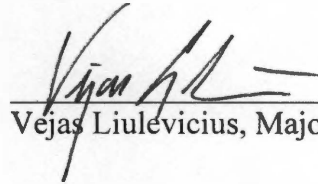
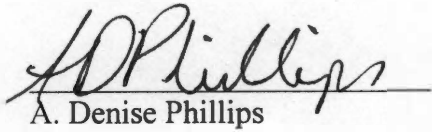


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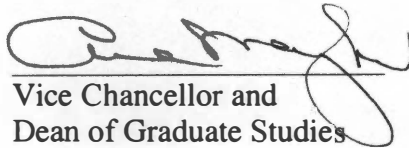

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Cultural Consensus, Political Conflict:

The Problem of Unity among German Intellectuals during World War I

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Abstract

When World War I erupted in 1914, German artists, writers, and academics seemed to be united behind a shared belief that the military struggle of World War I was actually the manifestation of a deeper and more ferocious spiritual or cultural war (*Kulturkrieg*). Using propagandistic wartime writings, they invoked the idea that Germany's unique spirit of community and idealism (*Kultur*) was under assault by Allied individualism and materialism (*Zivilisation*). Many were convinced that defeat in this conflict meant the total destruction of the German way of life, while victory would propel the German nation toward a new era of prosperity. Strangely, however, in spite of its unanimity concerning the *Kulturkrieg*, by the end of the war the German intellectual community had disintegrated into various competing factions. This study explores the reasons for this division and challenges the notion that German intellectuals were ever deeply united during World War I.

An examination of three pieces of wartime propaganda written by three exemplary intellectuals (Werner Sombart, Friedrich Meinecke, and Thomas Mann) reveals that these individuals did share a common notion of German identity, which was largely based on the German Idealist tradition, and that they all believed that a culturally revived German nation would emerge from the ashes of World War I. Nevertheless, the particular political views held by each of these men colored their propaganda and shaped their visions of postwar Germany. This study concludes that these differing political inclinations threatened to undermine any consensus over cultural issues that might have existed among the German intellectual community. Thus, it claims that the outward display of unanimity by German intellectuals at the beginning of the war was merely a fragile exterior, unable to conceal (or cure) deeper political disagreements.

Bolstering arguments made by Fritz Ringer, Wolfgang Mommsen, and other historians, this study maintains that the divisiveness that existed among German intellectuals during World War I carried over into the Weimar period, weakening the ideological foundations of that fledgling government. Additionally, similar to the work of Modris Eksteins, this thesis claims that German intellectuals were not motivated by an urge to preserve the existing Imperial system but, instead, sought to forge a new German society on the anvil of war. By popularizing this desire through war propaganda, intellectuals unknowingly helped prepare the public for the utopian message of the Nazis.

Table of Contents

Introduction:	1
Chapter One: A Nation of Heroes	22
Chapter Two: A Cosmopolitan Nation-State	38
Chapter Three: A “Nonpolitical” Nation	54
Conclusion:	68
Bibliography:	74
Vita:	81

Introduction

“All great wars are wars of faith, as it was in the beginning, it is in the present, and it will be in the future.”¹ Thus begins Werner Sombart’s polemical pamphlet *Händler und Helden (Merchants and Heroes)*. Written in 1915, the opening statement of this fiery tract demonstrated its author’s conviction that the military struggle of World War I was accompanied by a deeper and more ferocious spiritual or cultural conflict. In his view, a battle raged between the defenders of community and culture, the German “heroes,” and the proponents of individualism and materialism, the cowardly English “merchants.” For Sombart, defeat in this conflict meant the total destruction of the German way of life, but victory would usher in a new age of German cultural supremacy.

While the grandiloquent style of *Händler und Helden* was largely unrivaled by Sombart’s contemporaries, the central message of that text was echoed in countless publications by German intellectuals throughout World War I.² In their writings, like Sombart, these intellectuals attempted to invoke the belief that Germany was in the midst of a cultural struggle with the Allied powers. On one side stood the German spirit of community and idealism (*Kultur*), on the other Allied individualism and materialism (*Zivilisation*).³ Not surprisingly, France and England, the originators of the French and Industrial Revolutions, posed the greatest cultural threat to Germany; while Russia, with

¹ Werner Sombart, *Händler und Helden. Patriotische Besinnungen* (Munich: Stephan Geibel & Co., 1915), 3.

² For examples of these writings, see *Aufrufe und Reden deutsche Professoren im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Klaus Böhme, ed., (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975).

³ This dichotomy between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* was not unique to World War I propaganda, but had its roots in the German romanticism of the early nineteenth century. For more on the concepts of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: the Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study of the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

its perceived cultural and industrial backwardness, was often considered to be but a pawn of Western Europe. As with Sombart, most of these intellectuals predicted that if Germany was defeated in the war, its unique culture would disappear. However, if Germany were to vanquish its foes, its culture would be purified and the German nation would be propelled toward a new era of prosperity.⁴

The ubiquity of this *Kulturkrieg* (culture war) theme in the wartime writings of German intellectuals seems to indicate that the German intellectual community was largely united during World War I.⁵ However, while it is true that German intellectuals appeared to speak with one voice at the beginning of the war, by war's end, this singular voice had disintegrated into a cacophony of competing messages. In light of this fact, modern historians have been left with the task of uncovering both the forces that united these intellectuals and those that destroyed their sense of unanimity. But while scholars have devoted numerous studies to resolving these issues, uncertainties and ambiguities still exist.

Although more suggestive than exhaustive, this case study of three exemplary German intellectuals and their propagandistic wartime writings will help to illuminate

⁴ This general interpretation of World War I was not entirely unique to German intellectuals. In the Allied nations as well, intellectuals rallied to support the military effort of their respective states by describing World War I as a moral struggle for cultural supremacy. Many of their wartime publications mirrored the German intellectuals' practice of demonizing an enemy's culture, praising one's own culture, and claiming that the war held redemptive powers for one's nation. For an overview of this phenomenon among European intellectuals, see Rolland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982). For studies of the individual Allied nations, see Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of the Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992); Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁵ For a discussion of the concept of *Kulturkrieg* in World War I publications see Wolfgang G. Natter, *Literature at War, 1914-1940: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany*, (New York: Yale University Press, 1999), 123-7.

some of the dark areas in the historiography.⁶ More specifically, this examination of works by Werner Sombart, Friedrich Meinecke, and Thomas Mann will demonstrate that, during World War I, the German intellectual community was never as united as it appeared. Instead, the differing political inclinations that the intellectuals carried with them into the war ultimately undermined any outward display of consensus over cultural revival. Thus, like a microcosm of Imperial Germany, the intellectual community's shining exterior of strength and unanimity failed to conceal the fragmentation and disjointedness that existed just below the surface.⁷

In order to demonstrate the significance of these conclusions, it is necessary to establish an understanding of the historiographic issues that this study addresses. This requires a close examination of the debates surrounding the nature of unity among German intellectuals during World War I. Additionally, since these debates have evolved in accordance with changes in the larger historiography of modern Germany, a discussion of some of these general trends is necessary to reveal the broader implications of this study.

One of the most important developments in the post-1945 historiography of modern Germany came from Fritz Fischer's controversial *Germany's Aims in the First World War*.⁸ This study challenged the longstanding belief among German scholars that

⁶ In this study, the term "intellectual" is used to denote an individual who makes a living by exercising the intellect and/or by engaging in abstract thought (i.e. generally artists, writers, and academics). Furthermore, "propaganda" is understood as any information that reflects the views of its disseminator(s). This definition comes from the classic text, Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Random House, 1965; Vintage Books, 1973).

⁷ For a standard account of Imperial Germany's fragmented nature see Holger H. Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?: Modern Germany 1648-Present* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994).

⁸ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1961. trans. ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967, published in German under the title *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag und Druckerei GmbH).

their nation had been lured or forced into World War I and thus its war aims had been purely defensive in nature. Many of these same scholars drew clear distinctions between the natures of World War I and World War II. They claimed that rise of Nazism and its aggressive war policies had been an aberration, disconnected from the rest of German history. In *Germany's Aims*, Fischer maintained that Imperial Germany was largely responsible for the outbreak of World War I, and that its aggressive pursuit of world power status and annexationist objectives closely resembled the policies of Nazi Germany in World War II. While he sidestepped any direct discussion of continuities between the wars, Fischer made it clear that strong similarities existed between the two.

Much of Fischer's work was peripheral to the historiography of German intellectuals; nonetheless, that group still played an important role in his study of war aims. In particular, Fischer believed that the creation of the "ideas of 1914" and other such propaganda gave voice to the broadly held national desire for world power status and gave Germany's war effort a sense of mission.⁹ While most Germans already agreed that their nation was poised to replace Great Britain as the undisputed leader in European affairs, they were equally eager to accept the intellectuals' portrayal of the war as a clash between opposing moral forces. According to Fischer, this quasi-religious interpretation of the war "had nothing to do with any realistic political thought" but was effective

⁹ The phrase "ideas of 1914" was coined by the German economist Johann Plenge during the first year of World War I, but it was soon adopted and employed by much of the German intellectual community. The term was intended to denote a set of ideological principles that were unique to the German nation and were the foundations of the so-called "spirit of 1914" (the euphoric feeling of national unity that they claimed all Germans experienced at the beginning of the war). For more information on both the "ideas of 1914" and the "spirit of 1914" see Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

“precisely because of its non-rational, emotional appeal.”¹⁰ At the most basic level, these patriotic outbursts reflected a shared desire among almost all German intellectuals for both national power and national security. Thus, a message of preservation, as well as expansion, lay at the heart of the “ideas of 1914.” Simply put, by promoting the idea of Germany’s cultural uniqueness, intellectuals also advocated the defense of traditional social structures from the encroachments of democracy. Geopolitically, this translated into an endorsement of the creation of territorial buffer zones to shield Germany from the cultural influences of both the East and West.¹¹ While they may have disagreed over the specific nature or extent of territorial expansion, a desire for annexations superceded political affiliations and united all German intellectuals.¹²

While the so-called “Fischer Controversy” dominated the general historiographic debates during the 1960’s, the end of that decade witnessed the introduction of an important contribution to the study of German intellectuals during World War I. Focusing on only one segment of the intellectual community, Fritz Ringer’s *The Decline of the German Mandarins* chronicled the development of the German academic community from 1890 to 1930.¹³ In doing so, it attempted to account for that group’s descent from a

¹⁰ Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 156.

¹¹ Fritz Fischer, *World Power or Decline: The Controversy Over Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, trans. Lancelot L. Farrar, Robert Kimber, and Rita Kimber. (trans. ed. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1974, originally titled *Weltmacht oder Niedergang* Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 82, 91-2.

¹² Fischer does qualify his conclusions by admitting that, prior to 1917, left-leaning intellectuals “attached less importance to direct annexations and were chiefly concerned with extending Germany’s power in east Europe and overseas.” Yet he points to a petition of 1917, signed by some of the most liberal intellectuals (Friedrich Meinecke being one), advocating the annexation of the Baltic provinces, as proof that “the principle of annexations...was thus by no means foreign to the Liberal circle round Delbrück, Harnack, and Naumann...” Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 173.

¹³ Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969).

position of unity during Imperial Germany to one of political and ideological dividedness during Weimar.

According to Ringer, the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a distinctive educated class of German elites. This group of “mandarins” was composed of doctors, lawyers, university professors, and any other profession that required an advanced degree and the completion of entrance examinations.¹⁴ In the early-nineteenth century, the mandarins had relatively little power within society; however, as Germany began the process of unification and the state became more bureaucratic, these men became important advisors to the government. Out of this situation, a symbiotic relationship developed between the state and academic elites. As counselors to the ruling elites, the mandarins enjoyed an elevated status within German society; in return they provided the state with an unending supply of loyal and capable civil servants.¹⁵

As their influence within German society increased, the mandarins attempted to legitimize their position as members of the upper class by constructing a myth concerning the nobility of learning. They maintained that the mandarin style of education went beyond the mere retention of facts or pursuit of “practical knowledge”; instead, it was a matter of personal cultivation (*Bildung*), which refined a man’s sense of culture and provided him with “spiritual ennoblement.” Thus the mandarins claimed they were both experts in worldly matters and bearers of the German culture and spirit of idealism. In

¹⁴ Ringer, *Mandarins*, 5. Ringer’s use of the term “mandarin” pays homage to Max Weber’s study of Chinese literati. In a European setting, he defines the term as “a social and cultural elite which owes its status primarily to educational qualifications, rather than hereditary rights or wealth.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

this way education became a substitute for the nobility of birth and provided them with a common notion of identity.¹⁶

Unification increased the mandarin influence in society but, as Ringer shows, it also brought challenges to their newfound success. In essence, an increased emphasis on economic growth caused the development of an industrialized society with a new system of values. Consumerism and the desire for affluence intensified. The middle and working classes demanded a greater influence over political matters. Pressure groups openly subordinated political activity to economic objectives; and culture increasingly played a secondary role to utility.¹⁷

Yet the mandarins did not accept these changes with silent resignation; instead, Ringer claims, they attempted to use whatever influence they still possessed to convince the German people to preserve Imperial society.¹⁸ This rhetoric of preservation reached a fevered pitch during World War I in a multitude of propagandistic writings on the “ideas of 1914.” These tracts attempted to harness public support for mandarin values by giving voice to the feelings of national solidarity experienced by most Germans during the initial stages of the war. The mandarins claimed that the “August experience” signaled the end of conflict over political and economic issues and the beginning of a socially united Germany.¹⁹ In their view, this was the initial stage in the healing process of the Imperial

¹⁶ Ringer, *Mandarins*, 9.

¹⁷ These changes even reached into the mandarins' educational sphere, as was evident in the changing university curriculum. As members of the middle class began to stream into German universities they had little concern for the broad, “mandarin” style of education. Instead these new students were more interested in specialization and fields of knowledge that were useful in an industrialized society, a source of deep discomfort for the mandarins. *Ibid.*, 48-9, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 253-7.

