On June 20, 1923 the internationally renowned Bolshevik, Karl Radek, gave a speech before the executive committee of the Communist International. The speech was an appeal to the nationalistic German right to join the communists in a political alliance and, as a means of catching the ear of the right, Radek based his appeal on the life of the nationalist martyr Leo Schlageter, who had been executed for his part in resisting the French occupation of the Ruhr. Schlageter, Radek said, was a “class enemy” who had helped the big bourgeoisie of Germany stifle the revolutionary working class in its fight for freedom and socialism in 1919. Now Schlageter was dead, “a wanderer into the void,” his life wasted. It was a shame that he had not allied himself with the working class and that he had not died while resisting the French in the name of communism; had he done so, he could have been a “wanderer into a better future for all mankind.” Would the German right recognize Schlageter’s mistake and join the workers in their battle against international finance capital?

Radek was answered by Moeller van den Bruck, who in 1923 was a prominent ideological leader in nationalistic circles. Moeller always had seen certain common grounds between himself and the communists. In 1921 he had written that communists and nationalists had the same enemy, bourgeois liberalism. Startlingly, he also had written that nationalists and communists shared a “corporate basis” of thought and action, as if they were striving together for the corporate state or for völkisch or truly national life (in a sense, “Volk,” “nation,” and “corporate state” were synonyms). It was comments such as these which had led Radek to believe that an alliance with the right was possible. Nevertheless, Moeller spurned Radek’s appeal. Although he did feel attracted to the communists, he also was repelled by their attachment to historical materialism, a doctrine which he felt had made man’s stomach the measure of all values and “not man but an economy foremost.” It appeared unsuitable to Moeller that anyone should become so concerned with material goods as to desire a classless society in which there would be economic equality; together with the entire right, he believed that man should occupy himself with culture rather than with economic questions, for it was in culture that man could perfect himself. Insofar as the economy was to be considered at all, Moeller and others on the right believed that the corporate state should be characterized not by equality, but by Gliederung (structuring), a principle according to which everyone would hold his place in the division of labor, accepting the economic rewards which might accrue to that place without murmuring. Another thing about communism which Moeller found repugnant was its “revolutionary” attitude, i.e., its belief that “the whole world [had] gone wrong up until today” and that the cure for the world’s ailment could “come only from an entirely new order of life.” This communist attitude could not be reconciled with a “conservative” position, nor even with the oddly named “conservative revolutionary” position which Moeller held. Further, Moeller disliked what he considered to be communism’s excessive attachment to reason; he distinguished between “reason” and “understanding” (something akin to insight), attributing the former to the left as something undesirable and claiming the latter for the right. Finally, in answering Radek, Moeller made the point that it did not mean much that a Bolshevik had praised Schlageter’s heroism. Such praise
could not be the foundation of an alliance, for the tribute to Schlager had been accompanied by a reaffirmation of the class struggle. When would Radek understand that the next stage of history should witness not the substitution of one class rule for another but the synthesis of all classes in the nation?

Radek tried again. He professed himself to be amazed at Moeller's interpretation of his speech as a tribute to Schlager. The dead man had been called a class enemy and a wanderer into the void, not a hero. (Actually, Radek failed to see that it was precisely the phrase "wanderer into the void" which had caught Moeller's fancy and which had made the speech seem a panegyric on Schlager.) Furthermore, Radek was sure that Moeller's views on history were quite interesting; perhaps sometime the two could get together to discuss Weltanschauung. But now Weltanschauung was not at issue. The Communist Party wanted the right to face reality and join in concrete action against the common enemy, capitalism. Would the right cooperate or not? Moeller terminated the affair by putting Radek off again, saying: "Radek wants to postpone questions of Weltanschauung for later discussion. From the German standpoint this is not possible. Questions do not admit of separation into the immediate and the remote, the practical and the spiritual. The first are embedded in the second."

This flirtation between right and left in Weimar Germany and its failure arouse some theoretical curiosity. Was Moeller van den Bruck correct in believing that communists and nationalists shared something so profoundly significant as a common basis of thought and action? If so, what was it? How could Moeller possibly have seen anything similar to his own fundamental beliefs in an ideology against which he had so many fundamental objections? If there really was nothing of importance shared by nationalism and communism, how could Moeller have made such an error? Was he drawn to Radek's speech about the "wanderer into the void"? That is, was his view simply the product of a misunderstanding of ideologically used words? On the other hand, what was the nature of the ideological differences which Moeller saw between himself and Radek and which prevented the alliance? In objecting to the manner in which communists dismissed the past and to their espousal of reason, historical materialism, and the class struggle, Moeller was pointing to now familiar distinctions between conservatism and revolutionary progressivism, rationalism and irrationalism, and nationalism and a class-oriented internationalism aimed at the ultimate unity of mankind. He also was taking issue with the notion that economic equality (and economic justice however defined) should be considered man's primary value and holding up culture instead. What was the real significance of these differences? Given Moeller's attraction to communism, could it be that the differences were accidental and trivial rather than essential? Could it be said that Moeller's objections to Marxist doctrine were no more significant than the objections of one Christian sect to the doctrines of another, on the grounds that, speaking figuratively, communists and nationalists really preached and worshipped the same god, only in different ways, as Christians do? Or did the ideological disputes between the two groups reflect real opposition over the question of which gods should be worshipped and which goals pursued?

