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GERMAN WAR PHILOSOPHY

America and Her Allies Fight Not Only to Make the World Safe for Democracy,
but for Religion, Ethics and Civilization

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THE fundamental law that action is determined primarily by belief applies to groups as well as to individuals. We may understand the behavior of a nation under given conditions if we can know what it is thinking about, what it believes regarding the nature of the world, the meaning of life and the validity of the principles of righteousness and justice—in a word, if we know its philosophy.

It is often said that German philosophy was the cause of the war. But this responsibility cannot be imputed to that great movement of thought which began with Kant and culminated with Hegel, and which is usually called German philosophy. The results of this period of thinking now belong to the world, they cannot be regarded as the property of any one people. No justification can be found in Kant for the present German attitude, in fact, he was in some ways directly opposed to it. During the last half century Hegel has been studied more extensively, and probably more intensively, in England and the United States than in Germany. Hegel's philosophy was distinctly a system of rationalism and his ideal was to understand the world and to show that it was something reasonable.

Opposed to Hegel in many ways was the position in which the origins of the present German war philosophy may be found, the irrationalism of Schopenhauer. For him the solution of the problem of reality was found in the will, and the most marked characteristic of the will was the desire for life, *der Wille zum Leben*. This will to live, though, according to Schopenhauer, was a mere blind impulse, and the world that was the expression of its activity was essentially irrational. From the implications of this position were constructed the later beliefs that have become

the philosophy of the dominant element in Germany.

To Friedrich Nietzsche, brilliant writer and erratic thinker, this further development is due. Acknowledging his indebtedness to Schopenhauer, he goes far beyond the latter in the conclusions he draws from the fundamental position of irrationalism. Instead of Schopenhauer's will to live he considers the strongest instinct of mankind to be the will to power, *der Wille zur Macht*, and that this will in its manifestations knows no limits to that which may be allowed it. This doctrine is vividly expressed in the title of one of his books, "Beyond Good and Evil." The will to power is not limited by ethical considerations. For Nietzsche there are two types of moral codes, *die Herrenmoral* and *die Sklavenmoral*, the code of the master and the code of the slave. Will to power is will to rule and is manifested in its highest form in the rule of man over his fellow man. Christian ethics he identifies with *die Sklavenmoral*, the ethics of the weak, and expresses his scorn for those who are satisfied with it. To the strong man everything is allowable. Brutality and force are not only his right but his duty. The culmination of this doctrine appears in Nietzsche's ideal of the Superman, *der Uebermensch*, whose will is the only ethical standard.

Nietzsche's discussions never made quite clear whether he intended his doctrine of the Superman to apply simply to the individual or to include also the group. Heinrich von Treitschke, the historian, gave it the latter interpretation and made of it a political doctrine of the state. In his thought the Superman became the Supernation. Called to a professorship in the University of Berlin in 1876, for twenty years he preached to his auditors and

readers the doctrine of world domination. In his great work "*Die Politik*" he declared that the sin against the Holy Ghost of politics is weakness.

What Schopenhauer and Nietzsche taught as a philosophy and von Treitschke presented as a political doctrine, General von Bernhardt translates into the practical terms of military theory. In his now famous book, "Germany and the Next War" he presents the unconcealed and unadorned doctrines that might makes right and that the strong nation takes what it wants. He urges upon the German people that it is not only their right but their duty to make war. "Might is at once the supreme right, and the dispute as to what is right is decided by the arbitrament of war." In the next war "France must be so completely crushed that she can never again come across our path" and "'World power or downfall' will be our rallying cry."

This philosophy of irrationalism and force has not been generally accepted by the academic philosophers in Germany. Neither Schopenhauer nor Nietzsche had any considerable following in the universities, and Schopenhauer himself made a brilliant failure of his attempt at university teaching. The professors of philosophy easily detected the discrepancies and contradictions in the positions of both writers, and thinkers like Windelband realized clearly the dangers to the German people that were involved in Nietzsche's theories. It is possible even that the ideals of Nietzsche, von Treitschke and von Bernhardt have not been the ideals of the majority of the German people. The important fact is that this philosophy is to-day the accepted philosophy of the dominant element in the German Empire. The Pan-Germans have left us in no doubt regarding their ambition of world domination, and more than once the Kaiser has voiced these Pan-German aspirations.

Since 1914 the spokesmen of the German ruling class have repeatedly insisted that Germany is fighting a defensive war, but their assertions have probably deceived few intelligent persons outside of Germany. That the methods which this dominant class have adopted for the attainment of their ends are in direct accord with the *Herrenmoral* of Nietzsche and the "might is right" theory of von Bernhardt, is evident both from the German

methods of warfare and from the utterances of the official representatives of Germany. It is the acceptance of this philosophy that constitutes to-day the most terrible indictment of the leaders of Germany. Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg in his speech in the Reichstag Aug. 4, 1914 said, "We are now in a state of necessity of self-preservation, and necessity knows no law." On May 31, 1915, in an interview with Carl Ackerman regarding the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Secretary of State von Jagow said, "America can hardly expect us to give up any means at our disposal to fight our enemy. It is a principle with us to defend ourselves in every possible way." and the Kaiser, in the telegram to President Wilson, which he gave to Ambassador Gerard on Sept. 14, 1914, wrote the words, "Belgian neutrality, which had to be violated by Germany on strategic grounds." It would be difficult to imagine a more definite recognition and acceptance of the doctrine that military necessity, viz: the will of the strong, takes the place of righteousness and justice.