¹⁹ The so-called “August experience” refers to the German people's overwhelming display of national unity in the days surrounding the declaration of war in August, 1914.

state. Only France and Britain stood in the way of success; but by defeating these progenitors of materialism and individualism in battle, Germany could extinguish the source of those cultural and societal pollutants.²⁰

In Ringer's view, these wartime polemics were intended to point out flaws in the German society and encourage the adoption of mandarin values.²¹ Ultimately, however, the mandarin's propaganda campaign was unsuccessful. Not only did it fail to convince the masses to preserve the existing political system, but it also precipitated the first open disagreement within the mandarin community. Ringer claimed that, by 1916, the mandarins had split over how to apply the "ideas of 1914" to German society. The vast majority of mandarins occupied the "orthodox" position, which was characterized by its "doctrinaire, single-minded, and logically uncomplicated" approach to social change.²² These men obstinately clung to the institutions of Imperial Germany and believed that the reforms suggested in the "ideas of 1914" should reinforce the old power structures. In opposition to the "orthodox" position stood a small minority of "modernists," who advocated a more balanced interpretation of the "ideas of 1914."²³ They realized that the process of industrialization could not be reversed; and therefore, making blanket condemnations of the modern age was pointless. It was true that they believed in the superiority of German culture over Western, mass culture, yet they resigned themselves

²⁰ Ringer, *Mandarins*, 180-3, 187-9.

²¹ In a passage that is of great importance to this essay Ringer explicitly states this position by saying: "The most important point to be made about the German intellectuals' attack on the West was that it was intended for domestic consumption...Everything that had disturbed the mandarins in the social and cultural life of their country since 1870 was introduced into the character of England. Everything they had sought to preserve or to re-create became a part of the 'spirit of 1914.' The purpose of both maneuvers was to erect permanent symbols of the mandarins' own values." Ibid., 187.

²² Ibid., 129.

²³ Ringer makes no attempt to hide the fact that he believes the members of this group to be more articulate, politically sophisticated, and "intellectually distinguished" than their orthodox counterparts. Ibid., 130.

to the fact that democratization was inevitable. Thus, they decided it would be better to take an active role in the process in order to salvage what they could of the old mandarin culture and avoid being marginalized.²⁴

This division between orthodox and modernists intensified during the final two years of the war. According to Ringer, as the German prospects for total victory diminished, the orthodox became increasingly rigid in their general views on reform. This intransigence, combined with an irrational assessment of German war aims and a growing support for nationalistic associations, alienated modernists. By the end of the war, the modernists broke free from their orthodox counterparts and cautiously joined the masses in supporting the establishment of a democratic government.²⁵

Ringer's final conclusion was that, although it was not their aim to do so, the mandarins contributed to the rise of Nazism. The internal disagreements of the war years carried on into the Weimar period and weakened the fledgling republic. More importantly, the mandarins' identification with the old caste system of Imperial Germany and their resistance to change caused them to attack rational solutions to social problems.²⁶ Ringer claimed that this flight from reality laid the groundwork for the anti-intellectualism of the Nazi regime that would eventually destroy the mandarin way of life.²⁷

It is clear from Ringer's conclusions that he and Fischer shared some of the same basic assumptions about German intellectuals. Most significantly, both authors believed

²⁴ Ringer, *Mandarins*, 193-6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

²⁶ Even the modernists were to blame because they too engaged in escapist fantasies, such as the "ideas of 1914." *Ibid.*, 445.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 446-9.

that academics' actions during the war were primarily guided by a desire to preserve and protect the social and political structures of Imperial Germany. Revealing the ways in which that desire influenced the development of a common mandarin identity is a crucial component of Ringer's study. And yet Ringer's entire purpose was to demonstrate that, in spite of prior unifying forces, World War I created conflicts which precipitated a clear division of the mandarin community. Therefore, unlike Fischer, he stressed the importance of the mandarins' political affiliations and how these led to very different interpretations of the "ideas of 1914" and territorial annexations. By the end of Ringer's text, one is confronted by the picture of an academic community united by a desire to preserve but, at the same time, divided by political philosophies.

Ringer's interpretation of the German academic community remained largely uncontested for over a decade. In part, this was a testament to the quality and depth of the work. However, it was also due to the fact that Ringer built his conclusions upon a view of German history that Fischer popularized. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, historians followed Fischer's lead by drawing lines of continuity between the development of Nazism and its possible antecedents in Imperial Germany.²⁸ The result was an increase in scholarship comparing Germany's political development to that of Western Europe. These studies concluded that Germany suffered from a malformed or backward political system which produced authoritarian "illiberalism" instead of Western

²⁸ For two excellent examples of this, see George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: the Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study of the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

democracy.²⁹ Consequently, all German elites suffered from a particular kind of “cultural despair” which made them fearful of modern, industrial society and resulted in “an inflexible defense of the status quo.”³⁰ This model remained largely unchanged until the early 1980’s, when David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley produced a critical study that altered the way historians conceived of Imperial Germany.

In their text, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Blackbourn and Eley attempted to address the orthodoxy that Germany followed a “*Sonderweg*” or special, twisted path of development.³¹ Their primary goal was to discount the teleological belief that the rise of Nazism was somehow predetermined by the state of affairs in Imperial Germany. In order to accomplish this, they challenged the idea that the failure of the German bourgeoisie to successfully overthrow the Imperial government left it feeble, underdeveloped, and vulnerable to “refeudalization” by the aristocracy. They maintained that the idea of a “normal” bourgeois revolution was flawed because there has never been an instance, in any country, in which the middle class has overthrown a government and immediately begun altering politics to suit its own identity. The two authors believed it was more fruitful to judge the position of the German bourgeoisie by examining societal changes such as the growth of free-market competition, rule of law, and voluntary associations; all of which in fact indicate a strong middle class influence. When considering these areas in Imperial

²⁹ Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

³⁰ Ibid., xx.

³¹ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Germany it becomes clear that the bourgeoisie, not the aristocracy, represented the “general interests” of that society.³²

On the subject of the relationship between Imperial Germany and the modern age, Eley claimed that it is deceptive to refer to the Imperial German state as “backward” or anachronistic. In fact, he believed that if one considered the technocratic efficiency of its bureaucracy and military, and the level of state intervention in public affairs, then Germany was one of the most “modern” states in Europe.³³ With regard to “cultural despair,” Blackbourn maintained that Germans were not alone in their mistrust of and anxieties about the modern age. The French and British also demonstrated a general uneasiness over the effects of industrialization. He concluded this discussion by stating that, if there was anything peculiar about the German case, it was that anxiety often manifested itself in a “shallow optimism” over new possibilities of social and moral progress.³⁴

The impact of these conclusions on the historiography of Modern Germany has been great. Blackbourn and Eley demonstrated that the German bourgeois were not as weak as scholars had previously claimed, nor were the members of the aristocracy as strong as supposed. Additionally, by questioning ideas of German backwardness, Blackbourn and Eley paved the way for studies on the progressive aspects of Imperial society. Modris Eksteins’ *Rites of Spring* was one of these studies.³⁵

³² Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*, 190.

³³ Ibid., 140.

³⁴ Ibid., 216-7.

³⁵ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989; New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

As its title suggests, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* argued that World War I was a watershed or breakthrough moment from which a distinctly modern system of values came to predominate over all others. For Eksteins, these values (speed, newness, transience, inwardness, liberation, and most of all movement) appeared most strikingly in Germany, making it the twentieth century's modern nation *par excellence*.³⁶ He explained that, in the years before the war, Germany's rapid industrialization had instilled in its inhabitants an urge to create, advance, and expand. They felt more than a mere "shallow optimism" for the possibility of progress, as Blackbourn suggested; instead, Eksteins claimed, Germans were "starkly future oriented" and confronted the problems of industrial life with the belief that "where there was dissatisfaction or anxiety, it was to be overcome by change."³⁷ A long-standing philosophical tradition of German idealism provided them with explanations for their position.³⁸ They believed that the German nation was engaged in a process of transformation; by becoming the vanguard of forward movement, it would soon embody the spiritual dynamism of the age. All that was needed was a catalyst, a "breakthrough" that would propel this process toward completion. In World War I the Germans found their vehicle for change.

³⁶ Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, xvi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁸ German idealism was based on the doctrine that the ultimate reality of the universe resided in the metaphysical realm of ideas rather than in the information gain from sense perception. The halcyon days of this philosophy occurred in the era from the mid-eighteenth century to the Revolutions of 1848. Immanuel Kant, Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller were some of the most famous progenitors of the German idealist tradition. For more on German idealism see Steven Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 147-52. For an account of German idealism as it was interpreted by German intellectuals around the turn of the twentieth century, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Random House, 1958; New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 183-248.

Much like Fischer, Eksteins believed that the Germans approached World War I with the desire to fulfill their nation's perceived destiny as the new leader in European affairs. However, unlike Fischer, Eksteins claimed that they were not concerned with preserving the existing social structures, but were driven by an urge to create a new society out of the ashes of war. Interestingly, he pointed to a corresponding development in the European artistic avant-garde. In the years leading up to the war, artists demonstrated a preoccupation with death and rebirth. Through their creations they announced that liberation and rejuvenation could be achieved through destruction. In a similar way, many Germans carried with them a belief in redemption through blood sacrifice as they plunged headlong into war.

According to Eksteins, the war spread this belief throughout Europe. The horrors of trench warfare created a nightmare world of mechanical killing which severed all connections to reality. The value systems of the past could not be used to make sense of the total devastation. Under such circumstances, all that remained were visions for the future. By war's end, the belief in creation through destruction was severely transformed: the desire to create was now secondary to the desire to tear down; efforts to challenge existing conventions intensified; and predictions of the future became increasingly irrational and utopian.³⁹ Ultimately, the rebellious, madcap behavior of the 1920's did much to undermine old forms of authority, but offered little to take its place. Eksteins believed that, in Germany, Nazism filled this void.

In one of his most provocative arguments, Eksteins claimed that Nazism tapped into the currents of the age in a manner that was unparalleled in the rest of Europe. In

³⁹ Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 328.

every way, it was the extreme embodiment of forward motion and the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age). The Nazis were so focused on the future that their vision became a fantasy, utterly void of substance. Hitler and his ilk tried to reach their utopia by filling the void with pageantry, myth making, symbolism, and aesthetics; but as Eksteins said, they “confused the relationship between life and art, myth and reality.”⁴⁰ The result was a nihilistic drive toward self-affirmation, from which creation was impossible and genocidal destruction was inevitable.⁴¹

Eksteins’ work marked a radical break with the existing historiography. Although he still searched for continuities between Imperial and Nazi Germany, he turned on its head the conclusions of an entire generation. By portraying Germany as the foremost representative of modernism, he inverted interpretations that emphasized German backwardness or conservatism, and thereby took the conclusions of Blackbourn and Eley to another level.

Since the mid 1990’s, scholars have produced studies on German intellectuals that seem to bolster Eksteins’ views. Some of Wolfgang Mommsen’s later works fall into this category. In many ways, Mommsen was a member of Fritz Ringer’s generation. For most of his highly distinguished career he produced studies that accepted the idea that Imperial Germany was politically backward and socially underdeveloped. However, in the last decade of his life he published several studies on artists and writers in late Imperial Germany that support some of Eksteins’ conclusions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 304.

⁴¹ Ibid., 301-4, 325, 328.

⁴² Among the most notable of these studies are *Bürgerliche Kultur und künstlerische Avantgarde. Kultur und Politik im deutschen Kaiserreich 1870-1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1994); “Die kulturellen Eliten im Ersten Weltkrieg” in *Kultur und Krieg. Die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler, und Schriftsteller*

In particular, Mommsen confirmed that German intellectuals believed in the redemptive powers of war. In the years before the war there was a general feeling of boredom, stagnation, and sterility with regards to high culture. Many members of the avant-garde felt that bourgeois, materialist society had stifled the ability to create and that war would provide new stimulation for their artistic faculties. By the summer of 1914, “the assumption that war would be an ideal, and perhaps unavoidable, means of revitalizing a national culture that had grown stagnant was wide-spread, even among more liberal thinkers.”⁴³ Thus, with an eye toward the future, German cultural elites welcomed the outbreak of hostilities “almost to a man.”⁴⁴

According to Mommsen, the German academic community supported the war with even more enthusiasm than artists and writers. He claimed that this was primarily due to its close relationship to the state and aristocracy. Demonstrating his intellectual kinship with Ringer’s position, Mommsen agreed that academics were predominantly driven by the desire to preserve their position of privilege within society. Since that position, and the entire system of government, had its ideological base in German idealism, their wartime writings attempted to legitimize the decision to go to war by portraying the conflict as a defensive struggle to protect German culture. Mommsen admitted that, like the avant-garde, German academics believed that a new age was

im Ersten Weltkrieg, Mommsen ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 1996), 1-13; “German artists, writers, and intellectuals and the meaning of war, 1914-1918” in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-38; and *Bürgerliche Kultur und politische Ordnung: Künstler, Schriftsteller, und Intellektuelle in der deutschen Geschichte 1830-1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 2000).

⁴³ Mommsen, “German artists, writers, and intellectuals and the meaning of war,” 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21-23.

dawning; however, their redemptive message was saturated with appeals to retain the basic political and social structures of Imperial Germany.⁴⁵

In general, Mommsen's description of German intellectuals at the outbreak of war indicated an overwhelming sense of unity among them. While mandarins were joined together by their own particular concepts of professional identity, they shared with artists and writers a common view of the war as a redemptive force. Predictably, then, the unity among intellectuals dissolved when opinions on the war changed. By 1916, many artists and writers had discarded their earlier positive views of war, and a small but growing number of academics joined them. For these intellectuals, the war had lost all semblance of rationality or higher meaning, so they began to question its legitimacy. Politics played a key role in this process, with those on the left tending to adopt a more moderate or even anti-war stance. Like Ringer, Mommsen stressed that most left-leaning intellectuals increasingly objected to the nationalistic rhetoric and annexationist war aims of those on the right. When Germany was defeated, the more classically liberal, internationalist philosophy of the left provided the basis for the new experiment in democratic government. Mommsen concluded, however, that the rifts created during the war would come back to haunt the Weimar government, as the nationalist sentiments cultivated by those intellectuals on the right helped to undermine the republic and lay the foundations for the rise of Nazism.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ An excellent discussion of German academics' perception of World War I can be found in Wolfgang Mommsen, "The spirit of 1914 and the ideology of a German Sonderweg," in *Imperial Germany, 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1995), 205-216.

⁴⁶ Mommsen, "German artists, writers, and intellectuals and the meaning of war," 32-8; *Imperial Germany*, 214-6.