One thing is clear. Moeller's declaration that communism and nationalism had the same enemy was accurate insofar as both movements did despise the spirit of liberal society for the same reason. Karl Marx came to grips with liberalism in 1843 and saw little but egoism in it. Criticizing Germany's budding liberal society indirectly, as he saw it mirrored in Hegel's theory of "civil society," Marx complained that: "The present civil society is the realized principle of individualism; individual existence is the final purpose. . ." Later in
the year, while surveying liberalism’s celebrated “rights of man,” he observed that what was secured in the right of liberty was “the freedom of man regarded as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself.” It was a liberty “not founded upon the relations between man and man, but rather upon the separation of man from man.” The right of property was “the right to enjoy one’s fortune and to dispose of it as one wills, without regard for other men and independently of society.” It was, therefore, the “right of self-interest.” After making similar remarks about other rights on the list, Marx summed up by arguing that: “None of the so-called rights of man, therefore, goes beyond the egoistic man, the man withdrawn into himself, his private interest, and his private caprice, and separated from the community as a member of civil society... The single bond which holds individuals together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the maintenance of their property and egoistic persons.” The fact that liberalism’s “rights of man” had carried the day in Germany and Europe was deplorable, in Marx’s opinion, because he did not think that man could become a true “species being” as long as egoism existed.11

Nationalists noticed this antiliberal orientation of the young Marx in later communist doctrine and they agreed with the Marxist assessment of the liberal spirit. Moeller van den Bruck said frequently that liberalism was marked by “an individualistic and... egoistic view of life.” Much like Marx, he also commented that: “Liberalism is the manifestation of a society which no longer is a community.”12 Moeller detested the victory of liberal individualism in Germany because he felt that it was preventing the transformation of the German people into a true Volk; liberalism had put the ego in place of the Volk and thus had destroyed völkisch existence.18 As Moeller’s colleague Max Hildebert Boehm had pointed out, a Volk could not be a “mosaic of isolated individuals.”14 Others on the right argued similarly that liberal egoism was standing in the way of Germany’s transformation into a true nation. Thus, Paul de Lagarde, one of the forefathers of the Weimar right, in 1885 lamented the selfishness of the Germans as a nationally self-destructive evil, saying: “We still are not a nation, but a collection of self-destructive monads.”125

The common hostility of nationalism and communism to the egoistic spirit of liberalism provides an insight which makes plausible Moeller van den Bruck’s belief that both movements had “corporate” foundations, for superficial analysis of the alternatives which Marx and Moeller preferred to egoistic man, namely, man as a “species being” and man integrated into a Volk, or nation, reveals that there actually was a sense in which left and right were pursuing the same goal. For Marx, the individualistic person was incomplete and something less than a real human being; he was only a potential human being who had not yet realized his true, “species” nature. The essence of real human personality was its “social quality.” Marx insisted that: “The individual is the social being,” and he said moreover that: “My own existence is social activity; what I make from myself [aus mir], therefore, I make for society, conscious of my nature as social.” This meant that the real human person would be an almost literally selfless being, a being dominated by a social ethos, by the will to serve the community, and a being finding not only his fulfillment but his very existence in service to the “species” rather than in the satisfaction of any private interests.17 In the less Feuerbachian writings of the mature Marx with which the German nationalists were familiar, this real person becomes the man of the “higher stage of socialism,” the man who makes possible the classless society which is governed by the motto: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” He is the man who is willing to work according to his ability, prompted not by any desire for gain but, as the present day Russians say, “solely by moral stimuli, a high degree of social consciousness.”18
The nationalists desired a society of equally selfless people dominated by the same will to serve the community. Paul de Lagarde believed that before *völkisch*, or national, life could be established in Germany, the society would have to become "organic" and people would have to recognize a duty to serve their fellow men with "serving love." What he hoped to see was a community whose members would be as closely bound by "serving love" spiritually as the parts of organisms are bound by tissues physically. This being accomplished, people would be as devoted to the good of society in their actions as members of the human body are to the good of the person; they never would "separate themselves from the whole and never do anything against the whole" and they all would come to be related even more closely than neighbors (which was to say something in Lagarde's day). Wilhelm Stapel, the editor of the important right-wing journal *Deutsches Volkstum* and a contemporary of Moeller van den Bruck's, taught that the *Volk* should be conceived as a tree and the people who comprised the *Volk* as leaves existing only for the tree's benefit. Moeller himself attempted to persuade the Germans to develop a "powerful community feeling" and to consider as good whatever helped the nation and as evil whatever harmed it. Oswald Spengler, who called attention to the similarities between right and left even before Moeller and who boasted that the Germans had been "socialists" long before Marx was born, argued that there still was a great question to be settled in history: "Is the will of the individual to be subordinated to the common will or vice-versa?" The German (actually the Prussian) answer was: "[P]ower belongs to the whole. The individual serves the whole. The whole is sovereign." Adolf Hitler, finally, noted that the greatest virtue of the "Aryan" lay in his "willingness to put all his abilities in the service of the community" and in the fact that "he willingly subordinates his own ego to the life of the community and, if the hour demands, even sacrifices it." The slogan "Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz" ("The common interest is prior to private interest") also became a leitmotif of the Third Reich. On the basis of all these examples, it should be evident that the German nationalists' *völkisch* man was to be a person who would act with precisely the same social ethos as the Marxist "species being," albeit in the smaller context of the nation and, presumably, with the intention to render cultural, rather than economic, services.

