Heinrich von Treitschke | Creating a German national mission

Johnathan Bruce Kilgour

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HEINRICH VON TREITSCHKE:
CREATING A GERMAN NATIONAL MISSION

by

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B.A. Colby College, 2001

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

2004

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12-13-04

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A nation’s sense of its history greatly influences the way that it perceives its role in the world. In nineteenth-century Europe, many national historians glorified their nations’ past, often portraying their fellow countrymen as a chosen people with a special mission. In Germany, one historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, had a great impact on the way that Germans envisioned their nation’s history and national mission.

At the time of his death in 1896, Treitschke held conservative political views and expressed strong enthusiasm for imperialistic and militaristic policies. Treitschke had not always entertained such right-wing opinions. As a youth he actually harbored liberal sympathies. Under the influence of thinkers like Hegel and Machiavelli, however, Treitschke shifted from a liberal idealism to a narrowly defined realism. In the process he developed a coherent vision of Germany’s national mission.

Treitschke presented his interpretation of German history in his university lectures and in his *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*. He portrayed the German Reformation as a rebellion from the spiritual tyranny of Rome and as an act that made Germany a leader of humanity. This role as a crusader for intellectual freedom coupled with the strength of the Prussian state entitled Germany, so he argued, to a position of world hegemony.

Treitschke influenced many Germans, but perhaps none more so than General Friedrich von Bernhardi. Writing after Treitschke’s death, Bernhardi appealed to aspects of Treitschke’s national mission to add authority to his own imperialistic and militaristic agenda.

Finally, this paper points out that Treitschke’s and Bernhardi’s theories reflected greater European trends of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism. Their work was not peculiarly German. They had counterparts in most European countries.
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INTRODUCTION

NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL HISTORY
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Following the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, British and American scholars issued a deluge of translations of works by a German historian named Heinrich von Treitschke. In 1915, Eden and Cedar Paul published the first volume of their translation of Treitschke's *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, followed by volume two in 1916, volume three in 1917, volume four in 1918, and volumes five and six in 1919. In 1916, Blanche Dugdale and Torben de Bille published their translation of Treitschke's two-volume *Politics*. The titles of these works appeared harmless enough, but their translators and other commentators in Britain and America concluded that the ideas within them were threatening and offensive.

After examining the work of Treitschke, American and British scholars concluded that he was largely to blame not only for German imperialism and militarism, but also for the war itself. Charles Sarolea stated in his 1917 *German Problems and Personalities* that "more than any other thinker...Treitschke must be held responsible for the catastrophe" of World War I.\(^1\) He pointed to the "enormous influence of Treitschke on his countrymen" and wrote, "Since 1914 he has become a household name and a name of evil import."\(^2\) In a 1914 book titled *Why We Are At War*, a group of Oxford professors offered more hostile criticisms of Treitschke, "whose lectures on *Politik* have become a gospel."\(^3\) "The whole philosophy seems paganism," wrote the professors, "or rather barbarism, with a moral veneer."\(^4\)

Joining Treitschke as a target for Western attacks was the German General Friedrich von Bernhardi, a man whose books on military theory had earned him wide

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2 Ibid., 103-104.
4 Ibid., 113.
professional acclaim, but who had also published several highly politicized works in the years prior to World War I. As they did with Treitschke's books, English-speaking bookstores stocked their shelves with translations of Bernhardi's chief works. Editions of his books—with titles such as *Germany and the Next War*, *Britain as Germany's Vassal*, and *How Germany Makes War*—became available in the United States and Britain in 1914 and 1915.

Anglo-Saxon critics reacted to Bernhardi just as they did to Treitschke by damning him as a prophet of war. In a 1915 book entitled *The War Lords*, A.G. Gardiner called Bernhardi's *Germany and the Next War* an example of "the strange mentality of Prussia which has so baffled the world."\(^5\) Bernhardi was "the prophet of war."\(^6\) Gardiner explained that the Germans "have become obsessed by an idea, the idea of racial supremacy, of 'Kultur' imposed by the sword in the interests of the inferior types."\(^7\) For Gardiner, who was blind to British efforts to take up the "white man's burden," Great Britain represented the defender of liberty and democracy. In contrast, the mentality of Germany "[was] all Force, Force, Force, soulless and cruel and barbaric."\(^8\)