Mommsen's views seemed to straddle two trends in the historiography: his work on artists and writers appears to support Eksteins' conclusions; while his statements about academics mirror assumptions from the 1960's and 70's. Over the last decade, several young scholars have published studies on German academics which clearly reflect the influence of newer trends in the historiography.⁴⁷ Perhaps the best example of this scholarship is Stefan Bruendel's *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat*.⁴⁸ Bruendel's purpose was to examine the notion that the "ideas of 1914" were a source of conflict within the German academic community. His primary contention was that the "ideas of 1914" found their origin in an almost universal desire among academics to reform Imperial Germany through the creation of an "*inklusive Volksgemeinschaft*." Thus, far from endorsing the status quo, German intellectuals sought to create a new society.⁴⁹

During the first two years of the war, Bruendel claimed, there was a great deal of unity among academics with regards to the "ideas of 1914." All agreed that Germany was fighting to defend its unique way of life from Western aggression. They believed that a strong state, based on German idealism, would make the nation more able to navigate its way through the modern age and offer it protection from future cultural invasions by the West. Admittedly, conflicts arose as mandarins adopted interpretations of the "ideas of 1914" that could be construed as either politically left or right;

⁴⁷ One of the most interesting of these is Kevin Repp's, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000). While its focus lies slightly before World War I, it demonstrates that intellectuals in late-Imperial Germany were highly future-oriented. Repp claimed that German academics posited numerous solutions for social reform which, far from being preservative in nature, were "decidedly modern." These suggestions for reform represented numerous "paths" to modernity that Germany could have taken; such an idea challenged older notions that a backwards Germany was locked into a specific, unalterable *Sonderweg*.

⁴⁸ Steffan Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat. Die "Ideen von 1914" und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 21-8

nevertheless, there was a great deal of ambiguity in the mandarins' positions, making it difficult to draw clear distinctions between "modernist" or "orthodox" until well into the war.⁵⁰

Bruendel placed emphasis on the year 1916 as a turning point in mandarin relations. The disastrous battle of Verdun and the seeming futility of the war effort caused most of the mandarins to vent their frustrations by intensifying their nationalistic rhetoric. This alienated a minority whose idea of an "informal rule" (*informale Herrschaft*) over Central Europe was generally incompatible with the majority's growing desire for direct control through annexation. For Bruendel, this was the moment when the concept of "*inklusive Volksgemeinschaft*" dissolved into calls for either an "*exklusive Volksgemeinschaft*" or an "*inklusive Volksstaat*." Thereafter, the majority advocated the creation of an *exklusive Volksgemeinschaft*, based on the idea of German cultural homogeneity. The minority, on the other hand, favored the *inklusive Volksstaat*, which was to incorporate both German culture and some of the universally inclusive principles of democracy.⁵¹ During the final eighteen months of the war, these two positions became increasingly radical and polarized. Yet, despite this fissure, commonalities remained across the divide. Even the formation of the *Vaterlandspartei* by the right (August 1917), and the *Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland* by the left (December 1917) were not enough to eliminate mutual feelings of German political and cultural exceptionalism.⁵²

⁵⁰ In particular, Bruendel pointed to ambiguities concerning annexations, claiming that almost all academics had some desire for German territorial expansion. Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat*, 95.

⁵¹ Ibid., 144.

⁵² Ibid., 188.

Bruendel concluded that it was not until the German Revolution of 1918 and subsequent creation of Weimar that the divisions became permanent.

In some respects, Bruendel's study was a synthesis of different viewpoints. Like Ringer and Mommsen, he demonstrated the existence of a strong sense of identity among academics. Additionally, he agreed that the academic community was almost entirely united at the outbreak of war. However, he challenged both senior scholars by emphasizing the difficulty of drawing distinctions between academics simply by following political lines.⁵³ Indeed, his remarks regarding the ambiguities over annexations resembled those made by Fischer. And yet Bruendel's conclusions obviously tended toward the direction charted by Eksteins; he clearly demonstrated that German academics were interested in reform, creation, and forward progress, not conservation, preservation, and the status quo. So, paradoxically, while the academics may have believed in defending Germany's unique tradition of idealism, they hoped to do so by constructing a new, more modern society.

This brief examination of the historiography of German intellectuals during the First World War has revealed the points of agreement and points of contention among modern historians. The idea that German intellectuals were a united, cohesive group at the outbreak of war is something on which almost all scholars can agree; however, there is still no genuine concurrence as to why this unity existed and what its content was.

Most believe that a common tradition of German idealism was an important unifying

⁵³ Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg also address this topic in their study *Der Aufruf "An die Kulturwelt" Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1996). One of their primary contentions is that liberal academics, not conservatives (as many historians believe), were largely responsible for launching the propaganda campaign against the West.

factor, as was an ambition to increase the nation's power and prestige. Yet historians continue to debate whether this drive reflected a backward-looking desire to preserve or a forward-looking urge to create. Furthermore, it has yet to be determined precisely why the intellectuals' unity eroded. Political differences seem to be a starting point.

However, as Bruendel has pointed out in the case of annexations, these differences are not apparent and clear distinctions between left and right are not easily made. Thus, it remains to be proven what motivated the intellectuals to unite and what drove them apart.

Establishing clarity in these matters is of great importance to the general historiography of modern Germany. Historians have unanimously agreed that the divisiveness experienced by the German intellectual community during World War I had an adverse effect on the Weimar system and ultimately contributed to the rise of Nazism. The current study will help to create a better understanding of these historical processes by lifting the fog of uncertainty from the subject of wartime unity among German intellectuals. Comparing the war propaganda of Werner Sombart, Friedrich Meinecke, and Thomas Mann will reveal that German intellectuals were never as united as they appeared. By tracing the evolution of these intellectuals' prewar political views this study will demonstrate that, although they shared a similar concept of German identity and a similar desire to revive national culture, the differing political inclinations that each man carried with him into the war colored his visions for Germany's postwar future and threatened to undermine any attempt at lasting consensus.

Chapter One: A Nation of Heroes

Werner Sombart's political views underwent a dramatic transformation in the twenty years prior to World War I. During his student days in the early 1880's he was a self-proclaimed "blood red Social Democrat."⁵⁴ In the late 1890's he began to distance himself from the party politics of the SPD but remained an advocate of socialist reform.⁵⁵ At the turn of the century he painfully questioned his adherence to the Marxist ideal. And by the outbreak of World War I, he had completely rejected his previous position on the political left in favor of a racist, nationalistic position on the right. Such a left-to-right political development was not entirely uncommon among the German intellectuals of Sombart's era. Nevertheless, Sombart's particularly dramatic struggle to form ideological allegiances was almost unmatched by his contemporaries, and this internal torment left an indelible imprint on his scholarly work.

The exceptionality of both the man and his work has prompted some scholars to claim that he can be classified as neither "orthodox" nor "moderate" but, instead, occupies a place all his own.⁵⁶ However, given Sombart's relative estrangement from other German intellectuals, it is ironic that many historians remember him as the mouthpiece for that group's views on World War I.⁵⁷ Indeed, it is almost impossible to find an account of German intellectuals during the war that does not cite Sombart's

⁵⁴ Arthur Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement: Three Sociologists of Imperialist Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 210.

⁵⁵ Bernhard vom Brocke, "Werner Sombart 1863-1941. Capitalism-Socialism. His Life, Works, and Influence" in *Werner Sombart (1863-1941). Social Scientist* vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Backhaus. (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1996), 37.

⁵⁶ Mitzman claims that Sombart was not a "modernist" because he rejected liberalism, socialism, and democracy, yet he was not "orthodox" because he rejected Bismarck's version of the Imperial German state. Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement*, 29-30.

⁵⁷ This fact is even more peculiar when one considers that *Händler und Helden* appears to have reached only a limited German audience; it sold less than 11,000 copies during World War I. Brocke, "Werner Sombart," 57.

Händler und Helden. The vivacious clarity with which this piece explained the perceived cultural struggle between Germany and the West has led many historians to view it as the quintessential expression *Kulturkrieg* propaganda. There is a great deal of truth in this claim as *Händler und Helden* certainly displays a concept of cultural identity, based on German idealism, that was widely shared by other German intellectuals. Additionally, like the majority of German intellectuals' wartime writings, the text portrays World War I as a redemptive force with the power to create a new German society. However, its description of this future society differs from other accounts in crucial ways and is a reflection of Sombart's distinct political and ideological evolution. Exploring the manner in which *Händler und Helden* represents both Sombart's political views and the more widely-held cultural views of German intellectual community will help to shed light on the nature of unity among German intellectuals during World War I.

As the son of a bourgeois politician, Werner Sombart's ideological development began at an early age.⁵⁸ His father's involvement in the National Liberal Party influenced his views as a youth, and it was not until his days as a university student in the 1880's that he began to develop his own *Weltanschauung*.⁵⁹ While studying economics at the Universities of Berlin and Pisa, Sombart became fascinated with Marxism. His interest stemmed from his belief that, through the process of class struggle, the proletariat would restore the communal bonds that had been destroyed by modern capitalist society. In his view, industrialism had brought forth important technological advancements, but it had also created an increase in individualism and materialism. Sombart believed that Marx

⁵⁸ Sombart was born in Ermsleben in 1863. He died in Berlin in 1941.

⁵⁹ Brocke, "Werner Sombart," 22-3.

had failed to adequately address these issues in his work. Thus, for the next twenty years, he attempted to “complete” the Marxist perspective by identifying the spiritual components of capitalist development; in doing so, he hoped to introduce a new aspect of German idealism to Marx’s materialist views.⁶⁰

Sombart remained a loyal and outspoken advocate of socialism during the 1880’s.⁶¹ But over the next decade, as his high-minded attempts at reforming Marxism clashed with the realities of interest politics and SPD dogma, his devotion to the cause steadily slipped away. He began to question the proletariat’s ability to transcend materialism and establish a genuine spirit of community. He expressed this sentiment in one of his most important scholarly works, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* in 1902, and again four years later in *Das Proletariat* (1906). By this time Sombart viewed the proletarian as a typical “city dweller”: “abstract, rational, and utilitarian,” completely “removed from nature and fantasy,” and characterized by the “predominance of understanding over feeling.”⁶²

The apparent spiritual bankruptcy of the working class drove Sombart to conclude that the only remedy to individualism and materialism lay outside the bounds of modern society. Thus he began attacking all the progenitors of industrialism, including his own nation. In *Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (1903), he lambasted Imperial Germany for its emphasis on industrialization and even proposed a

⁶⁰ Reiner Grundmann and Nico Stehr, “Why is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?: From Fame to (Near) Oblivion” *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 1(2), (2001), 261.

⁶¹ It should be noted that Sombart’s support for socialism began to waver toward the end of the 1880’s; however, the lapsing of the anti-socialist laws in 1890 gave him renewed hope that his revisionist theories might be used to reform Imperial Germany. Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement*, 217.

⁶² Werner Sombart, *Das Proletariat*, quoted in Grundmann and Stehr, “Why is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?,” 262.

link between the German national character and the spirit of capitalism. This conclusion plunged Sombart into a feeling of deep despair and marked a point of total estrangement from his nation and from society at large.⁶³

Sombart's solution to this isolation is evident in his publications from 1908 to 1913. In *Karl Marx und die Sozialwissenschaft* (1908), *Der Kapitalistische Unternehmer* (1909), *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1912), and *Der Bourgeois* (1913), he further distanced himself from socialism and modern society but reconnected with the German nation. He did so by cultivating a dualistic view of capitalist development which divided the "spirit" of capitalism into two parts. Sombart claimed that on one side was a spirit of enterprise, adventure, vivacity, and creation; all of which were embodied by the "entrepreneur." The other side was a force of rationality, calculation, greed, and materialism; qualities that were personified by the "merchant" or "trader." The entrepreneurial spirit gave birth to "early capitalism" and had since remained stable. Conversely, the merchant spirit had been subject to constant change and fluctuation. The "high capitalism" of modern society had resulted when the merchant spirit spun out of control, dominating the entrepreneurial spirit and giving rise to the materialism of industrial life.⁶⁴

Sombart increasingly believed that racial characteristics played an important role in this development.⁶⁵ Continuing his theme of dualism, he divided Europe's population into "entrepreneurial" and "merchant" races. Of the latter, he believed the Jews to be the

⁶³ Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement*, 221-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 235, 237-8 254.

⁶⁵ Even in his early work, Sombart had always been inclined toward speaking in racial terms. However, his propensity for doing so seemed to have come to the forefront from around the mid-point of his career on forward, as he increasingly sought to assign personal blame for the origins of modern, industrial society.

most important example. Citing their age-old practice of money lending, Sombart argued that Jews had always been particularly materialistic and preoccupied with earthly endeavors.⁶⁶ In contrast, Germans, with their concern for the transcendental, were the ultimate expression of the entrepreneur spirit. Yet, in the industrial age, even Germany had fallen under the influence of the merchant races. Nevertheless, if they consciously rejected the profit-motivated mentality of the merchant races in favor of their own entrepreneurial characteristics, the German people could return their nation to the community oriented age of early capitalism.

With this conclusion, Sombart simultaneously cut his ties to socialism and took what he felt to be a crucial step toward solving the problem of the isolated individual in modern society. He no longer searched for community in a unified, international working class. In his eyes, both the proletariat and bourgeoisie were a part of the industrial, materialist world that he had come to reject. From this point forward, Sombart turned his attention to analyzing his own nation, hoping to promote the creation of a German *Volk* community.