Oswald Spengler maintained that socialism should be understood as an ethos. He could as well have included nationalism, *völkisch* consciousness, and corporativism in his argument. So far, corporativism and Marxist socialism have been considered as ethos and, viewed in this light, they seem now to have been the same; thus, Moeller van den Bruck's opinion apparently is vindicated. It seems that both communism and nationalism were seeking the identical end of a society founded on man's self-sacrificing will to serve man. To speak figuratively again, it appears that both movements stood in the service of the same god, "man." In fact, as everybody now knows, the young Marx said explicitly that the dialectical stage of fully developed communism was "humanism." It may come as a surprise that nationalism, too, was "humanism." Having called for a new man possessed of the same ethos as the Marxist "species being," nationalism certainly had equal claim to the title. Moeller van den Bruck even appears to have thought that nationalism had a better claim to the title on the grounds that communism had forfeited its claims to humanism by adhering to historical materialism. This seems at least partially to have been the sense of his accusation that Marxism had made "not man but an economy foremost."

Moeller's feeling that communism was imperfectly humanistic recalls the question of the real significance of the differences between communists and nationalists. Up to this point in the analysis, nothing has been gained for the understanding of their
disputes. Nor is anything likely to be gained by continuing the consideration of corporativism and Marxist socialism as ethos, for it does not seem probable that any differences between the two ideologies could have originated in their agreement that man should become "social." Of course, the contending parties in the Weimar Republic did carry on some debates about what a truly social ethos would imply. These debates, however, did not elucidate any of the essential points at issue which were enumerated above. For example, Moeller and Oswald Spengler attacked historical materialism together, arguing that it was not a philosophy of true socialism but only of liberalism in a social disguise, or "atomized socialism." They believed this because they mistakenly thought that the Marxist vision of the class struggle and proletarian revolution really was only a rationalization aimed at justifying the egoism of one economic class which hoped to expropriate another. It seems also that Moeller and Spengler regarded the fact that people would bother to make comparisons between the economic statuses of different classes as \textit{prima facie} evidence that those people had grasping natures. Any person who was truly selfless in the service of the community surely would not care whether other people had more or less in the way of material goods than he; he would accept any position in the economic structure gladly, sacrificing his personal material interests, provided only that he could serve. This conception of the truly social ethos was a factor in Moeller's denunciation of the communists for making the economy (read, economic interests) prior to the community. It also moved both men to regard the principle of \textit{Gliederung}, in which everyone would hold his place while serving the whole, as the most desirable principle for the organization of society and, thus, Spengler praised the highly structured Prussian society as the most truly social one which ever had existed. Marxists predictably retorted that such arguments were merely bourgeois attempts to trick the proletariat. They mistakenly believed that all the socialistic rhetoric of the right, with its advocacy of the principle of \textit{Gliederung}, really was only a product of the will to rationalize vested interests in the existing relations of production. They also found it perfectly inconceivable that anyone could propose a socialism which had no interest in ameliorating the sufferings caused by the capitalist mode of production and which insisted on preserving economic privileges. How could anyone claim to be serving man while simultaneously exploiting him, starving him, and dehumanizing him in the factories? How could service to man consist in denying the fruits of production to the many while bestowing them in abundance upon the few? How could a truly social ethos be realized anywhere but in a classless society?

It ought to be plain that the conflict between these two arguments could not be resolved simply by a process of deductions from the single premise of the desirability of a social ethos and, indeed, that the conflict scarcely could have arisen from that premise alone. The divergent positions in the dispute actually arise from two hidden premises, i.e., the nationalist belief that economic life and economic justice were not the means to human perfection and thus not worth the concern of the socially oriented man and the communist belief to the contrary. The real question implicit in this debate over social ethos, therefore, was why culture should have been preferred to economic justice, or vice-versa. Nothing in the idea of social ethos and nothing in the historical discussion about its implications answers this question or explains why it should have become an issue. There were similar arguments in the Weimar Republic over the problems of whether true sociability would be served best by conservatism or revolutionary progressivism, irrational understanding or rationalism, and nationalism or proletarian internationalism. Each side
usually attempted to reduce the other's positions to rationalizations of interests and, thus, these arguments also failed to indicate why any of the alternatives should have been preferred to the others in the first place. It is fair to conclude that the problem of sociality merely served to disguise the real origins of the differences between communism and nationalism and that the reasons for their opposition must be sought elsewhere. Full comprehension of the communist positions will depend on a more serious analysis of the young Marx and, to penetrate to the sources of the nationalist ideology, the works of Friedrich Nietzsche will have to be examined rather extensively.

Nietzsche never was a racist or proto-Nazi. Nor was he ever a German chauvinist. The crowning achievement of his life, the idea of the Übermensch (overman), was rejected outright by most nationalists. Nevertheless, Nietzsche deserves to be called one of the founders of the German nationalist movement. It was he who posed the problem which most people on the right thought had to be solved and it was he who suggested the solutions which they adopted. The Übermensch was only Nietzsche's second answer to an all-important question with which he seems to have wrestled for most of his life and, while rejecting Nietzsche's second answer, the many nationalists who recognized the importance of his question seized upon the first.

Nietzsche seems to have expended much of his intellectual energy in the effort to find a way of coping with one, distressing experience, that which lay behind his dictum that "God is dead," and the "God is dead" formula appears to have been only one of several symbolic descriptions by Nietzsche of a single predicament in which he and the nationalists found themselves and mankind. A number of examples of such descriptions of the human condition by Nietzsche may be related and then analyzed together for the purpose of determining what the problem was that nationalists wished to solve. In his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche calls the basic experience of the Greeks, which he has shared, "an insight into the horrible truth" of the "absurdity of existence." The experience produces a "terror and horror of existence" and also is accompanied by a "longing" for which "no comfort avails." In his essay "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life," Nietzsche depicts his own intellectual development as a "passionately searching and straying voyage over dark, strange seas," and a voyage of which he has had more than enough.