It has been claimed by German writers that the philosophy of Nietzsche was not responsible for the war, and that von Bernhardt was an obscure and unimportant author. It may be. It is possible that Nietzsche stands in the same relation to the present war that Schopenhauer held to two important periods in earlier European history. The main work of the latter, "The World as Will and Idea," published in 1819, had as its outstanding features his doctrine of the will and his position of pessimism. For nearly thirty years the work failed to attract attention. It was only after the revolutions of 1848 that Schopenhauer was hailed by many as the great pessimist. His popularity at this time, though, did not mean that he had persuaded his readers to be pessimists, but rather that those who had become pessimists because of the failure of the revolutions, discovered in his writings an adequate expression of their own mental attitude. Again, after the Franco-Prussian war, when the German nation awoke to the realization of its power, it found in Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will as the fundamental reality, a philosophical expression of the position which it had reached by less theoretical means. So it may be that Nietzsche's philosophy is only an expression of an attitude of mind that the rul-

ing class in Germany have reached by other paths. The history of Prussia gives much color to this theory. Frederick the Great was an apt pupil of Machiavelli. Bismarck's doctrine of *Blut und Eisen* was a valuable model for the Prussian ruthlessness of to-day, and his falsification of the Ems telegram was as good an illustration of "strategical necessity" as the violation of Belgian neutrality.

How extensively the German war philosophy is accepted in Germany would be difficult to determine. Its significance is due not to the extent of its acceptance but, as previously suggested, to the fact that those who have openly advocated it represent the ruling class in Germany, the class that to-day is responsible for the destinies of the German Empire. We have heard much of the Reichstag as the popular assembly in Germany. We hear little of the Bundesrat, probably because its proceedings are in secret, but it has the real governing power. Its members, 61 in number, are the personal representatives of the rulers of the German states, and they vote simply as they are instructed by these rulers. Most legislation originates in the Bundesrat. All legislation must have its approval. Of the 61 votes, Prussia controls 17 directly and of course, many more indirectly. No change can be made in the constitution of the Empire if there are 14 votes against it. Thus the Kaiser as King of Prussia can personally prevent any modification in the German form of government, and the small ruling class, composed largely of the nobility, can, by the absolute veto power which the Bundesrat has over the Reichstag, prevent any legislation that would be unfavorable to its interests.

The ruling class in Germany has committed itself so completely to the doctrine of "military necessity" that it has apparently lost the power to appreciate the attitude of mind of those who still believe in the validity of principles of righteousness and justice. Upon this class rests the responsibility for the fact that Germany stands to-day before the civilized nations of the world a moral bankrupt. This moral blindness was manifested by Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg in an interview in Sept., 1914. "It is true," he said, "that we have broken Belgium's neutrality because bitter necessity compelled us to do so, but we promised Belgium full indemnity and integrity if she

would take account of this necessity." He was apparently surprised that a nation should decline to accept Germany's promise of indemnity for the damage done by Germany while violating a previous promise, in which the national honor of Germany had been pledged. The tragedy of the situation and the sufficient answer to the German war philosophy has been well expressed by the really great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In his treatise "To Eternal Peace," published in 1795, in which he discussed the conditions under which lasting peace may be hoped for, he writes, "No state in time of war shall undertake such hostilities as would make impossible a mutual confidence in a future peace. Even in the midst of the war some confidence in the mental processes of the enemy must remain, else no peace can be concluded." The judgment suggested by Kant has been clearly expressed by President Wilson in his statement that it is not possible to enter into negotiations with the present rulers of Germany.

The German war philosophy is a menace to the world. The triumph of Germany would fasten upon Europe, and eventually upon the rest of the world, the doctrine that might makes right; it would banish from the world the principles of righteousness, justice and truth. The issue involves not only ethics but religion. It is one of the tragedies of history that the land that gave Luther and the Protestant Reformation to the world should to-day be under the rule of an autocracy that exercises a rigid censorship over press and pulpit equally. Even outside of Germany there are suggestions of the malign influence of the Prussian philosophy. The recent peace note of the Pope was a striking illustration. Whether or not it was written under the influence, direct or indirect, of Germany, the sad fact remains that the head of one of the great branches of the Christian church presented to the warring nations a plea for peace in which there was not a suggestion that there was such a thing as moral responsibility or that the war involved such an issue as justice.

We are fighting, as President Wilson has said, to make the world safe for democracy, but the issue is even greater than this. We are fighting to make the world safe for ethics and religion. We are fighting for our very civilization itself.