While Germany's enemies in the First World War certainly exaggerated the ideas of Treitschke and Bernhardi and used them as potent pieces of propaganda, their accusations were not wholly inaccurate, as these two writers certainly were at least in part responsible for the chauvinistic, imperialistic, and militaristic sentiments that permeated parts of German society before the Great War. While impossible to quantify, Treitschke's influence on the mind of Imperial Germany was undeniable. "It is scarcely

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\(^6\) Ibid., 265.
\(^7\) Ibid., 252.
\(^8\) Ibid., 263.
possible,” observes Paul Kennedy, “to go through the memoirs of the Wilhelmine Right without encountering some reference to the impact which Treitschke had made upon their formative thoughts.” Among those who expressed their debt to Treitschke were men no less influential than Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, as well as Bernhardi.

In the minds—or at least in the words—of Western propagandists, Treitschke and Bernhardi were not regarded simply as two men among many who had a hand in influencing a part of German society’s conceptions of itself and the world around it. According to Anglo-Saxon critics, these two men had single-handedly indoctrinated the German nation with their radical ideas. German pacifists, liberals, and others who reacted unfavorable to Treitschke and Bernhardi were entirely ignored as the West painted a picture of German society as a uniform product of Treitschke’s teachings. Some Britons and Americans at least presented—and perhaps truly believed—that Germans were indeed “peculiar” in comparison with their Western counterparts. The chauvinism and militarism present in Treitschke’s and Bernhardi’s publications were viewed as an aberration in Western Civilization.

Of course, in its enthusiasm for militarism and imperialism the German nation was by no means unique in Europe. Nationalistic extremism like that of Treitschke’s and Bernhardi’s infected most, if not all, European nation-states. Britons gloriéd in their empire, upon which the sun never set. Pan-Slavism captured the attention of many Russians and Slavs in other Eastern European states. France witnessed the tirades of Paul Déroulède and the rise of a substantial revanchist faction within its government.

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In such a climate of national enthusiasm, historians were not immune from the popular mood. Nineteenth-century historians produced a high number of national histories, many of them epic in length and stylistically beautiful. While many of these historians portrayed their respective nations as specially unique, they shared several common methods and objectives. Each historian saw his own nation as a chosen people, as a culture somehow superior, either culturally, politically, or spiritually, to all others. Nationalist historians often interpreted their nations' supposed peculiarities as justifications for various national missions. Finally, these historians all sought to glorify their nations' pasts in an effort to rally popular support for national policies in the present, an exercise that often led them to portray falsely aspects of their nations' past.

In France, Jules Michelet made no attempt to disguise his goal of writing a French national epic, at one point remarking that he envisioned his *Histoire de la Révolution française*, completed in 1853, as "an epic poem with the people as the hero."\(^\text{10}\) Michelet devoted much time to celebrating the accomplishments of the French Revolution. One historian has written that Michelet regarded the Revolution as "an epic of liberty and a crusade for the emancipation of the people,"\(^\text{11}\) while another has described his work as a "hymn to the glories of France as the principal actor in the drama of liberty."\(^\text{12}\) Often noted for its stylistic brilliance, Michelet's work assigned to France a glorious national mission as the deliverer of liberty to the oppressed peoples of the world. Voltaire and Rousseau appeared as "twin apostles of humanity," and for Michelet the Revolution was


by far the greatest historical event ever: “She came not as a nation but as Justice, Eternal Reason, demanding nothing of men but that they should realize their own highest aspirations.”

In Britain, several historians also glorified aspects of their nation’s past. Described by one author as a “volcanic secular prophet,” Thomas Carlyle set out in his 1845 *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches, with Elucidations* “to vindicate both the character and the policy of his hero.” In this four-volume work Carlyle presented Cromwell as a “Hero-King” who made great personal sacrifices for the good of his nation. F.R. Flournoy concludes that Carlyle succeeded in rectifying the then overly critical perception of Cromwell, but in doing so he grossly overcompensated, sanctifying the man to an unbelievable degree:

The Cromwell of Carlyle was always right in his policies. His brutalities were explained away or approved. Those who differed with him, whether Royalists, Fifth Monarchy Men, or simple Republicans, were subjected to vicious ridicule.