In "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche laments the fact that people hang onto existence and its pleasures instinctively, like animals, without a care for the painful problem of man's inability to grasp life's "metaphysical significance." "It is so with all of us, for the greater part of our lives," he says. "Casually we do not transcend animality; we ourselves are animals who appear to suffer insensibly." There are moments, however, in which Nietzsche does transcend animality and he says that "then the clouds part and we see how we, with the rest of nature, are straining towards the Man as towards a Something which stands high above us." The attainment of this consciousness of one's own upward striving is progress, in Nietzsche's opinion, but only in the sense that man finally becomes aware of his suffering. The "Man," or the full, ripe humanity towards which mankind is striving, cannot be achieved because it is synonymous with a full understanding of life's "metaphysical significance," which is out of reach. Thus, pondering the failures of his great hero, Schopenhauer, to acquire the desired knowledge, Nietzsche cries out with a mixture of self-pity and compassion for his teacher: "Oh, your deaf ears, your heavy head, your feeble understanding, your shrunkened heart! Oh, how I despise everything that I call mine! Not to be able to fly but only to flutter one's wings! To look above oneself and not be able to rise! . . . And what a destiny it is . . . to know oneself as fruit on a tree which never can ripen because it is too much in
the shade and to see thick sunshine lying ahead which cannot be reached.” In the same essay, Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer in observing that there are moments in which men feel saintly love and benevolence towards their fellows and that “there is something beyond our being [Jenseits] that comes, for those moments, to the hither side of it [zu einem Diesseits wird].” Having felt the presence of this something, he goes on to say that “therefore, from the depths of our hearts, we long for a bridge from here to there.”32 (After deciding that the Übermensch is “the meaning of the earth,” Nietzsche repeats this bridge symbolism, replacing the Jenseits with the overman as the target of his “arrows of longing for the other shore.”33)

In the famous “death of God” aphorism in The Gay Science, Nietzsche’s “madman” depicts God’s demise as a painfully disorienting event for man. He asks: “Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while? . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?”34

Finally, in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes a highly symbolic spiritual autobiography entitled “On the Three Metamorphoses.” The story is told of how the spirit first becomes a camel, then a lion, and then a child. The story of the metamorphosis of the spirit into a camel recounts Nietzsche’s motivating experience once again and celebrates the Schopenhauer-like strength of the soul which chooses to face the reality of that experience honestly. “There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong reverent spirit that would bear much,” Nietzsche says, and when faced with difficult things, this heroic spirit “kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded.” The chief burden which is assumed by the spirit is the refusal to avoid truth, for the sake of which “suffering of hunger in one’s soul” must be endured. Another heavy load is “being sick and sending home the comforters.” The comforters must be sent away because one of the truths which cannot be avoided is that no comfort avails, a point already announced in The Birth of Tragedy. So, incapable of health and satiation, and “like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert,” where the next metamorphosis occurs.35

Although the symbolism differs in each of these examples, it seems clear that, in every case, Nietzsche is describing a single experience which has three elements. First of all, he perceives a movement of his soul towards something which it desires but which it neither possesses nor knows. The soul’s movement is portrayed variously as “longing,” “passionate searching,” and “straining towards the Man as towards a Something which stands high above us,” as the wish to “fly,” to “rise,” to “ripen,” and to be in the “sunshine” rather than in the “shade,” as “hunger” and the desire for “comfort” and “health,” and as the wish for a “bridge from here to there,” to that Jenseits which occasionally becomes a Diesseits. At times, Nietzsche conceives the unknown object of the soul’s longing as propositional knowledge, as when he expresses the wish for knowledge of the “metaphysical significance” of life and for “understanding.” On other occasions, the goal is envisaged as a spiritual condition, e.g., as full humanity, ripeness, elevation, illumination, comfort, and union with the Schopenhauerian Jenseits.

Whatever the object of the soul’s outward movement is, it is not anything connected with material goods, status, or psychological ego protection, for the young Nietzsche consistently refers to the object as “metaphysical” and as something which transcends the human condition and, later in life, Nietzsche still speaks exclusively of problems of the spirit, except when he is analyzing and denouncing the tricks used by men to avoid facing up to those problems. Nietzsche likewise desires nothing connected with the salvation schemes of
the traditional religions or with the higher pleasures of virtue and contemplation which were recommended by the Greeks as the way to happiness. He counts religion as one of the tricks which people use to avoid the real problems of the spirit, and he cannot suppress a sneer when he mentions that Christians (together with Romantics) do manage after all to comfort themselves. Virtue, reason, and all human "happiness" are viewed by Nietzsche with impatient contempt and he urges others to the same position; Zarathustra says to the multitude: "What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue." Nietzsche feels this impatience partially because virtue, reason, and "happiness," like religion, seem to him to be fetters upon the soul's freedom to know "arrows of longing for the other shore," which every nonbovine, truth-loving soul should suffer. More importantly, he experiences his "hour of the great contempt" and, when younger, he exclaims that he despises everything that he calls his because he sees that everything which man has is contemptible as related to the soul's great longing; nothing known to man can satisfy that longing. This is the second aspect of his fundamental experience which Nietzsche attempts to communicate time and again. It is not possible for man to fly, rise, hear, understand, grasp life's metaphysical significance, ripen, or be in the sunshine. God, the being from whom man hoped to receive solace for so long, is dead, murdered by a science which has discovered that the intellect neither can find God nor know him with certainty. "No comfort avails," and therefore the man of truth must abjure comforts.