During World War I, Sombart took the opportunity to enthusiastically employ his newly revised theories in the service of his country. *Händler und Helden* was the result. Published in the spring of 1915, the text aimed to reveal the essential character of World War I. In doing so, he hoped to demonstrate to the German people the larger significance of their contribution to the struggle. Following the theme of his earlier writings, Sombart

⁶⁶ It is worthy to note that Sombart had a complex relationship with the Jews, which historians have devoted significant energy to examining. Heinz Ludwig describes Sombart's feelings as a mixture of admiration and dislike, sympathy and distance. Whatever Sombart's misgivings about the Jews, Ludwig believes it would be erroneous to speak of outright hatred or anti-Semitism of the Nazi style. Heinz Ludwig, "Sombart and the Jews" in *Werner Sombart (1863-1941). Social Scientist* vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Backhaus. (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1996), 205-10.

claimed that Europe had become dominated by two fundamentally disparate worldviews: that of the “merchant” and that of the “hero.” Again, he linked these distinct mindsets to the spiritual origins of a race or nation. But while the Germans remained the primary representatives of the entrepreneurial, hero spirit, Sombart made the timely substitution of the English in place of the Jews as the progenitors of the merchant worldview.⁶⁷ He explained that, due to their fundamental spiritual differences, these peoples were destined to clash; consequently, World War I was the result of an inevitable struggle between the two spirits for dominance over Europe. With *Händler und Helden*, Sombart hoped to enter this foray by revealing to the world the “incomparable superiority of the German spirit.”⁶⁸

The text began by considering the English merchant spirit. Sombart was quick to point out that the term “merchant spirit” was an oxymoron because the defining characteristic of that spirit was its complete attachment to the material world. This was evident in its primary objective: to attain the greatest amount of earthly enjoyment for as many individuals as possible. For this reason, those having the merchant perspective approached life with the question, “What can Life give me?” Such a mindset produced a view of human existence in which interpersonal relations were no more than commercial transactions in which every individual attempts to gain the greatest profit for himself.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Sombart’s substitution of the British in place of the Jews as the primary example of the hero spirit is particularly interesting because, fifteen years earlier, Sombart had actually praised the English labor movement for its ability to pursue class struggle in largely non-violent way. Fritz Reheis, “Return to the Grace of God: Werner Sombart’s Compromise with National Socialism” in *Werner Sombart (1863-1941). Social Scientist* vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Backhaus. (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1996), 177. However, it was not uncommon for Germans to identify similarities between Britain and the Jews. See Ian Buruma, *Anglomania: A European Love Affair* (New York: Random House, 1998), 203-4, 217, 219, 221-2.

⁶⁸ Sombart, *Händler*, 5-6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

Since the merchant spirit was born from commercialization, England, with its long tradition of trade, had always been particularly susceptible to its influence.⁷⁰ Sombart claimed that the depth to which the merchant spirit penetrated English culture was evident in that nation's philosophical tradition. Since Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), all ethical and political thought in England had been based on the principles of utility: the greatest number of benefits for the greatest number of people. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "social contract" theories relegated the state to the role of peace keeper because, according to the principles of the merchant worldview, the greatest material gain occurs when conflicts are minimized. This standard was applied to English foreign policy as well in the "balance of power" theory (in essence, war should only be waged to defend trade relations or when there was profit to be made). When combined with the way England "mechanically" accumulated its empire "piece by piece," these developments demonstrated the schematic, "inorganic" way in which the English state was formed.⁷¹ According to Sombart, the English state and empire lacked real inner unity but took the form of a giant trade organization, with different branches all over the world. For him, the entire system resembled "a huge octopus, which consists only of tentacles and an enormous digestion apparatus, and where all other organs...have died off."⁷²

Since it was anchored in the material world, nothing transcendental could arise from a culture engrossed in the merchant worldview. In England, "comfort" and "sport"

⁷⁰ Sombart, *Händler*, 15-6.

⁷¹ According to Sombart, England's mechanical, "inorganic" nature was further demonstrated by its replacement of agriculture with industry. He pointed to the statistical evidence that only eight percent of the English were involved in agriculture and fishery, whereas forty-five percent were involved in industry. *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 37.

emerged as surrogates for actual spiritual values. In Sombart's view, these principles not only replaced transcendental ideals, but also helped to expunge the last vestiges of spiritual life from the English people.⁷³ Comfort as a means of making life easier was harmless. It became dangerous, however, when people viewed it as an end in itself. When a culture placed value on obtaining physical luxuries, it could not lift itself above the contemplation of material concerns; unable to reach a higher level of existence, "a *Volk* that [had] this worldview, such as the English, [was] no better than a pile of living corpses."⁷⁴ Sport, the "twin brother" of comfort, operated on the same principles. Although sport contained potential benefits for the body, it had a degenerative effect on the soul when it replaced or took precedence over important spiritual activities.⁷⁵

Against this picture of the materialist, merchant worldview Sombart introduced the German spirit. Unlike the transparent English spirit, the spirit of the German people defied simple definition. Calling on Nietzsche (and not for the last time), Sombart invoked the great philosopher's description of the German spirit as ever changing, multifarious, never "is" but always "becoming." Taking this into account, Sombart said it was still possible to pinpoint certain essential features of the German character, which distinguished it from all others. First and foremost, the German spirit was "the unanimous rejection of everything that was English or Western European in thought and sensation"; most specifically, it was the refutation "at all times of utilitarianism, eudemonism, and therefore all philosophies of usefulness, happiness, and enjoyment."⁷⁶

⁷³ Sombart, *Händler*, 50.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁵ A discussion of the "political distinction" between the German idea of "sport for exercise" and the British notion of "sport for entertainment" can be found in Buruma, *Anglomania*, 157-8.

⁷⁶ Sombart, *Händler*, 55.

Again, Sombart divided the world into material and spiritual realms: in the former, life was individualized; in the latter, it was united. The goal of the German essence was to leave the lower realm of individuals and become united in the higher realm of spirit. This could only be accomplished through action, production, self sacrifice, and letting go of material comforts. While the English approached the world asking “what can Life give me,” the German asked the question, “what can I give Life”; the merchant spoke of rights, the German of duties. For Sombart this was the essence of heroism; thus he crowed, “to be German is to be a hero.”⁷⁷

This heroic spirit could not be separated from the concept of “Fatherland.” The Fatherland, or *Volk*, was the earthly manifestation of spiritual unity for which each German hero strives. Far from simply being a state, the Fatherland existed with or without national boundaries; indeed, a German hero’s love for the Fatherland was completely apolitical. Sombart maintained that the relatively recent creation of the German political state was an organic outgrowth of the collective will of the German people, the next stage in a process of development toward spiritual unity. But while actions of the individual received meaning only through his willing subordination to the unified Fatherland, it was the unique function of the German state to give each individual a voice, thereby preventing him from being “swallowed up” by the whole.

According to Sombart, the English were completely unable to understand the German concept of Fatherland. The merchant spirit prevented them from comprehending a state that did not operate in accordance with the principles of utility. Consequently, they saw the undemocratic German state as a burden from which its masses must be

⁷⁷ Sombart, *Händler*, 63-5.

freed. Taking the same position on the subject of German militarism, the English could not conceive of the possible benefits of a militaristic society. For Sombart the advantage was clear; militarism was yet another emanation of the hero spirit. Through militarism the heroic ideals of courage, sacrifice, bravery, obedience, piety, and reverence were actualized. This gave the German people a markedly different opinion of war. Unlike the English merchants, who shied away from combat without material profit, the Germans embraced war, seeing it as “the holiest thing on earth.”⁷⁸ While the English shamefully employed foreign soldiers and colonial auxiliaries to fight in their wars, Germany gladly sacrificed the best the *Volk* could offer. That a man went to his death for the preservation of the Fatherland was the highest consecration of the hero spirit; and the outbreak of World War I gave young Germans the opportunity for this expression.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Sombart claimed, the merchant worldview was poised to take over Europe. English commercialism had spread its tendrils over much of the continent, bringing with it the twin non-values of comfort and sport. Sombart shamefully admitted that the merchant worldview had even penetrated the German *Volk*. Rapid industrialization in the years before the war had elevated material concerns and suffocated the hero spirit. The culturally anemic German people, lacking any sense of a higher purpose, soon became “lost in living well, coupling, filling the belly, emptying the intestines, and running senselessly back and forth.”⁷⁹ Various groups made vain attempts to alleviate the effects of the “English poison.” Some people viewed socialism as the best form of a cure. However, as Sombart was eager to point out, the

⁷⁸ Sombart, *Händler*, 88.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

ethos of socialism made it ill-equipped to combat the merchant spirit. Born of the liberal “ideas of 1789,” socialism’s core values of freedom, equality, and individual liberty were all merchant values. Furthermore, socialism replaced duty to the Fatherland with duty to a vague “Humanity.” Most repulsive of all was the fact that modern socialism had lost all semblance of its old self and had degenerated into an economic interest movement for the proletariat; rather than initiating a world-historical revolution, its goal had become to gain as many material advantages as possible for the working class. This all added up to the conclusion that socialism was “nothing more than capitalism or commercialism with a different name.”⁸⁰

Just when it seemed as though humanity would succumb to the merchant worldview, “like a miracle,” war arrived. In Sombart’s eyes, World War I resulted from the German heroic spirit attempting to break through the surrounding malaise of the modern, materialist world. Like an unused muscle, the heroic spirit atrophied in the culturally insipid prewar environment; yet, by confronting and defeating the representatives of the merchant worldview, the heroic spirit would be reinvigorated. Thus, the war was a cleansing process; a way for the heroic spirit to be reborn. Seeing the war as a redemptive force reestablished the German people’s sense of purpose; the anomie of modern life was dissolved by renewed service to both *Volk* and state. In what was, for Sombart, a true thing of beauty, the war seemed to unite Germans from every

⁸⁰ Sombart, *Händler*, 114-6.

level of society in an effort to destroy the influence of the merchant worldview for all time.⁸¹

To be certain, one could not expect the merchant worldview to go quietly into the night, as its toxins were still present in the German bloodstream during the first months of the war. With disgust, Sombart relayed a German soldier's report from the front in which the man spoke with great fascination about the English soldiers' shaving kits. "This is sad," Sombart declared, "in the midst of such great events, to think only of the removal of stubble from one's face. It seems to me an ugly sign of the hollow English huckster's culture."⁸² Still, Sombart remained convinced that the war would cleanse Germany of the merchant ideals. In some of his most dramatic testimony, he concluded *Händler und Helden* with his vision of post-war Europe.

Once Germany had vanquished the agents of the merchant worldview, Sombart believed the nation would be reborn as the highest expression of the heroic spirit. The state would exist as both the living will of the German people and as a suit of armor, shielding the *Volk* from threats by rival states. Freed from the influence of pure commercialism, economic endeavors would be subordinate to the service and protection of the *Volk*.⁸³ Culturally, Germany would be entirely self-sufficient, sheltered from

⁸¹ It should be noted that Sombart's primary concern was removing all traces of the merchant worldview from the German people; he did not believe that a victory in war would extinguish the merchant spirit from the face of the Earth. The English would still retain the same national characteristics that they brought into the war, but following the war, the German people would be immune to these "poisons."

⁸² Sombart, *Händler*, 101.

⁸³ Sombart's ideas of economic self-sufficiency might be construed as part of a widespread and wide-ranging effort by German intellectuals to promote German economic hegemony over Central Europe. This desire for a "*Mitteleuropa*" took many forms and, although it appeared most prominently during World War I, it had antecedents in the nineteenth century. Henry Cord Meyer explored the genesis, development, and expression of the idea of "*Mitteleuropa*" in his text, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955).

“West-European ideas.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, for Sombart, a certain amount of cosmopolitanism was part of the German nature; thus, the *Volk* would appreciate the cultural creations of other lands, with the obvious exception of England. Of course, other nations would despise Germany after its victory in the war. As it had been with the Greeks and Jews in ancient times, as God’s chosen people, the German *Volk* would be hated for its superiority.⁸⁵

Still, for all its power, Germany would treat other countries with benevolence. Sombart believed that the German goal was not to conquer foreign lands and culturally convert them as the English had done. He scoffed, “Fear not, dear neighbors: we will not devour you. What would we do with that indigestible bit of food in our stomach?”⁸⁶ However, he continued, “if it is necessary that we enlarge our property so that the greater body of the *Volk* gets space to develop, then we will take as much land as needed.”⁸⁷ It was a testament to the supremacy of the heroic spirit that it could not be exported, but could only be organically grown; and, according to Sombart, that was exactly what Germany would occupy itself with following the war. Closed off from the rest of the world, the German *Volk* would perpetuate the heroic spirit for all eternity.⁸⁸

Given the tone and message of *Händler und Helden*, it is tempting to dismiss it as the ostentatious ramblings of a crazed German nationalist. However, within these bombastic ruminations are keys to understanding nature of unity among German

⁸⁴ Sombart claimed, “A strong victory would allow us the possibility of not worrying about those around us. Once the German stands there, leaning on his huge sword, armored in steel from head to toe, then whoever wants to can dance around his feet, even if they insult him and throw filth at him.” Sombart, *Händler*, 131.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 143-4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

intellectuals during World War I. Specifically, Sombart's text displays the same concept of German identity that can be found in countless wartime publications by German intellectuals. Influenced by German idealism, it portrays the German people as spiritual, community-oriented, self-sacrificing; always engaged in a process of self-analysis and constantly changing, developing, and moving forward. In contrast, it identifies Western Europeans (in this case Britons above all) as materialistic, self-serving, individualistic, and unable to rise above terrestrial concerns.⁸⁹ Like other German intellectuals at the time, Sombart viewed pre-war Germany as polluted by the forces of democracy, industrialization, and self-interest, all of which were emanating from Western Europe. He agreed with his compatriots that World War I was a struggle to the death between German and Western cultures; and that a German defeat meant the end of their way of life. However, they all also believed that victory meant the birth of a new German society, one that was free from the problems that had plagued the Imperial state.