A disciple of Carlyle’s and “one of the most intensely nationalistic of English historians,” James Anthony Froude glorified British history after the style of his teacher in his *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the defeat of the Armada*, completed in 1870. The work had great “pictorial power” and “captivated the reading public,” but was ultimately marred by its author’s strong Protestant bias. Froude portrayed the English Reformation as a “[fight] for truth, honesty, and private judgment against

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13 Michelet quoted in Gooch, 174.
14 Harold T. Parker, “Thomas Carlyle,” in Boia, 190.
15 Gooch, 306.
17 Ibid., 40.
18 Barnes, 219.
19 Parker, "James Anthony Froude," in Boia, 198.
priestcraft and ecclesiastical tyranny."^20 For Froude, the English Reformation marked the beginning of England's rise to national greatness. Ultimately, though, Froude failed to curb his own biases. Gooch concludes that his "lack of impartiality...excludes [him] from the first rank of historians."^22

Perhaps the best known of the British national historians was Thomas Babington Macauley, who was a formative influence on Treitschke. Known for his literary ability, Macauley once declared that "[t]o be a really great historian...was perhaps the rarest of intellectual distinctions."^23 In his extremely popular History of England from the Accession of James the Second, completed in 1855 in four volumes, Macauley portrayed the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as one of the greatest moments of history. Writing in the wake of the revolutions of 1848, Macauley saw the English Revolution as a model for all revolutions:

It was a revolution strictly defensive. In almost every word and act may be discerned a profound reverence for the past. Of all revolutions the least violent, it has been of all revolutions the most beneficent. Its highest eulogy is that it was our last revolution.^24

The historian lauded the efforts of William III, portraying him as a man who sacrificed all self-interest for the "interests of Protestant Europe." Ultimately, Macauley's History was, in the words of Gooch, "a paean to the Revolution and to its principal author."^25

Enthusiasm for national history also found expression in Russia, where it was one of the few types of literature permitted under the repressive censorship of the

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21 Gooch, 311.
22 Ibid., 314.
23 Ibid., 277.
24 Macauley quoted in Gooch, 283.
25 Gooch, 88.
Romanovs.\textsuperscript{26} Russia’s first significant national historian, Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, completed his twelve-volume \textit{History of the Russian State} in 1824. Early in his life Karamzin had entertained liberal political inclinations, but as he aged his politics grew increasingly conservative and he developed strongly Slavophile and “conservative [nationalist]” views.\textsuperscript{27} In his \textit{History} “[H]e depict[ed] the early princes as absolute rulers, and present[ed] Ivan III, who freed Russia from the Tartars, as the ideal monarch.” Gooch observes that Karamzin’s work “has been called the epic of despotism.”\textsuperscript{28} Throughout the work, the Russian historian argued “that autocracy alone had bestowed all the blessings that the Russian Empire had ever enjoyed.”\textsuperscript{29}

Of course, enthusiasm for national history took hold in Germany as well. German historians, however, faced a dilemma that other European historians did not. As Germany did not exist as a national state until 1871, the Prussian school of German historians—Heinrich von Sybel, Johann Gustav Droysen, and Heinrich von Treitschke—wrote highly politicized accounts of the German past directed at harnessing national enthusiasm in support of German unification, which they all deeply desired. This trend was so apparent among these three historians that they are often referred to as the “political school,” an apt characterization considering these historians considered history to be a political device to affect policy in the present and future.

What these historians wanted to change was the political structure of Germany agreed upon by the delegates at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. Chiefly orchestrated by the Austrian foreign minister Klemens von Metternich, the Congress

\textsuperscript{26} Barnes, 224.
\textsuperscript{28} Gooch, 414.
\textsuperscript{29} Mazour, 66.
pursued as a primary aim the restoration of the continental equilibrium to a semblance of its eighteenth-century balance of power. To recreate the pre-Revolutionary balance, Metternich and his fellow delegates determined that Central Europe had to remain divided and established in the middle of Europe the German Confederation, or Bund, described by one historian as “a loose federation of thirty-five monarchical states and four city republics,” two of which were Austria and Prussia. The creation of the Bund in June of 1815 effectively left Central Europe in a state of political disunity.

Henry Kissinger has written that Metternich’s primary concern “was the construction of the strong Central Europe which he considered the condition of European stability and Austrian security.” To maintain a stable Central Europe, Metternich ensured a dominant position for Austria within the Bund. He could only do this, explains Kissinger,

by creating a political structure which would by its inner logic have to rely on Austrian support; by calling into being a multiplicity of sovereignties which would have a joint interest with Austria in frustrating the twin movement of nationalism and liberalism.