The discovery of the fact that "no comfort avails" produces the third element of Nietzsche's experience, absolute spiritual disorientation and anguish. The soul which longs to ripen and to fly never knows anything but "sorrow" and suffering. The Schopenhauerian spirit which agrees to hear what is "difficult" is "sick" and lives in a "desert." Because God is dead, man tumbles through an infinite void. Life is cold, dark, empty, totally devoid of reference points for self-interpretation and self-understanding, and, as Nietzsche points out in Twilight of the Idols, without any end, or final cause.

As portrayed in this exegesis, Nietzsche's description of mankind's predicament turns out to have been an analysis of the ontological situation of the human soul and a narration of Nietzsche's personal reactions to that situation. Considered as such, Nietzsche's ideas bear a partial resemblance to the Socratic theory of "love," which also was an analysis of the ontological situation of the soul and perhaps one in terms of which a more complete understanding of the Nietzschean experience might be achieved. In Plato's Symposium, Socrates argues that all men are "lovers" in the sense that every soul longs for a vision of the "beautiful," a vision which "will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is—but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness . . ." This is to say that every soul is attracted to an eternal, transcendent being or, to use Aristotelian language, to the "ground of being." Socrates says that the satisfaction of the soul's longing would make man happy but, unfortunately, the soul lacks "wisdom," or the perfect vision of the ground of being which it craves. To be sure, the soul does have some knowledge which relates to the ground, namely, the knowledge that it feels drawn to something transcendent, but the nature of that something and the possible modes of human participation in it remain hidden, so that while the ground is known as an object of attraction it simultaneously remains unknown. The soul thus finds it-
self in a paradoxical condition which is neither wisdom nor ignorance, neither possession of the desired vision nor the total loss of it. As Socrates maintains, the soul stand between wisdom and ignorance, between “resource” and “need,” in a middling condition of “love of wisdom,” or yearning for it. This middling situation of tension is the soul’s ontological condition. It is a very difficult situation; Socrates says that love is “harsh and arid, barefoot and homeless.” Yet, once having experienced the love of wisdom, the soul never can desire any object other than the vision of beauty and it knows that, if the vision can be attained by man, a life spent in its pursuit will have been worthwhile. Socrates therefore concludes by praising love and by exhorting all men to cultivate it. For him, the experience of the soul’s tension towards the ground of being has become an ordering experience, despite the harshness and aridity of life which the tension causes.

It seems probable that Nietzsche discovered the same ontological condition of the soul as Socrates had discovered. Both thinkers agree in describing the soul’s situation as one of unrequited longing for something transcendent and they agree further that the soul which knows this hunger lives as though in a desert. They differ only in their interpretations of the experience of attraction and in their reactions to the human situation. Socrates welcomes love and fosters it in his soul, feeling cheerfully that love at least approximates possession of the desired object and hoping that someday the approximation might become real wisdom. Nietzsche gloomily fastens his attention on the soul’s ignorance and emptiness and finds the human condition unbearable. For him the experience of attraction has become a disordering one; his soul is incapable of enduring its tension towards the ground of being. This weakness leads to the great question of Nietzsche’s thought: How might it be possible to live without being overwhelmed by the truth of the advice offered by Silenus to Midas that it would have been better for man never to have existed at all? Nietzsche’s simplest and most profound answer to the question is given in the essay “Schopenhauer as Educator.” There it is concluded that the man who has known the sorrows of Schopenhauer will put an end to his sufferings through an act of will. The person “finally will turn his soul around [seine Seele herumwenden] so that it will not consume itself in futile yearning—and now he will discover a new circle of duties.” This spiritual turning around consists of two kinds of acts, each of which is treated symbolically in Zarathustra’s parable of the three metamorphoses. First there is an act of negation, in which “the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert” by saying “No” to all of humanity’s “values” and to all will other than his own. What the lion is attempting to do in this act, which in Nietzsche’s life took the form of destructive psychological exposures of religion, philosophy, and morals, is to liberate the will from the previous master of the desert, to kill everything within and without the soul which would dissuade the will from filling up its empty desert by turning to a “new circle of duties.” Thus, Nietzsche asserts that the lion aims at “the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation.” When the will is liberated, the second phase of the soul’s turnaround is executed. The spirit deliberately commits itself to a falsehood; it undergoes its third metamorphosis and becomes a child, a being which at once is “innocent” and “forgetful” and which therefore is ready to play a “game of creation” that would have terrified an “adult” spirit which was not innocent and forgetful of the truth. The falsehood to which the spirit commits itself is that the new “game,” the new “circle of duties,” will fill man’s emptiness and turn his pain to joy. As the younger Nietzsche argues in the language of Schopenhauer, the “truly existent primal unity,” of which man is part, requires and achieves “redemption through illusion.” Man can live only
through the “pious disposition to illusion” and all men who know how to live “adore appearance,” shunning truth. The soul thus finds its salvation in what Socrates might have called “antiphilosophy” (deliberate philodox). Socrates also exhorted man to turn his soul around and the Nietzschean turnabout leaves the soul facing in a direction exactly opposite to the Socratic.

As noted above, the new “game” to which Nietzsche turned in his search for illusory redemption was “creation.” The mature Nietzsche hoped for the creation of the Übermensch. Zarathustra pictures man as a “bridge,” or a “rope, tied between beast and overman,” and, much like Paul the Apostle, he urges people to die to the old, bestial, contemptible man in order to be able to “cross over.” The crossover occurs when the childlike spirit “wills his own will,” thereby constituting himself an Übermensch. The younger Nietzsche believed in the efficacy of creative art, confessing that: “I am convinced that art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life.” He derived this article of faith from the Greeks (if not from Richard Wagner), interpreting the Dionysian chorus as the art form through which the Hellenes “saved” themselves, and professing himself a Dionysian man. Apparently noticing that the Dionysian Greeks had saved themselves collectively, in the context of a public cult in which they could reinforce one another’s illusions, Nietzsche also came to think that “the new duties” of artistic redemption could not be imputed to “isolated individuals.” Much rather, they would have to be the affair of a “powerful community.” With this conclusion, Nietzsche arrived at the idea of culture, art communally sustained, as man’s salvific activity. As will be shown in a moment, he also arrived at the idea of the structured Volk, or nation, as the community organized for artistic redemption.