Yet, despite these similarities, *Händler und Helden* differs from the writings of other German intellectuals by reflecting aspects of Sombart's own unique *Weltanschauung*. The entire structure of the argument followed in the footsteps of his earlier work on the genesis of capitalism. Sombart retained his dualistic view of opposing capitalist spirits and continued to trace their origins to racial characteristics. Although he changed the details of the argument in order to coincide with the concrete facts of the war, his conclusion remained the same: the merchant spirit and all its

⁸⁹ Sombart was not the only German intellectual to single out the British in his polemics. Despite economic competition between their states, the German intellectual community had experienced a close relationship with Britain in the nineteenth century. Thus, many had felt betrayed by Britain's entry into World War I and leveled particularly violent attacks at that nation. For more on the German intellectual's perception of Britain in the nineteenth century, see Charles E. McClelland, *The German Historians and England: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Views* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

manifestations must be cleansed from Germany in order to establish a genuine national community.⁹⁰

These assumptions clearly resulted from his political and ideological movement away from Marxism. In the years before the war, he had ceased to believe in the proletariat's ability to form a cohesive community, and no longer felt that a solution to the problem of the isolated individual lay within the bounds of modern, industrial society. He had become increasingly convinced that communal bonds could be established only within the racial and cultural homogeneity of the German *Volk*. *Händler und Helden* reflects this view in its picture of a post-war Germany that was internally united and culturally isolated from the rest of Europe. Sombart continued to promote the complete expulsion of democracy, commercialism, individualism, materialism, and all other negative aspects of modern capitalism from German society. Territorial expansion would only be attempted when it aided in the development of German culture; otherwise, Germany would remain in a shell, cultivating its unique culture of community in accordance with German idealism.⁹¹

While Sombart's particular ideas of German exceptionalism have been widely recognized as "protofascist," modern scholars have disagreed about the true nature of his political inclinations. Although some historians have described him as a Marxist turned Nazi, others believe that Sombart never truly subscribed to either ideology. Instead, these scholars claim, he merely attempted to resolve his search for community by applying his

⁹⁰ The chilling similarities between Sombart's conclusion and the *Weltanschauung* of the Nazis has prompted many scholars to debate the possible influences Sombart's concepts had on the National Socialist mentality. For examples see Reheis, "Return to the Grace of God: Werner Sombart's Compromise with National Socialism," 173-92; and Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement*, 263-4.

⁹¹ Once again, Sombart's idea bears a striking resemblance to the concept of *Lebensraum* propagated by the Nazis.

personal theories first to Marxism and then to Nazism, both without success.⁹² But even without pinpointing Sombart's political position, it is clear that his specific vision of post-war Germany clashed with those of other German intellectuals on both the left and right. For members of the right who favored vast annexations, Sombart's cautious position on territorial expansion was unacceptable. Intellectuals on the left felt similarly dissatisfied with his view of an anti-democratic Germany. The idea that the nation should be entirely sealed off from the world must have also seemed unreasonable to many German intellectuals, regardless of their political affiliations.

Thus it has become apparent that *Händler und Helden* demonstrates areas of both convergence and telling divergence with respect to the wartime publications of other German intellectuals. All the texts share similar views of German identity and the nature of World War I; which would seem to indicate the existence of a consensus among German intellectuals on these cultural matters. However, beyond this, Sombart's vision of a racially pure postwar Germany demonstrates that an individual's unique political inclinations could bring his work into conflict with other members of the German intellectual community. An analogous situation appears with regards to the wartime propaganda of Friedrich Meinecke; but unlike the mercurial Sombart, Meinecke's political inclinations remained grounded in a search for balance.

⁹² This position represents the view of many scholars at the present time. It is now believed that Sombart only appeared to change political allegiances, when in fact his worldview remained largely the same throughout his life. See Fritz Reheis, "Return to the Grace of God: Werner Sombart's Compromise With National Socialism," 186-7; Rolf Reiß, "Werner Sombart under National Socialism," *Werner Sombart (1863-1941). Social Scientist* vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Backhaus. (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1996), 203; and Mark E. Blum, "Breaks or Continuities in Sombart's Work: A Linguistic Analysis," in *Werner Sombart (1863-1941). Social Scientist* vol. 3, ed. Jürgen Backhaus. (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1996), 87-9.

Chapter Two: A Cosmopolitan Nation-State

In his professional and political life, Friedrich Meinecke was a moderate in every sense of the word. As a historian, he devoted his energy to pointing out the contrasting poles between which the Western world had moved: rule and freedom, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, power and ethics.⁹³ Politically, his search for balance led him to advocate both individual freedom and a powerful state apparatus. During World War I, Meinecke's political worldview greatly influenced the propaganda he produced. As with other German intellectuals, his writings criticized the Allied nations while praising Germany's unique culture and spirit. Additionally, like his colleagues, Meinecke saw the war as a creative force, capable of propelling Germany forward. However, his warnings against radical nationalism fell on deaf ears, and the democratic German nation-state he envisioned for the future was, in fact, something many of his peers sought to avoid. Thus, as with the case of Werner Sombart, exploring Meinecke's political views and their impact on his propagandistic wartime writings will help to uncover the forces that united German intellectuals during World War I and those that drove them apart.

Friedrich Meinecke was born in Salzwedel in 1862.⁹⁴ As a child, his moderate nature was overshadowed by the patriotism of his parents. Like other children of middle-class Prussian families, Meinecke was taught at an early age to respect the instruments of the state and look upon the figure of Otto von Bismarck with awe and reverence. Even at the tender age of seven, Meinecke demonstrated his love for the state by composing "blood-and-thunder" war poems about the Prussian victory over Austria in the Seven

⁹³ Gerhard Masur, "Friederich Meinecke: Historian of a World in Crisis" in *The Origins of Modern Consciousness*, ed. with introduction by John Weiss (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1965), 138.

⁹⁴ Meinecke died in Berlin on February 6, 1954.

Weeks' War.⁹⁵ In 1871, Meinecke's family moved to Berlin. Growing up in the burgeoning capital of Bismarck's newly-united Germany only strengthened his support for the existence of a powerful, conservative state.

Meinecke's experiences as a student at the University of Berlin in the mid 1880s reinforced his Prussian upbringing in some ways, but also presented new challenges to his youthful worldview. Under the tutelage of scholars like Heinrich von Treitschke, Heinrich Sybel, and Johann Gustav Droysen, Meinecke received a heavy dose of Leopold von Ranke's "Prussian School of Historiography."⁹⁶ One of the primary tenets of this thinking was that an objective view of history could be obtained through the study of state formation and development.⁹⁷ For Ranke, the state was the vehicle with which a nation could protect and assert itself. In his view, history was the account of power struggles between states as different nations attempted to impose their wills on one another. Not coincidentally, most Ranke disciples wrote histories on the German nation's

⁹⁵ Richard W. Sterling, *Ethics in a World of Power: The Political Ideas of Friedrich Meinecke* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), 4.

⁹⁶ Scholars often refer to Ranke as the "father of modern history." In general, his historiography was based on the assumption that it was a historian's duty to search for absolute truth. For Ranke, this was to be accomplished by approaching an individual subject of study with the intention of presenting only the objective facts, and portraying the subject as it really was with as little contemporary judgment by the historian as possible ("*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" became the rallying cry of Ranke devotees). However, Ranke also maintained that human beings were unable to comprehend absolute truth in its entirety; instead, they could glimpse only bits and pieces of the truth through the window of individual realities. Therefore, in many cases, Ranke stressed the study of great individuals as representatives of larger truth-values. In his career as a historian, Meinecke relied heavily on Ranke's historical method. Sterling, *Ethics*, 8, 24-5. For a clear representation of Ranke's often complex views on the study of history and the contribution of these ideas to the historical discipline, see Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, ed., *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

⁹⁷ Ranke viewed the state as an independent entity, operating under its own system of laws and values. Most specifically, he believed that a state was driven by the law that it must maximize its possibilities for self-assertion or risk being destroyed by other states. Politically, this meant that all internal developments were fundamentally subordinate to and dependent upon external developments that arose from its interaction with other states. Such a formula led to a view of history in which most events could be understood in their relation to the overarching struggle for power between states; as a result, a historian could uncover most truths through an exploration of state interaction. Robert A. Pois, *Friedrich Meinecke and German Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 12, 14-5; and Sterling, *Ethics*, 8.

attempts to achieve statehood. However, many of these devotees misrepresented Ranke's ideas by overemphasizing the importance of force, deception, and guile in the process of state formation. Politically, these "Neo-Rankeans" used their research to justify and extol the policies of *Realpolitik* and to elevate their version of Bismarck's legacy to mythical proportions.⁹⁸

Meinecke absorbed much from the "Prussian School of Historiography." In particular, he was deeply influenced by Ranke's historical method and view on the relationship between state and nation. These ideas added fuel to Meinecke's childhood fascination with the German state and directed his professional career toward the study of political history. Meinecke broke away from the "Neo-Rankeans," however, by refusing to bow to the idol of power. He continued to respect Bismarck's achievements, and understood that state power ensured national growth; nevertheless, he maintained that there must be limitations on a state's ability to enforce its will upon its own population. Without such boundaries, the drive for naked power would overshadow the creative capacities of both the individual and the nation. Thus, after receiving his degree in 1886, Meinecke devoted his career to searching for a balance between the powerful state and personal freedom.

Over the next decade, Meinecke's political ideas were in a state of flux. While working at the Prussian state archive, he made several discoveries that resolved his quest for balance and also precipitated a shift in his political inclinations from conservative to moderate. In 1890, after encountering an essay by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Meinecke

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Mommsen claims that this group of historians was responsible for creating the mythology of Bismarck as "iron chancellor," an ideological edifice that still stands to this day. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Ranke and the Neo-Rankean School in Imperial Germany: State-Oriented Historiography as a Stabilizing Force," in Iggers, *Leopold von Ranke*, 132.

became fascinated by Germany's period of classical liberalism and humanism.⁹⁹ He soon began writing a massive two volume biography of Hermann von Boyen (*Leben des Generalfeldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen*, 1896-9), which brought him into intimate contact with ideas of the German Enlightenment.¹⁰⁰ The great minds of the movement, Humboldt, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, and others, all stressed the importance of the individual and his capacity for growth and creativity. These German thinkers were principally concerned with spiritual development and, unlike their French counterparts, did not automatically equate self-realization with self-government. Instead, they emphasized "a sovereign private life and a self-sacrificing public life."¹⁰¹ In these ideas, Meinecke believed he had found the key to combining individual freedom and the authoritarian power-state. His *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (1907) provides a thorough explanation of this proposed solution, and is the ultimate expression of Meinecke's political and ideological worldview in the years before World War I.

The central theme of *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (*Cosmopolitanism and Nation-State*) was the emergence of the German nation-state from the cosmopolitan doctrines of rationalism and romanticism.¹⁰² According to Meinecke, the process began with the universal ideals of the German Enlightenment thinkers which, in promoting the inalienable rights of man, had laid the moral foundations of the state. He believed that

⁹⁹ In this essay, Humboldt attempted to prescribe limits to the state's authority over the autonomy of the individual. For Meinecke, this appeared to justify his own search for the limitations of state power. Sterling, *Ethics*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Hermann von Boyen had been a key figure in the Prussian Reform movement in the first years of the nineteenth century. Meinecke focused on Boyen's efforts to democratize the Prussian army and his belief that to do so would "strengthen the state and preserve its cultural heritage." These attempts were met with stiff resistance from conservatives and were ultimately defeated. Pois, *Meinecke and German Politics*, 13.

¹⁰¹ Steven Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 152.

¹⁰² Sterling, *Ethics*, 54-5.

these thinkers were correct to declare that the individual's freedom of expression was the basis of humanity, and that protecting that freedom was of paramount importance. Yet, in their zeal to create a European community based on universal ideals, these thinkers failed to acknowledge the realities of power-politics. In particular, they wrongly assumed that states would ignore their own self-interests and protect the freedom of other states. This error in judgment became evident at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, where German attempts to create a nation-state under European-wide protection were foiled by self-seeking "Balance of Power" policies.¹⁰³

For Meinecke, it took both the ideas of Leopold von Ranke and the actions of Otto von Bismarck to overcome the deficiencies of the early-nineteenth century thinkers. For his part, Ranke combated idealism by reintroducing Machiavellian realism into political theory. In particular, he argued that states were naturally self-serving entities that acted solely in their own best interests. Consequently, international solidarity between states became an idealistic fantasy because, in reality, states were engaged in an unrelenting struggle for power. Such theories helped to remove the ideological barriers from the path of German state development.¹⁰⁴ Bismarck continued the process by skillfully eliminating the physical barriers to unification. But while Meinecke admired Bismarck's success in implementing *Realpolitik*, he felt that the chancellor's actions had lacked a moral underpinning. Unlike Bismarck, Meinecke did not believe that the simple necessity of realist policies sufficiently justified the pursuit of power; on the contrary, such a short-sighted mentality led to the acquisition of power for its own sake. Although

¹⁰³ Sterling, *Ethics*, 37-8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

this approach had been required to bring the German state into existence, ethical standards were needed to guide the state's drive for power and keep it in check.¹⁰⁵

To locate these standards, Meinecke returned to the values of early-nineteenth century Germany. Like the German Enlightenment thinkers, he viewed the nation as the best vehicle for organizing free and harmonious human relationships. Therefore, he also saw the nation as the medium through which human beings could achieve the highest degree of self-expression, both as individuals and collectively in the form of culture (*Kultur*). Ethical guidelines for state policy thus could be found by joining the power drive of the state to the creative properties of the nation. In other words, if the state was the political manifestation of a national will, then its egoistic drive for power was natural and acceptable, so long as it acted in accordance with the nation's drive to protect, perpetuate, or increase its capacity for creativity and expression.¹⁰⁶ The greatest weakness of the German Enlightenment thinkers had been their failure to recognize this connection and their subsequent view of the powerful state as a detriment, not a benefit, to individual freedom. Meinecke concluded *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* by claiming that, since the power-state (*Machtstaat*) was the guardian of the culture-state (*Kulturstaat*), all necessary steps must be taken to ensure the existence of a strong state, capable of protecting the nation and its culture.¹⁰⁷

Guided by these conclusions, Meinecke's political actions in the years preceding World War I were primarily focused on strengthening the state. As he looked out on the political landscape of pre-war Germany, he saw disenfranchised masses, resentful of the

¹⁰⁵ Sterling, *Ethics*, 78-9, 127.

¹⁰⁶ It is apparent that Meinecke built this conclusion upon Ranke's suggestion that states should have a cultural function and create new avenues for expression of the human spirit. *Ibid.*, 83-4, 123-5.

¹⁰⁷ Pois, *Meinecke and German Politics*, 15.

existing governmental system. Since a divided population severely weakened the state, Meinecke believed that it was necessary to transform working class indignation into national allegiance, through political enfranchisement. Thus, he joined other “modernist” mandarins in supporting the National Liberal party and, later, Friedrich Naumann’s short-lived National Social Union.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Meinecke was by no means an ardent democrat. Like other mandarins, he questioned whether unsupervised political involvement by the masses might not accelerate the decay of high-culture that had plagued the modern age. Even so, Meinecke saw democracy as the unavoidable byproduct of industrialization. Thus, the only way for Germany to compete with other technologically advanced states was to reform its political system in accordance with the demands of industrialized society.¹⁰⁹

Pointing out the pragmatism in Meinecke’s views on democracy is not to gainsay his commitment to the idea of a *Volkstaat*. It was still his desire that Germany would someday walk the tightrope between power and the individual, becoming the first state to embody the collective will of an entire nation. Given this dream, it is easy to see why he joined other German intellectuals in interpreting the unity of the “August experience” as the dawning of a new age. Like so many of his colleagues, Meinecke published propagandistic pamphlets during the initial months of World War I in order to justify the German war effort and offer his vision for a post-war future. The first of these, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914* (*The German Uprising of 1914*), displayed many similarities to the wartime propaganda of other German intellectuals; however, as with

¹⁰⁸ Fritz Ringer provides an excellent analysis of Meinecke’s and other moderate mandarins’ attraction to these political parties. Ringer, *Mandarins*, 130-4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-3.