Kissinger identifies Metternich’s two primary political goals as the paralysis of “the two powers he considered revolutionary, Russia in Europe and Prussia in Germany.” The Austrian statesman worked to thwart Prussia’s potential as a nationalizing force in Germany: “fear of the national mission of Prussia became the unifying element within the German Confederation under Austria’s tutelage.”

By 1818 Metternich had achieved his goal of a stable Central Europe dominated

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32 Ibid., 232.
33 Ibid., 233.
34 Ibid., 235.
politically by Austria. Nationalist and revolutionary sentiment did persist, though, as evidenced by Karl Sand’s murder of the journalist Kotzebue, suspected of spying for tsarist Russia, in 1818. This event gave the Austrian statesman a pretext for repressing civil liberties, such as freedom of the press, which European statesmen debated at Karlsbad in August of 1818. The resulting Karlsbad Decrees, “railroaded through the Frankfurt Diet” on September 20, 1819,\(^\text{35}\) included measures for censorship of the press and regulation of German universities, with the ultimate aim of “seperat[ing] Prussia from German nationalism” and “paralys[ing] the efforts of certain Prussian statesman…to ally Prussia with German liberalism.”\(^\text{36}\) Kissinger explains that the Karlsbad Decrees “ended, for the time being, the dream of a unified Germany.”\(^\text{37}\)

By 1848 the frustrations of German liberals living under Metternich’s repression coalesced with social and political tensions triggered by the initial stages of European industrialization, creating a volatile situation in Germany that erupted in revolt in March of that year. The 1848ers primarily sought the creation of a German national state, seeing national unification as a vehicle for achieving desperately sought political freedoms. "Deutschland über Alles," which was written in 1841 but would become the future national anthem of a united Germany, reflects several of the goals of the 1848 revolutionaries. One line reads, “Let us strive fraternally for unity, law, and liberty with heart and hand.”\(^\text{38}\)

In the "Vormärz," the period leading up to the revolution, German liberals had begun to regard national unity and state power as perquisites for liberal political

\(^{35}\) Holborn, Modern Germany 2: 466.
\(^{36}\) Kissinger, 241-243.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 244.
demands. The first thinker to publicize such views was Paul Pfizer, a Swabian, who in 1831-32 argued in his *Correspondence Between Two Germans* that a “constitutional system...could achieve its full liberalizing results only by turning a culturally united people into a political nation.” Pfizer added that any movement for liberal reforms and national unity would require a certain degree of power, which he believed could only come from the Prussian state. Pfizer was one of the first intellectuals to assign Prussia a nationalizing mission, but the desire for a Prussian-led unification of Germany soon became the dominant theme of many German liberals.

One German liberal who shared Pfizer’s conviction that only power could ensure national unity and liberal reforms was Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, who, severely disillusioned after the aborted 1848 revolution, proclaimed in the Frankfurt Assembly on January 22, 1849,

The path of power is the only one that will satisfy and appease the fermenting impulse to freedom—for it is not solely freedom that the German is thinking of, it is rather power, which has hitherto been refused him, and after which he hankers.

Dahlmann soon became the leading advocate of the Prussian-led unification of Germany. The “spiritual father” of the Prussian school of German historians, Dahlmann instilled in his students the belief that historical writing “must lead in the present, if possible with stronger current than the Rhine.” Dahlmann’s teaching, all hoped to “prove” Prussia’s destiny as the national unifier of Germany by finding evidence of a Prussian “mission” in the past.

Johann Gustav Droysen, born in 1808 in Pomerania, held professorships at Kiel,

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Jena, and Berlin. A liberal early in life, Droysen served in the Frankfurt Assembly of 1848 and was a member of the “moderate liberal ‘Casino’ group or ‘Erbkaiserpartei,’” the supporters of a hereditary emperor. Over time, however, Droysen shifted to the right politically, “finally even vindicat[ing] the starken Machtstaat, thus justifying imperialism, militarism, and the oppression of political opposition.” In the spirit of the Prussian school, Droysen dutifully espoused the conviction that Prussia’s historical mission was to unify all of Germany under the Hohenzollern crown. Two of his early works—*Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen* (1833) and *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1843)—attempted to draw a parallel between Alexander and Macedonia on the one hand and the Hohenzollern monarchy and Prussia on the other. Droysen believed that Alexander’s conquest of Greece could serve as a model for Prussia’s unification of Germany. In his “Memorial of a Schleswig-Holsteiner,” Droysen, the Pomeranian native, wrote that Prussia could not allow Austria to act as the strongest power in Germany.