The Nietzschean description of the human condition and of the necessity of “redemption through illusion” had an enormously powerful impact on German thought at the turn of the century. It would not be too strong to say that, after 1890, every ideological nationalist of consequence was a Dionysian (even if in his own way). Limiting the argument on this point to one example, Moeller van den Bruck found himself as spiritually lost as Nietzsche had been. Reeling under the hammer blows which Nietzsche had dealt to religion and philosophy, Moeller had to admit that both of these forms of spiritual existence had become meaningless. This discovery set him adrift on an uncharted sea of “becoming” on which it was impossible to see anything “eternal” or to know anything of the creation of the world or of the purpose of life. Beyond the present, which was all that seemed really visible, Moeller could see only “blackness, . . . the void.” It was problematic whether man would not “collapse under this fate” (and it would have required great courage to have been a “wanderer into the void,” like Schlageter). Moeller suffered constantly from “the feeling of being torn, shattered, of searching purposelessness” and he wondered how he could win “peaceful adjustment of needs and yearnings.” He resolved his dilemma by turning his soul around, as Nietzsche had, arguing that as long as man could not know an eternal purpose anyway, it made more sense to believe in a “purpose of the earth.” Having performed the turnabout, he found the strength to withstand the human situation and followed Nietzsche in saying: “Only today are we strong enough internally not to collapse under this fate but rather to say to ourselves that therefore we surely can create . . .” This Dionysian outlook led Moeller to the position that culture was the path to salvation. He remarked that cultures were “stages on the way to the fulfillment of the earth through the means of man” and that: “In cultures we approach the world purpose. In cultures we throw clarity on our dark destiny. In cultures we wrest from our unending assignment solution upon solution in mastered finality.”
Moeller also accepted fully the Dionysian commitment to illusion. He believed that "myth" was truer than science and he chastised Spengler for forsaking myth and called the historian a "rationalist" for having despaired of cultural salvation in *The Decline of the West.*

It will be a simple matter now to explain Moeller's objections to Marxism. He obviously preferred culture to economic justice because culture was the medium of Dionysian redemption, whereas the economy belonged to the realm of the absurd. It would have been antihumanistic to induce men to waste their lives struggling for economic justice, which would have been to doom them to absurdity and deny them fulfillment. Moeller recommended "myth" rather than reason because he was convinced with Nietzsche that salvation depended on a deliberate commitment to illusion and therefore ultimately upon an act of will rather than upon anything that reason could discover. He argued for the nation rather than mankind as the organizational context of salvation for the simple reason that nations can have cultures, whereas mankind cannot. It never was Moeller's opinion that the German nation should be worshipped because it was German; he detected the actual Germany in which he lived, as a matter of fact, because he thought that it was full of cultural philistines who were resisting the Dionysian message. He taught that the most important thing about the true nation was its spiritual mission as a redemptive vehicle. He opposed the Marxist corollary of the unity of mankind, i.e., the class struggle, because strife between classes was destructive of völkisch existence. Within the true nation, Moeller demanded Gliederung instead of equality, not only in the economy but in all national life, because he believed that the "structuring" of essentially unequal men was absolutely necessary to Dionysian redemption. This idea came from Nietzsche too. It requires but little insight to see that the great works of any culture are created only by a few individuals and not by the masses of common men. Perceiving this fact, Nietzsche concluded immediately that ordinary people should do everything in their power to create the conditions under which the truly redemptive men, the artists, could rise up and prosper. This would be a noble act and one for which the masses would receive equal service in return, for by helping the artists they could participate in salvation vicariously. "For the question is to be put thusly," Nietzsche observed. "How does the life of you, the individual, attain its highest value, its deepest meaning? How is it wasted least? Certainly only in that you live for the advantage of the rarest and most valuable specimens and not for the advantage of the majority who, taken individually, are the most worthless specimens." This calculation became the principle of völkisch organization for the entire right and thus for the right's call to the social ethos. With an eye on Nietzsche's argument that the masses could be saved by living for the artists, Moeller also claimed that the structured society would be the most truly democratic one, for it would permit the masses to participate in their destiny.

In explaining Moeller's predilection for conservatism and his rejection of revolutionary progressivism the first thing which should be noted is that, to Moeller, "conservative" was merely another name for "Dionysian." He defined "conservative thought" as "a demiurgic thought which allows the creative man to continue the work of the Creator on earth." The conservative, therefore, was simply he who pursued artistic redemption politically (a distasteful task to which unpolitical Dionysians had been driven only by the results of the First World War). It was the business of the Dionysian to be a conservative, or to look to the past, because as Nietzsche had pointed out, the culture of a Volk could grow only from the nation's historical tradition and, moreover, the modern artist could take courage for his work from the examples of the great creators in that tradition. The "revolutionary" idea of the commu-
nists, insofar as it implied that the whole world had "gone wrong up until today," was intolerable because it diminished the value of the great creative acts which had been performed by individuals in the nation’s history and thereby struck a blow against the will of modern man to create. The progressivist aspect of communist revolutionism also was intolerable because it placed redemption in a stable condition which would come at the end of a continuous historical process, thus denying the Dionysian insight that salvation was to be found in acts of creative will, which happen sporadically rather than developing in a process, and therefore in a condition which always would have to be reconstituted by new creative efforts rather than enjoyed as something existing statically. There also was a feeling on the right that man would be degraded by an uncreative “salvation” which depended upon a confluence of events beyond the control of the human will; Nietzsche already had criticized Hegel on this score.\(^5\)