Sombart's *Händler und Helden, Die deutsche Erhebung* ultimately reflected Meinecke's own distinctive political views, which harbored the possibility for conflict with his peers.

Following in the footsteps of *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat, Die Deutsche Erhebung* focused on the evolution of the German state. Meinecke's central argument was that World War I should be seen as the culminating event in a series of German revolutions, which sought to create a uniquely German nation-state. As in his earlier work, Meinecke began by discussing the ideological foundations of the nation-state. He claimed that, around the turn of the nineteenth century, the German Enlightenment thinkers realized that an individual could commune with the spiritual through the medium of the nation, and that the state was the highest expression of national will. Ever since, Germany had tried to create a state which allowed its citizens to exist as creative, free individuals, while still remaining subordinate to the will of the nation.

The Wars of Liberation in 1813, the Revolutions of 1848, and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, were all milestones in the process of German state formation; yet, each had failed to create an appropriate medium for the expression of the German spirit. According to Meinecke, the German Wars of Liberation had successfully expelled Napoleon, in part, because of the feelings of national unity which they inspired. Nevertheless, the political immaturity of the masses and the ideological naïveté of reformist leaders prevented them from capitalizing on the feelings of German solidarity. In the end, a strong conservative backlash from the Prussian government quashed the

formation of a nation-state. Despite the failures of the early-nineteenth century, Meinecke claimed, the desire for a nation-state still burned in the hearts of many Germans.¹¹⁰

This desire was to burst forth again in the Revolutions of 1848, but, to Meinecke, the leaders of this uprising were even more incompetent than their predecessors of 1813. Steeped in an “infinity of delusions” these liberal revolutionaries still suffered from an overabundance of noble hopes and a dearth of practical statesmanship. Among their most serious blunders was the inability to see the “sturdy Prussian state-organism” and its robust military as a valuable unifying force.¹¹¹ These facts were not lost on Otto von Bismarck.

As he had already in *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, Bismarck again appeared as the great liberator of the German nation. Through his understanding of power-politics, Bismarck put an end to the quixotic fantasies that had retarded state development. Armed with the doctrines of *Realpolitik*, this modern-day Moses led the German people from the wilderness of idealism to the promised land of the nation-state.¹¹² For Meinecke, the serendipitous character of the “Uprising of 1870” was that the will of the entire nation had been embodied in the figure of one man; without Bismarck’s personal desire for power, the unification of Germany would not have been possible. Yet this was also the revolution’s biggest shortcoming. Having so little direct responsibility for unification left the German people politically weak and underdeveloped. Thus, while their state was united, the nation could not proficiently utilize its political mechanism to

¹¹⁰ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914: Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Berlin: J.G. Cotta, 1914), 10-1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

heal internal class conflicts. Instead, it succumbed to the centrifugal forces of modernity.¹¹³

Initially, following unification, Germany's creative energy burst forth in a period of massive industrial development. Meinecke claimed that, while this increased the power of the state, it divided the German nation into different classes. Class-based economic interest groups came to dominate the government and soon "the crude traits of materialism and egoism began to disfigure the intellectual and political life of the nation."¹¹⁴ By the 1890's this materialism had affected Germany's creative capacities.

According to Meinecke, cultural putrefaction had occurred all over Europe in the decades before World War I. Lust for commerce and material wealth had eclipsed creative desires and "a mass of mediocre talents" dominated the intellectual landscape. The resulting "aesthetic insensibility" limited artistic creations to "cheap ornaments of mass production and popular taste."¹¹⁵ Meinecke found it most disturbing, however, that some of the intellectual movements that developed during this time, such as positivism in France, treated the state as a "monster, the deadly adversary of the individual."¹¹⁶ For him, the central problem of the modern age was the contrary: the individual had become isolated from the nation-state. Alone and thus unable to fully express themselves, people were floundering in an abyss of individuality.¹¹⁷

Meinecke believed that the Germans had experienced this problem every bit as much as other Europeans; yet they alone possessed the means to overcome it, through

¹¹³ Meinecke, *Erhebung*, 18-9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22, 32-3.

their unique national characteristics. He claimed that the German spirit contained the antithetical attributes of forward motion and contemplation; the impulse to forge ahead was always tempered by the desire to reflect on the current situation and past developments.¹¹⁸ In Meinecke's eyes, this innate power of self-analysis would allow Germany to avoid the "decadent self-surrender" that had afflicted its neighbors and move forward as they sat idle. A desire to create the perfect form of state had been swelling within the German heart for a hundred years. In the modern age, when the individual was more isolated than ever, the German idea of unity in service of the state seemed like the perfect solution. A catalyst was all that the German people needed in order to realize their goal.

Meinecke believed that World War I provided that breakthrough moment. It immediately united all Germans in the spirit of service to the Fatherland. Suddenly the individual was imbued with a fresh sense of purpose, and the despondency of modern life melted away. The German spirit of self-sacrifice manifested itself on the battlefield. For Meinecke, the deaths of those heroic soldiers released creative, redemptive powers. The war was a "sacred Springtime" for Germany, "the sap of the tree that brings forth flowers and greenery."¹¹⁹ With the aid of these powers, the German spirit would end its series of revolutions and at last create a perfect nation-state.¹²⁰

Meinecke claimed that, in contrast to Germany's mission of spiritual rejuvenation, the Allies had entirely materialistic motivations for war in 1914. France wanted to regain the territory it lost in the Franco-Prussian war, and secretly sought revenge for the

¹¹⁸ Meinecke, *Erhebung*, 31.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28, 35.

humiliation it suffered in that conflict; Russia wanted to expand its hegemony over Slavic lands; and England wanted to do away with its new economic rival.¹²¹ Each had operated according to the laws of power-politics, believing that war had been in the best interest of the state; still, none could boast of Germany's "greater passions of a just war, a holy war."¹²² Despite admiring its deep cultural traditions, Meinecke was disturbed by what he saw as Western Europe's morally shallow attempts to isolate Germany through slander. Although the nations were at war, he saw no reason for the "wanton destruction of old and vital cultural bonds" between Western and Germanic worlds.¹²³ Meinecke was frustrated by the Janus-faced Allied nations who, while calling Germany a militaristic dictatorship, themselves conquered foreign lands and denied the rights of their colonial subjects. In his view, the German spirit of self-analysis minimized this kind of hypocritical doublespeak. Thus, he claimed, "The Western Europeans had the formal and aesthetic advantages of an older social culture...But in the hour which decides the fate of the world, the language of truth has a higher cultural value."¹²⁴

Meinecke published *Die deutsche Erhebung* during the first six months of the war, when the hopes for a quick, decisive German victory were at their height. Thus, his vision for the postwar period reflected this enthusiasm. In Meinecke's eyes, Germany would emerge from the conflict as the first true nation-state. The unity, heroism, and patriotism inspired by the war would endure through the subsequent period of peace. Certainly there would still be friction among various interest groups; nonetheless, the memory of common suffering during war would motivate the German people to

¹²¹ Meinecke, *Erhebung*, 48-9.

¹²² Ibid., 55.

¹²³ Ibid., 36.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 72.

overcome their differences of opinion.¹²⁵ Most importantly, Germany would achieve its century-long goal of combining individual freedom and creativity with national unity, under the protection of a powerful state.

Meinecke claimed that, as the new leading world power, Germany would not pursue unscrupulous policies of conquest, as the English had done; nevertheless, it would expand its overseas colonies if such activity was necessary to maintain its industrial vitality.¹²⁶ Ultimately, however, the German people would remain content once their cultural creations and political boundaries were secured from outside threats. This is not to say that Meinecke believed Germany should separate itself from the rest of Europe. On the contrary, he felt that to isolate Germany, especially in the cultural sense, was to deny its distinct tradition of cosmopolitanism.¹²⁷ The German people had always attempted to absorb the world's cultural wealth, and they had much to teach others as well. In particular, Meinecke indicated that the rest of Europe might someday follow Germany's model of the perfected nation-state. Therefore, his vision of the future was a Europe in which Germany was able to securely coexist with its neighbors while simultaneously fulfilling its great spiritual destiny as a "world-nation."¹²⁸

But in order for this vision to become a reality, Germany first had to win the war. It seemed to Meinecke that the conflict had become "a struggle of Western European culture against German culture."¹²⁹ He proclaimed to his countrymen that, under such dire circumstances, "the fate of our national culture, our prosperity as well as our spiritual

¹²⁵ Meinecke refers to the memory of the war as a "Sabbath" which the Germans will keep in the future, to remind them of the collective struggle in service of the nation. Meinecke, *Erhebung*, 56.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 49-50.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 36-7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 34-7, 45, 55-6.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 36.

life, our freedom as well as our unity, hangs in the balance...”¹³⁰ In their slanderous propaganda campaign, the Allied nations had done their best to isolate Germany from the rest of the world, both politically and culturally. Always the moderate, Meinecke admonished his people not to respond in kind. Allowing national unity to degenerate into jingoism would only spoil the noble purpose of the German revolution. As long as it maintained a balance between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, Meinecke was convinced that Germany would combine moral superiority with its military superiority to produce a “new dawn” for the nation-state.

As with Sombart’s *Händler und Helden*, it would be tempting for the casual reader to dismiss Meinecke’s *Die deutsche Erhebung* as empty wartime propaganda. But a comparison of the two works reveals the latter’s importance in resolving the question of unity among German intellectuals during the war. For instance, both texts reveal points of consensus between the authors with regard to German identity. Following the German Idealist tradition, Meinecke and Sombart each described the German spirit as constantly growing and changing, and always driven toward a higher level of existence.

Furthermore, both authors agreed that the nation was the proper medium through which an individual could commune with the transcendental. Thus, they joined in praising the uniquely German concepts of heroism, self-sacrifice, service to the state, and loyalty to the Fatherland. Both Meinecke and Sombart viewed the years before the war as a stagnant period which endangered these values. In their eyes, materialism had overshadowed culture and industrialization had isolated the individual. But they also believed in the vitality of the German people, and interpreted World War I as the German

¹³⁰ Meinecke, *Erhebung*, 55.

spirit's attempt to break through the malaise of the modern age. In this way, the authors considered the war to be a "holy" force of creation and redemption. Nevertheless, they agreed that the possibility of destruction lingered; and defeat at the hands of the Allies meant certain death for the German way of life.

Beyond these important general similarities, *Die deutsche Erhebung* and *Händler und Helden* reflect larger conflicts based on their authors' differing political worldviews. As an ideological descendent of the German Enlightenment, Meinecke used *Die deutsche Erhebung* to argue for the existence of universal laws, individual rights, and cultural creation for the good of humanity. Unlike Sombart's unmitigated condemnation of the "merchant spirit," he did not attack the philosophical foundation of Western Europe because he had an ideological stake in its legitimacy. When Meinecke did criticize France and Britain, he most often related their deficiencies to the negative circumstances of war, power-politics, or the modern age. By presenting the problems of materialism as a Europe-wide phenomenon, instead of a Western poison, he salvaged the value of Western culture and politics.

The two authors' visions of post-war Germany reveal further disagreements. Meinecke's cosmopolitan nation-state would have driven Sombart to despair. To him, the intermingling of peoples and cultures would only result in pollution of the German "hero spirit." For Meinecke, Sombart's racially pure, politically isolated state was both undesirable and impractical. Not only would it lead to the kind of nationalistic fanaticism that degraded German culture, it ignored the Rankean insight that the nature of power

politics demanded Germany's involvement in international affairs.¹³¹ Interestingly, both authors agreed on the question of annexations, believing that Germany should pursue only limited territorial expansion. Ironically, though, their reasons were diametrically opposed: Sombart maintained this position to protect Germany from contamination by foreign peoples, while Meinecke hoped to avoid conflicts that would interrupt cultural exchange.

The areas of conflict and consensus between *Die deutsche Erhebung* and *Händler und Helden* demonstrate their importance in revealing the true nature of unity among the German intellectuals during World War I. In comparing Meinecke's propagandistic writing to that of Sombart, the outlines of a pattern have begun to emerge. It is becoming clear that, regardless of German intellectuals' shared cultural identity, differing political inclinations threatened their community with discord. Even those who claimed to lack political views contributed to this conflict, as the case of the "nonpolitical" Thomas Mann will demonstrate.

¹³¹ These criticisms would not have had much effect on Sombart, who thought "Balance of Power" theories too objective and "British." Sombart, *Händler*, 39.

Chapter Three: A “Nonpolitical” Nation

As one of Germany’s most famous authors, Thomas Mann spent his literary career exposing the ironies of the human condition. That he did so is not surprising considering that his own personal life was filled with paradox, contradiction, and internal tension. All of these elements combine to produce Mann’s multifaceted, intensely complex personal philosophy. During the First World War, one specific aspect of this worldview came to the forefront: his notion of politics and the isolated artist. In essence, Mann maintained that an artist’s separation from political concerns enhanced his creative abilities. This belief was reflected in his wartime propaganda, which applauded Germany’s “nonpolitical” culture and attacked Western democracies. Yet, the irony of Mann’s position is clear; in praising the nonpolitical, he unintentionally ended his own artistic isolation from the material realm of politics.

The contradictory nature of his argument notwithstanding, Mann had good reason to believe he was nonpolitical. In Imperial Germany, the state honored artistic freedom and allowed the artist to live in relative peace, so long as his creations posed no threat to political stability.¹³² This ambivalence between state and artist stood in sharp contrast to the bond between the state and German academics. Unlike artists, German academics had a vested interest in the state because it was the source of their livelihood. Thus, exploring Mann’s wartime propaganda will add the artists’ nonpolitical perspective to the study of unity among German intellectuals during World War I.¹³³ Like Sombart and

¹³² Hannelore Mundt, *Understanding Thomas Mann* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 99.