Moeller’s final reason for condemning the communist revolutionary idea, that it called for an “entirely new order of life,” presents something more of a puzzle than his other objections to Marxist doctrine. In working towards an order based on Dionysian philodoxy, Moeller surely was striving for a new order himself, a fact which he and other nationalists acknowledged in calling themselves “conservative revolutionaries.” The Marxist demand for a new order, therefore, was not in itself the cause of Moeller’s hostility. Rather, there was something which Moeller disliked about the nature of the demand which he could not describe articulately, probably because he had no real theoretical grasp of Marxism.

Moeller’s observation that communists wanted an “entirely new order of life” was accurate, to be sure. As the young Marx contemplated the existing order he was, in his own words, moved to “indignation” and he exclaimed: “War on German conditions! By all means! They are below the level of history, beneath all criticism, but they are still an object of criticism just as the criminal below the level of humanity is still an object of the executioner.” Being thus outraged, Marx called for a “radical revolution,” one which would not leave any of “the pillars of the house standing.”\(^6\)

Moeller van den Bruck sensed this spirit of indignation and radicalism but he did not comprehend its causes and aims.

Marx undoubtedly was incensed at the sufferings of the working class, especially in his later years. It must be remembered, however, that he was careful to distinguish himself from those socialists for whom the proletariat was important “only from the point of view of being the most suffering class” (italics supplied) and that his compassion did not extend to the Lumpenproletariat, the “dregs” of society who in every age are the most miserable and pitiful.\(^7\) It also must be remembered that Marx was a committed revolutionary before he ever discovered the proletariat. Something other than suffering and social injustice stirred his wrath, namely, the “alienation” of mankind.

As is too well known to require much elaboration, Marx believed with Feuerbach that man was in the habit of projecting his essence onto fantastic objects of his own creation, stripping himself of his finest attributes in order to give them away in the imagination to an alien being. Marx identified three levels of alienation, the religious, the political, and (only lastly) the economic. He thought that in religious alienation the human essence was projected onto “God,” in political alienation onto the state, and, in economic alienation onto the products of labor, in each case with the practical result that the alien receptacles of human nature were set up as existential powers, spook-gods which were acting through human instruments as the lords and masters of the submissive men who had created them. It was man’s submission to such gods which made Marx most indignant, for he found it intolerable that mankind should have any gods at all. In the preface to his doctoral dissertation he ex-
plicitly adopted the motto of Prometheus: “In one word, I hate all the gods . . . ,” and he regarded submission to any deity as a condition in which man was a “degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being.”

Marx’s hatred of gods is to be understood in two ways. First, it was based on a feeling that man should not allow superstition to reduce him to a pawn of natural forces which he could and should control. Secondly and more importantly, Marx simply was defiantly unwilling to bend his knee to any deity, imagined or real. He regarded Prometheus, the rebel against Zeus who had been guilty of “wresting from the gods their honors to give them to creatures of a day,” as “the noblest saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar” and he approved of the statement of Prometheus to Hermes that it would be better to suffer untold torments than to be a servant of the god. Marx committed himself to this Promethean rebellion because he wanted man to be “the supreme being for man,” free of all servitude. He was so serious about this point that he refused even to admit that man had been created, which would have implied the necessity of human servility to a Creator. “A being only regards himself as independent when he stands on his own feet,” Marx observed, “and he stands on his own feet only when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favor of another considers himself dependent. But I live entirely by the favor of another if I owe him not only the maintenance of my life, but also its creation, its source.” Since the creation of man would have implied dependence, Marx proceeded to erect man as a self-caused cause, saying: “Since for socialist man, however, the entire so-called world history is only the creation of man through human labor and the development of nature for man, he has evident and incontrovertible proof of his self-creation . . .”

Marx concluded this discussion of man as a self-caused cause by remarking that: “Communism is the necessary form and dynamic principle of the immediate future but not as such the goal of human development—the form of human society.” There has been a tendency in the history of Marx scholarship to disregard this remark, as if Marx could not have been serious in saying that communism was not the goal of mankind. The statement ought to be taken seriously, however, for it seems evident that for Marx the final goal of human development was a situation in which all men would acknowledge the divinity of man, contemplating that divinity and simultaneously constituting it in the act of labor. Marx’s hope was that mankind collectively, through labor, would perform the act of Prometheus, to wrest from the gods their honors in order to give them to man (an act which Aeschylus, through Hermes and the Chorus of the Daughters of Oceanus, characterized as “madness” and wrong-headedness). It was this Promethean goal which made the economy meaningful to Marx rather than absurd, as the nationalists thought. Communism itself was only the social form in which the Promethean goal would have to be realized. Man would have to give himself completely to other men in order to receive back his person in a collectively elevated form; the perpetuation of individualism only could have resulted in the perpetuation of alienation, the dominance of man by commodities as wielded by individuals. Marx’s support of the proletarian revolution and the faith which he retained in reason even after his break with Hegel also can be explained in terms of his Promethean intentions. He supported the proletariat because he believed that it was the living negation of true humanity and therefore that it was dialectically qualified to win the “total redemption of humanity,” or the reclamation of man’s divinity from alien beings. It was the function of reason to “criticize” and “unmask” alienation, so that man could become spiritually free for the Promethean task; Marx asserted that the criticism of religion, which he considered to be the premise of all criticism, “disillusions man so that he thinks, acts, and shapes his reality like a disillusioned man

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who has come to his senses, so that he revolves around himself and thus around his true sun."