¹³³ For more on the general perspective of artists during World War I, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “German artists, writers and intellectuals and the meaning of war, 1914-1918” in *State, Society, and*

Meinecke, Mann's writing expressed a notion of German identity that many other intellectuals shared. Furthermore, it reflected the widespread belief that the war held the possibility for cultural rejuvenation or cultural destruction. However, as with Sombart and Meinecke, Mann's political (or "nonpolitical") views on the isolation of the artist carried the potential for conflict with other German intellectuals.

Mann's personal experiences with artistic isolation began at an early age. He was born in the medieval Hansa port city of Lübeck in 1875.¹³⁴ His father was a well-to-do grain merchant who had risen to prominence within the city government. Descended from a long line of North German bourgeois, Mann's father hoped his son would follow in his footsteps, taking over the family business and leading a respectable middle-class life. But while Mann was to inherit his father's bourgeois sense of discipline and self-control, his inner being resembled that of his mother. A mixture of Portuguese-Creole, Brazilian, and German lineage, she was an exotically beautiful and musical woman who instilled in her son a passion for art. Throughout his youth, Mann wrestled with the tension between his parental influences; but despite attempts to play the role that his father had prescribed for him, Mann's artistic élan prevented him from being comfortable within the confines of traditional bourgeois society.

Isolation followed Mann from early childhood into adulthood. In school, he performed poorly. He expressed little interest in the curriculum, and was finally able to complete his education only after repeating grades several times.¹³⁵ Clownish antics brought him friends, yet feelings of intellectual superiority and nascent homosexuality

Mobilization in Europe during the First World War. ed. John Horne. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-38.

¹³⁴ Mann died in Zurich, Switzerland in 1955.

¹³⁵ Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 4.

often left him melancholy and detached from his peers.¹³⁶ His father's death, in 1891, brought about the liquidation of the family business and ended Mann's future occupational obligations. But while he had become free to pursue his literary and artistic desires, he continued to doubt the legitimacy of such an undertaking. In a letter written in 1895, Mann called the artist a "good-for-nothing" whose libertine, outsider's existence he wanted to avoid; he claimed that "one needs a firm hold, an orderly occupation in order not to fall into idle ways."¹³⁷ He attempted to find such an occupation as a clerk at an insurance company, but remained at the position only until his first short story was published. Within five years of surrendering to a literary career, Mann had published his enormously successful novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901). However, international renown did not end his feelings of isolation and, in fact, further distanced him from a bourgeois society that was suspicious of artists and their "irregular way of living."¹³⁸

In an effort to come to terms with this situation, Mann authored several works justifying the isolation of the artist. Of these writings, his novella *Tonio Kröger* (1903) was the most significant. The story follows its title character through a twenty-five year struggle to accept his dual identity as both an artist and a member of the bourgeoisie. In his youth, Tonio is painfully torn between joining the material, commercial world of his father and following his own artistic impulses. After a male classmate ignores his attempts at affection, he bids farewell to the community of the common man and

¹³⁶ Donald Prater, *Thomas Mann: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8-9.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Mundt, *Understanding Mann*, 5.

¹³⁸ Joseph Gerard Brennan, *Thomas Mann's World* (New York: Columbia Press, 1942; Russell & Russell, 1962), 10.

submerges himself in the isolation of art.¹³⁹ Years pass and Tonio's detachment from society increases. With the growing separation, his ability to love life and humankind fades, and he descends into an existence of carnality and nihilism. Ultimately, however, his bourgeois propensity for order and restraint resurfaces and prevents him from continuing on the path of self-destruction. In the end Tonio, now in his forties, finally accepts his dualistic nature. He realizes that, as an artist, he must remain separated from society in order to gain insights into human existence. Nevertheless, he also recognizes that, as a bourgeois, his "love for the human, the living, and the ordinary" constantly inspires him to share his knowledge with others.¹⁴⁰ The reader is left with the irony that, while art's goal is to convey truth to humanity, the artist can only create, and thus communicate, when he is isolated.

The implications of *Tonio Kröger* are clear. Although Mann saw no end to the isolation of the artist, he made the separation more bearable by demonstrating its necessity and desirability. For him, freedom from everyday social and material concerns became a kind of "critical distance," allowing the artist to perceive truths to which the average person was blind.¹⁴¹ Caught between a world of reasoned regulation and creative impulse, it seemed that the bourgeois artist was doomed to struggle with internal strife as well as isolation. Nonetheless, Mann showed that bourgeois tendencies actually

¹³⁹ Like many of Mann's writings, *Tonio Kröger* is filled with autobiographical references. Here Mann is referring to his relationship with his "first love," classmate Armin Martens. Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art*, trans. Leslie Willson. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 33.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories By Thomas Mann*, trans. David Luke (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 191.

¹⁴¹ Mann was not the first thinker to make this observation. Joseph Brennan points out that the theme of the isolated artist and the relationship between art and isolation was a recurring theme during the romantic period, most specifically in the works of Lord Byron. However, Mann added original insights to the older idea with his comments on the nature of the bourgeois artist. Brennan, *Mann's World*, 13-4.

benefited the artist by preventing him from overindulging in art or losing sight of its true communicative purposes. With these justifications, Mann, like Tonio Kröger, was able to accept his dualistic position, despite its unresolved ironic tensions.

In the remaining years before World War I, Mann continued to explore the position of the isolated artist. Having already established the primacy of artistic freedom, he now focused on the negative consequences of disrespecting the boundaries between an artist and society.¹⁴² Ironically, though, when war broke out Mann wasted no time in joining the propaganda campaign against Western Europe. By September of 1914, his brief essay “Gedanken im Krieg” (“Thoughts in War”) appeared among the masses of other anti-Western writings by German intellectuals. He followed this work with the more subtle “Friedrich und die Große Koalition” (“Frederick and the Grand Coalition”) in early 1915. Unsatisfied with the brevity of his first two efforts, Mann quickly began work on *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. Although he had several motivations for writing this piece, his primary intention was to demonstrate the ways in which Germany’s unique nonpolitical culture protected artistic freedom and fostered creativity.¹⁴³ But Mann understood that, in writing political tropes, he descended to a material world that violated his principles of isolation. Therefore, in many ways, *Betrachtungen* became yet another attempt at resolving his own internal tension; and what had been intended as a

¹⁴² Perhaps his most famous example of this is *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*). Written in 1911, it follows an aging writer on his path toward spiritual degeneration. Unable to keep his distance from material life (exemplified by his attraction to a fourteen-year-old boy), the writer is lead down a path toward decadence, deterioration, and ultimately his own death.

¹⁴³ One of the most immediate reasons Mann wrote *Betrachtungen* was to counter the thinly veiled personal attacks launched by his brother Heinrich, in his book *Zola*. However, Hermann Kurzke points to several other underlying motivating forces, among which was Mann’s longstanding desire to become Germany’s national poet. Kurzke, *Mann: Life as a Work of Art*, 217.

concise study of German culture and World War I slowly ballooned into a six-hundred page exercise in self-analysis.

One of Mann's primary goals in *Betrachtungen* was to describe the fundamental nature of Germany's "nonpolitical" culture. He claimed that this task was made difficult because the German essence was ethereal, amorphous, and always in a state of shifting, changing, and becoming. As with all things spiritual, the German character could not be comprehended through the direct means of rationality; instead, it could only be understood through an indirect medium such as art. Obviously, if there were no way to directly speak of the German essence, Mann's textual reflections would have been over before they began. Nevertheless, he worked around this problem by employing the notion that any concept can be understood by examining its opposite.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, in order to understand Germany's "nonpolitical" nature, Mann examined everything associated with "politics." But before he did this, he first established an even more important dichotomy; that of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*.¹⁴⁵

In Mann's view, the difference between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* was more than the age-old formula of "material versus spiritual."¹⁴⁶ Although it was primarily concerned with the physical world, *Zivilisation*, like *Kultur*, had its own transcendent qualities. Those qualities (reason, enlightenment, individual freedom) were born of Western

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1918; reprint, 1922), 372.

¹⁴⁵ This dichotomy was not original to Mann, but for years had been popular among German intellectuals as a means of discussing the difference between Germany and other nations. For more on *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: the Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study of the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); Rolland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982).

¹⁴⁶ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 147-9.

Europe and reached their maturity in the French Revolution. The ultimate goal of *Zivilisation* was to understand the universe through the lens of rationality so that it might better serve humanity. Applied to the realm of human relations, *Zivilisation* manifested itself in the form of politics. For Mann, utility, equality, and the social contract were key characteristics of politics because they were completely rational ways of viewing interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Mann stated that “belief in politics is belief in democracy,” because democracy was the logical, and thus, most revered outcome of a worldview that valued each individual equally.¹⁴⁷

Mann claimed that *Kultur* was the antithesis of *Zivilisation*. Its primary goal was not to scrutinize the material aspects of life, but to gain knowledge of the universe through the power of intuition, and to transmit these insights through artistic mediums. Human reason played almost no role in these processes, making the byproducts of rationality (politics, democracy, and egalitarianism) of no importance to *Kultur*. Individual freedom was significant in that it allowed for creative diversity, but total equality had a leveling effect, which stifled more talented personalities. Thus, *Kultur's* notion of justice was reflected in the slogan “to each his own,” not “to all the same.”¹⁴⁸ Mann went on to say that, since all creative impulses emerged from mankind’s union with the spiritual, to apply rationality to the spiritual (as *Zivilisation* did) was to demystify and destroy it. In this way, *Zivilisation* had an inherently stultifying, degenerative effect on *Kultur*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, xxxiii.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 147-9.

From Mann's perspective, this destructive relationship was acutely evident throughout Europe in the years preceding World War I. For over a century, *Zivilisation's* internationalist message of democracy had helped it to spread across much of the continent. Class conflicts were fueled by the demands for social and political equality. Concern for utility, happiness, and the physical world brought with it an increased interest in creature comforts and a "senseless worship of affluence."¹⁵⁰ In short, the nineteenth century had become a "commercial epoch" in which the philosophy of materialism reigned supreme and high-art was left to decay.¹⁵¹

As the vanguard of *Kultur*, Germany was particularly affected by these negative developments. In Mann's view, the German people naturally adopted the values of *Kultur* rather than *Zivilisation* because, for much of their history, they had been bound together by the cultural ties of the nation, not the political ties of the state. Lacking sociopolitical concerns, Germans had created a rich artistic tradition which, for Mann, revolved around its middle class. In a chapter entitled "*Bürgerlichkeit*" ("burgherly nature") he explained how members of the German middle class were free from both political affairs and monetary constraints, and thus were able to engage in personal cultivation (*Bildung*) and artistic creativity.¹⁵² Fortunately, Mann claimed, the burghers' sense of duty and organization helped them to promote ethical aspects of art and prevented them from sinking into decadent aestheticism.¹⁵³ The insights gleaned from

¹⁵⁰ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 348.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 355-7.

¹⁵² Mann claimed that, contrary to what most Western Europeans believed, the German word "bürger" was not mechanically interchangeable with the French word "bourgeois." While both terms referred to members of the economic middle class, the former also implied a specific way of life based on learning and personal cultivation (often referred to as "*Bildung*"). Ibid., 115-7.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 77.

this balanced approach formed the basis of German culture, to which the German people looked for moral guidance and a sense of identity.¹⁵⁴ Even after state formation in 1871, the burgherly artists were able to continue this cultural interchange because political matters rested in the hands of the Imperial bureaucracy. However, when *Zivilisation* entered the equation, as it had in the pre-war years, the result was potentially devastating. Simply put, democracy jeopardized the burgher artists' ability to create by eliminating their critical distance from political and material concerns. Without the creative flow from these cultural wellsprings, Germany was in danger of losing the source of its spirit and identity.¹⁵⁵

Like any living organism, the German spirit had a drive for self-preservation; and thus it lashed out at the threat posed by *Zivilisation*. Mann believed that, from its habitual position as a cultural outsider, Germany had developed a history of "protesting" against encroachment by the West. The barbarian hordes, Luther, the Romantics; all were part of this tradition. Nevertheless, Germany had also been the ideological battleground of Europe. Geographically positioned between a rational Western Europe and a passionate Eastern Europe, Germany, like its burgher artists, occupied the space between two worlds.¹⁵⁶ Thus, for Mann, the "intellectual antitheses" of the entire continent were miniaturized within "the soul, the mind, and the heart of the individual German."¹⁵⁷ Consequently, he saw the German revolt against *Zivilisation* both as a rebellion against

¹⁵⁴ Mann pointed out that the burgher artist was literally the cultural mouthpiece of every German, and therefore was the embodiment of all Germans. He said, "German *Bürgerlichkeit* was always German humanity, freedom, and *Bildung*. The German burgher was really the German human being; and everything from above and below that strove for freedom and intellectuality, strove toward his center." Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 117.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., xliii, 347, 355-7.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.

the West and also as the result of a European-wide attempt to overcome the crisis of materialism.