It seems, then, that when Moeller van den Bruck objected to the Marxist call for "an entirely new order of life" he touched upon the most crucial of the differences between communism and nationalism and perhaps even on the source of all the differences between the two ideologies. The nationalists and Nietzsche did not dream of a radical reconstitution of being which would result in the divinization of man; they intended to escape from the order of being by resorting to illusions and not to assault it, for they revered that order even while opposing it as an impossible order for human life. This diversity of metaphysical goals justifies the conclusion that communism and nationalism were movements which were absolutely different in kind. Their convergence in the idea of the desirability of a social ethos, or "humanism," was only an accident, for neither movement recommended the social ethos as a good in itself but rather as a means to totally unlike Dionysian and Promethean ends. Moeller van den Bruck was not led to think that communists and nationalists shared "corporate" goals by any mere linguistic misunderstanding but his failure to distinguish means from metaphysical ends was no less serious an error. He did well to follow his instincts in concluding that there could be no reconciliation or cooperation between himself and Radek.

Of course, in making the argument that communism and nationalism were absolutely different, it must be kept in mind that their goals reconverged in a "humanism" which was of a higher, more metaphysical order than that of the social ethos. Nietzsche saw this metaphysical convergence and it even led him to make the mistake of confusing the gods Dionysius and Prometheus. He wrote that: "The suddenly swelling Dionysian tide then takes the separate little wave-mountains of individuals on its back, even as Prometheus’ brother, the Titan Atlas, does with the earth. This Titanic impulse to become, as it were, the Atlas for all individuals, carrying them on a broad back, higher and higher, farther and farther, is what the Promethean and the Dionysian have in common. In this respect, the Prometheus of Aeschylus is a Dionysian mask . . ." Nietzsche meant that both Dionysius and Prometheus intended to perfect man, or to redeem him, in opposition to the order of being. This is why both the Dionysian and Promethean humanistic movements proved so fatal to man.

Today a third humanistic movement is afoot in the United States, especially on the campuses of Catholic universities. It calls itself Christian humanism and it draws its inspiration from Christ’s second great Commandment. The participants in this movement feel no great love for Nietzsche or the German nationalists, but this might be only a result of the fact that it is not fashionable to teach Dionysian humanism. They do feel a tremendous affinity for Marxism, however, and they bristle whenever any philosopher makes so bold as to criticize Marx. They are attracted to Marxism in the same way that Moeller van den Bruck was, for they despise the egoistic spirit of the liberal American society and they approve of Marx’s demand that man should become truly social; this position seems wholly compatible with the Christian’s mandate to love his neighbor as himself. The Christian humanists are so taken with this similarity between Christianity and Marxism that they do not notice that the two movements have different goals, Christian and Promethean. This is a dangerous situation. One hopes that the new humanist movement will extract itself from this situation as Moeller did, by rejecting the proffered hand, and that it will proceed to build a better society which does not justify the murder of present men for the sake of future ones.

Moeller van den Bruck, "Sind Kommunisten Deutsche?" Das Gewissen, Jg. 3, No. 26, June 27, 1921. The discussion is repeated by Moeller in Das dritte Reich, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Ring Verlag, 1926), p. 224.

Moeller van den Bruck, Das dritte Reich, p. 71.

For one of Moeller's statements on the value of culture, see Die Zeitgenossen, Die Gelster—Die Menschen (Minden i.W.: J.C.C. Bruns, 1906), p. 3. For Hitler, too, culture was supreme, even above race. Anyone doubting this should note the relationships between race and culture developed in Mein Kampf, I, 395th-399th ed. (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Frz. Eher Nachf, 1939), chap. xi., or the English version at the same place, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943).

Moeller van den Bruck, Das dritte Reich, p. 274.


Moeller van den Bruck, "Wirklichkeit," Das Recht der jungen Völker, p. 92.


Moeller van den Bruck, Das dritte Reich, pp. 224, 117.

Ibid., p. 117. Also Moeller van den Bruck, "Was ist der Ring?" Das Gewissen, Jg. 2, No. 49, December 12, 1920.

Max Hildebert Boehm, "Was wir wollen," Das Gewissen, Jg. 1, No. 36, December 17, 1919.


Although Marx's real man is "almost literally selfless," he finds, in truly Hegelian fashion, that as he leads the life of the species his "self" is returned to him. This point will be taken up later.


Plato, op. cit., 202a-204b.
Voegelin, loc. cit.
Plato, op. cit., 203c, 203d, 211e-212c.
Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," pp. 138-139.
Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," pp. 126-127, 139.
See Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," p. 95. There Nietzsche says that there was "to be sure, a profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates; the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of logic, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being . . ." It might occur to inquire why rationalism should have been attacked if it was an illusion. The answer is that Nietzsche did not attack it as such; he approved of Socrates as a Dionysian man who willed the rational illusion. Illusion becomes evil when it bars a Dionysian grasp of the problem of life and leads men to long for death more than life, as in Christianity.
Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, pp. 330-331.

There is no space in which to document the applicability of this statement to the National Socialists. However, the suggestive chapter "Greenwich Village Warriors" in Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics, The Roots of the Nazi Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1941 and 1965) may be read as a partial substitute.

Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, pp. 151-175.


Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung," op. cit., pp. 491, 500. The translation is that of Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (Garden City, N.Y.: Double-day Anchor, 1967), pp. 252, 260. Previous quotations of Marx in this paper have been compared with the Easton-Guddat translations but rendered differently.