According to Mann, the breakthrough came in the form of World War I. He claimed that the majority of Germans (himself included) viewed the war both as a chance to liberate the world from materialism and as an opportunity to realize their national destiny.¹⁵⁸ They all believed that, after crushing the Western enemies of *Kultur*, Germany would be reborn as the new world power. Yet, it would not be simply an economic or military power, as France and Britain had been; instead, it would become the first *Weltvolk des Geistes* (world-nation of the spirit).¹⁵⁹ The German people “had taken a long drink at the fountain of ambition” and believed that they alone possessed the positive values of modernity (progress, youth, genius, novelty) to move forward into a new age of *Kultur*.¹⁶⁰ Thus, Mann explained, “the indescribable uprising in the summer of 1914 was an uprising of belief, of unbounded readiness...”¹⁶¹ Its shockwaves “spread everywhere...awakening in every breast the most somber, the oldest, the simplest, and the strongest feelings.”¹⁶²

Nevertheless, there were those Germans who did not unite with their countrymen and, instead, took the side of Western Europe. Mann called these people *Zivilisationsliteraten*, or “literary men of civilization.” Far from being anti-German, these individuals were very patriotic and wanted to help Germany solve the social problems caused by industrialization. However, they thought the solution rested in the

¹⁵⁸ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 176.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 329, 346.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 141.

democratization and politicization of Germany, not realizing that the result would be the death of its uniquely nonpolitical spirit. It was this group (of which his own brother Heinrich was a member) that inspired Mann to define the nature of the German culture and to call for its preservation.¹⁶³

Mann understood that he was fighting a losing battle. By the time he completed *Betrachtungen* in 1918, the German war effort was failing and calls for democracy were rising among the masses. His final vision for Germany's future reflected this desperate situation. No longer did he entertain the possibility of victory. Instead he only hoped that Germany would somehow remain "unbeaten"; because if it could avoid total submission to the forces of the West, it might be able to salvage some facet of its unique culture.¹⁶⁴ Mann considered the creation of a *Volksstaat* as one possible avenue for preserving the German spirit; however, he was unsure whether such an institution could seriously represent the German national will (as it was intended to do).¹⁶⁵ In all probability it would devolve into a soulless Western democracy, in which case the "de-Germanization" of Germany was inevitable. Regardless of what the future held, Mann concluded his cogitations by restating his loyalty to the creative German spirit, even in the face of its destruction. And yet, he could not help but feel that, in analyzing Germany's nonpolitical culture, he had unintentionally contributed to its rationalization,

¹⁶³ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 15-33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 505-6.

¹⁶⁵ Mann's support for the *Volksstaat* was based on the fact that he viewed the democratization of Germany as inevitable and, therefore, some democratic form of government must be put in place. For Mann, the *Volksstaat* was the best possible choice under the circumstances because, as its proponents claimed, its primary purpose was to express the national will. Although he hoped that the *Volksstaat* would live up to these expectations and somehow preserve German culture, he believed it was more likely to end up a hollow, impersonal democratic government (like those in Western Europe). Ibid., 248-50, 363-4.

politicization, and degradation.¹⁶⁶ Thus, as he had done so many times before, Mann ended his work with the strong scent of irony and unresolved tension hanging in the air.

As with *Händler und Helden* and *Die deutsche Erhebung*, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* provides clues to understanding the extent to which unity existed among German intellectuals during World War I. For instance, Mann's description of German identity and the nature of World War I was almost indistinguishable from that of Sombart and Meinecke. Like them, Mann obtained his notion of the German spirit largely from the Idealist tradition; and as a result, he too described the German essence as ethereal, protean, and constantly shifting, developing, and evolving as it attempted to unite with the spiritual. All three authors believed that excessive exposure to the crass physical world was inimical to the German spirit, and that, in the years preceding World War I, Germany had witnessed a dangerous increase in materialism. For them, the war was a chance to confront this threat in one spectacular breakthrough moment. Nonetheless, they all agreed that the stakes in the conflict were incredibly high: victory would bring the revitalization of German culture and the dawning of a new age, but defeat would bring an end to the German way of life.

Despite these areas of consensus, Mann's message of political nonparticipation in *Betrachtungen* caused it to differ greatly from *Händler und Helden* and *Die deutsche Erhebung*. Most importantly, unlike Sombart and Meinecke, Mann did not believe that the state played an active role in the creation of German culture. He would have disagreed with Sombart's idea that a racially pure state was the highest expression of the

¹⁶⁶ In a chapter entitled "*Einkehr*" ("Soul-searching") Mann discusses his possible contributions to the *Zivilisationsliteraten* cause. Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 34-73.

German spirit.¹⁶⁷ For Mann, such a radically nationalistic state would have denied Germany's position as the ideological middleman of Europe. Like Meinecke, he believed that Germany could benefit from contact with certain cultural contributions of the West.¹⁶⁸ However, Mann's total rejection of Western democracy stood in clear contrast to Meinecke's "modernist" position.¹⁶⁹ Although both supported the creation of a *Volksstaat* to guard German culture, Mann did so with great reservation and only as a last resort.¹⁷⁰ In this way, his apprehension of state power resembled the view of the German Enlightenment thinkers that Meinecke had strongly criticized.¹⁷¹

Beyond Meinecke and Sombart, it is clear that many other German academics would have found Mann's nonpolitical position unacceptable. Unlike artists, who inhabited the periphery of society, German academics had obtained an elevated social standing by serving as advisors to the state. Consequently, they did not share Mann's ambivalence toward a seemingly remote Imperial government, nor could they echo his claim of "having no life or death interest" in its operations.¹⁷² But, as ironic as it may be, the artist's nonpolitical position still had political implications, which could easily become the source of conflict.

¹⁶⁷ However, an interesting similarity between the two existed in their notions of the burgher artist and the heroic entrepreneur. Mann himself mused on the fact that both he and Sombart had independently theorized that the German middle class was the creative force behind its national culture. Nonetheless, he called Sombart's synthesis of hero, merchant, and burgher "greatly exaggerated." Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 127.

¹⁶⁸ Mann especially admired the English contributions to the development of the novel. *Ibid.*, 439.

¹⁶⁹ See Ringer's discussion of the German mandarins' "modernist" and "orthodox" political positions, Introduction page 8.

¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that Mann gained his basic concept of *Volksstaat* from the general ideas that Meinecke and others members of the center and left had propagated during the war.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 2.

¹⁷² Mann reflected the feelings of most artists when he described the impersonal state as "a stern, wooden figure with a full black beard, with a star on his breast, and adorned with a mixture of military-academic titles that appropriately signified its power and legality: as *General Doktor von Staat*." Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 225-6.

Thus, it is evident that *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* provides another important element to understanding the nature of unity among German intellectuals during World War I. By comparing the nonpolitical perspective of Mann's war propaganda to the writings of Sombart and Meinecke a pattern becomes clear.

Regardless of a shared cultural identity, differing political views threatened to undermine any sense of real unity among German intellectuals. Exploring the implications of this discovery for the historiography of German intellectuals is all that remains.

Conclusion

Comparing the propagandistic wartime writings of Werner Sombart, Friedrich Meinecke, and Thomas Mann demonstrates that, during World War I, the German intellectual community was never as united as it appeared. The areas of cultural consensus that bound German intellectuals together in the first months of the war were destined to be overshadowed by political conflicts. Thus, like a microcosm of Imperial Germany, the intellectual community's sparkling exterior of strength and unanimity failed to conceal the fragmentation and disjointedness that existed just below the surface.

Nevertheless, the unity among German intellectuals during World War I was not entirely fictive. This study of three exemplary figures has demonstrated that Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann all exhibited the same conception of national identity, based largely on the German Idealist tradition. In their eyes, to be German was to be artistic, cultural, nationally oriented, constantly developing, and always focused on the spiritual realm. All of the authors agreed that the metaphysical nature of this identity made it vulnerable to the materialism of modern, industrial society. Likewise, they all maintained that the First World War was essentially a clash between German culture and Western materialism, thereby juxtaposing their own perceived identity with the values of Western Europe. Finally, they all believed that the war held great powers of rejuvenation and that, if Germany was able to survive such a trial by fire, it would rise from the ashes renewed, revived, and reborn.

Yet, despite their similar views on these cultural issues, a more extensive unanimity among Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann was prevented by their differing political inclinations. This fact becomes particularly evident when comparing the

authors' predictions for postwar Germany. While Sombart believed that Germany's future rested in a racially pure, authoritarian state, Meinecke envisioned a cosmopolitan, democratic nation-state. For his part, Mann only hoped for a state system that encouraged political nonparticipation. Thus, regardless of their shared desire for a revitalized Germany, the political views fueling their visions for the future were entirely incompatible with one another. Any attempt to attempt to bring these dreams to life would eventually lead to conflict.

The significance of these findings is manifold. By demonstrating the similarities between Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann's perceptions of national identity and the nature of World War I, this study shows that common rallying points existed among German intellectuals. Thus, it supports the belief among modern historians that the German intellectual community was largely united in the initial months of World War I. Furthermore, it also gives insights into the cultural ties that bound the intellectuals together. For example, Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann's description of a Germany poised to fulfill its national destiny revives Fritz Fischer's claim that Germans were united by their desire to become a world power. However, this study counters Fischer's picture by emphasizing the importance of political inclinations as a source of conflict within the German intellectual community. In this way, it echoes Fritz Ringer, Wolfgang Mommsen, Stefan Bruendel, and others who claim that, during the war, political differences drove a wedge into the German intellectual community and destroyed any feelings of harmony that might have existed. Moreover, it supports the notion among these same authors that this political factionalism carried over into the Weimar

government, crystallizing the division between the intellectuals on the left and right and weakening the ideological foundations of the fledgling republic.

There is still some uncertainty as to exactly when this split between intellectuals first occurred and what the primary catalyst might have been. Many historians believe that the 1916 relaxation of censorship on the discussion of war aims was a key moment because it allowed for controversy over specific future programs to erupt.¹⁷³ While this study does nothing to oppose such claims, it does demonstrate that comparing annexationist aims is not an entirely reliable method for gauging conflict among German intellectuals. As Sombart and Meinecke proved, individuals could express similar opinions on territorial expansion for entirely opposite political reasons. Additionally, although open disagreement among German intellectuals may not have manifested itself until 1916, it is obvious that tensions existed prior to that year. In particular, the cases of Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann demonstrate how a German intellectual's wartime propaganda was heavily influenced by his prewar political inclinations. Thus, it seems that while the political disputes occasioned by World War I ultimately divided the German intellectual community, the seeds of those conflicts had been planted long before the outbreak of war.

Once again, this is not to say that the unity that German intellectuals expressed at the beginning of the war was a total mirage. Clearly, the intellectuals in this study were unified in their desire to preserve the integrity of certain social, political, and cultural institutions. However, this was not a drive to maintain the status quo. As Mann said,

¹⁷³ See Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 158-165; and Mommsen, "German artists, writers and intellectuals and the meaning of war, 1914-1918" in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-38.

“Being conservative does not mean wanting to preserve everything that exists...Being conservative means wanting to keep Germany German.”¹⁷⁴ In the 1960’s and 1970’s, historians often failed to acknowledge this subtle but crucial distinction. Consequently, (whether intentionally or unintentionally) their accounts were inclined to portray German intellectuals as backward-looking proponents of the Imperial system.¹⁷⁵ This study separates itself from such conclusions by demonstrating that, within their wartime propaganda, German intellectuals advocated the creation of a new, more perfect German society. In this way, it resembles more recent accounts by Geoff Eley, David Blackbourn, Kevin Repp, Stefan Bruendel, and many others, all of whom have underlined the progressive aspects of Imperial Germany.¹⁷⁶

However, the conclusions drawn from this study are perhaps most significant in their affinities to Modris Eksteins’ *Rites of Spring*. In particular, they bolster Eksteins’ argument that the German people were basically future-oriented and believed that they possessed the attributes necessary to overcome the cultural stagnation of the modern,

¹⁷⁴ Mann, *Betrachtungen*, 189.

¹⁷⁵ See Fritz Fischer, *German’s Aims in the First World War* (trans. ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967, published in German under the title *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag und Druckerei GmbH, 1961); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “The spirit of 1914 and the ideology of a German Sonderweg,” in *Imperial Germany, 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, trans. Richard Deveson, (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1995), 205-216; George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: the Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study of the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

¹⁷⁶ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Steffan Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat: Die “Ideen von 1914” und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003); Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).

industrial age.¹⁷⁷ This examination of Sombart, Meinecke, and Mann has shown that these authors expressed such a sentiment time and again in their descriptions of the dynamic, forward-moving German spirit and its drive to free itself from the stultification of materialism. Furthermore, this study has illustrated how each man believed that the war was a creative, breakthrough moment and that the destruction it wrought would purify and revitalized Germany. Both of these points mirror Eksteins' observation that a belief in the power of creation through destruction pervaded intellectual discourse during the war. In Eksteins' account, these ideas became popularized in the years following World War I and ultimately resulted in Nazi Germany's nihilistic drive toward total devastation. While such claims lie beyond the immediate scope of this essay, it is still possible to relate its findings to the rise of Nazism in Germany.

The most apparent connection between the German intellectuals of this study and the proponents of Nazism was their shared desire to create a more perfect Germany. For both groups, this involved uniting the German *Volk* by establishing an environment in which their unique national attributes could flourish. Sombart's vision of a racially homogenous German state demonstrates how closely an intellectual's concept of this perfect environment could mirror that of the Nazis. Conversely, Meinecke's vision of a cosmopolitan nation-state bore almost no resemblance to the Third Reich. Nonetheless, Meinecke, Mann, and many other German intellectuals may have indirectly contributed to the rise of Nazism through their propaganda campaign during World War I. By

¹⁷⁷ Reinhart Koselleck has made interesting observations on the modern perception of movement and progress and its impact on the creation of utopian visions. He has argued that the introduction of the notion of progress to the human psyche has created a situation in which expectations for the future no longer need be based on past experiences but are utopian fantasies with no foundation in empirical reality. Reinhart Koselleck, *On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985).

zealously promoting German exceptionalism, they kindled the fires of a belief in racial superiority that was to burst into flames during the Third Reich. Furthermore, by propagating grandiose visions of national movements and spiritual revivals, they cultivated an intellectual environment that encouraged flights into fantasy and from which even more spectacular utopian visions could emerge. Finally, by advocating political non-participation they ultimately supported turning a blind eye as the Nazis gained increasing influence in the ailing Weimar system.¹⁷⁸

All of these aspects of the German intellectuals' propaganda campaign helped the Nazis to succeed where the intellectuals themselves had failed: whereas their efforts to sustain the unity of the "August experience" fell miserably short, the Nazis effectively garnered public support for their spurious message of cultural rejuvenation. There are numerous reasons why the intellectual community was unable to unite the German population, but this study has pointed out that internal conflict over political issues played a key role. As a community, German intellectuals sought to eliminate the social divisions of prewar Germany by initiating a cultural revival. However, their differing political inclinations led to the creation of competing visions for Germany's sociopolitical postwar future. Thus, any cultural consensus that the intellectuals shared at the beginning of the war was bound to unravel in the face of political conflicts. So, like Imperial Germany itself, the intellectual community's outer unity simply masked the fragmentation that existed below the surface. In the end, both would fall victim to these centrifugal forces.

¹⁷⁸ It should be noted that Mann was not among those individuals who ignored the political rise of Nazism. Instead, he abandoned his non-political stance in the years following World War I and became a fierce opponent of the Nazi regime.

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