The second historian of the Prussian school, Heinrich von Sybel, was born in Düsseldorf in 1817 and held chairs at Bonn, Marburg, and Munich, before he began overseeing the Prussian archives in Berlin in 1875. In 1859 he founded the *Historische Zeitschrift*, which he edited until his death in 1895 and which has since become a major journal of German historiography. Like Droysen, Sybel advocated a Prussian-led unification of Germany, excluding Austria. In “The German Nation and the Empire”

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44 Blanke, 274.
45 Gooch, 127-129.
Sybel called for the removal of Austria from German affairs, writing, "As sure as the stream flows forward, Germany will form a close union under the lead of its strong member."^47 Of course, he saw Prussia as the "strong member." In 1894 Sybel finished his seven-volume Foundation of the German Empire by William I, which one historian has called "a highly partisan defense of Bismarck's politics and diplomacy,"^48 and another "an apologetic vindication of Bismarck's policies."^49

Perhaps more than the other members of the Prussian school, Treitschke, the youngest of the three historians, took Dahlmann's words—history "must lead in the present"^50—to heart. Treitschke devoted his life and scholarly career, which are discussed in detail below, to the single goal of German national unity. His essays and lectures prior to 1871 vigorously advocated the need for a German state unified under the aegis of Prussia. Following unification, Treitschke modified his message slightly to account for the creation of the German Empire, but the same dominant themes remained until his death in 1896.

What Treitschke accomplished was nothing less than the creation of a coherent national ideology for the German people. In The Idea of Nationalism,^51 Hans Kohn has provided a rich definition of nationalism and its necessary components, all of which Treitschke presented in his History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century and his Politics. Kohn argues that the ancient Hebrews were the first people to really develop a sense of nationhood and nationalism. Regarding themselves as a chosen people, they

^47 Heinrich von Sybel quoted in Gooch, 131.
^48 Barnes, 211.
^49 Schleier, 317.
^50 Dahlmann quoted in Bussmann, 34.
shared a common history and a missionary or messianic zeal. In his main historical work, the *German History*, the first volume of which was published in 1879, Treitschke sought to give the German nation, which had only recently been united under one sovereign, a sense of a common national history, “the fundamental condition of national consciousness.”\(^5\)

Treitschke also presented the German people as a chosen people. With Luther’s Reformation, the German nation became a “new Israel.” Other scholars have emphasized the importance of a sense of “chosenness” to any national consciousness and nationalism. In her work on British nationalism Linda Colley has argued that this sentiment was crucial to the genesis of British national consciousness. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britons thought of their nation as a “Protestant Israel.”\(^5\)

More than anything else, though, Treitschke established for Germany a sense of national mission, something that Hannah Arendt has called “the most dangerous concept of nationalism.”\(^5\) He commanded his fellow countrymen to devote their energies to bolstering the power of the German state and asserting themselves as a world power. He found justification for such a mission in the German past, particularly in the traditions of the Prussian state and the Hohenzollern dynasty. Through a policy of imperial expansion, perhaps violent in nature, Treitschke wanted Germany to rise to a hegemonic position not just in Europe, but also in the world, just as Prussia had asserted itself as the hegemon in Germany. Treitschke’s message found a receptive audience in men like Friedrich von Bernhardi and other members of the radical right who could look to Treitschke to legitimize their own adventurous plans.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 35.


CHAPTER ONE

TREITSCHKE'S LIFE AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT:
IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL MISSION
Treitschke, described by G.P. Gooch as "[t]he youngest, greatest and last of the Prussian School" and as the historian who "most completely embodies the blending of history and politics which it is the aim of the school to achieve," was perhaps the greatest culprit in falsifying German history. Andreas Dorpalen has called Treitschke the "most vocal" representative of the Prussian school, an accurate qualification considering Treitschke spent the majority of his career as a historian shrilly espousing the national mission of Prussia, and, once unification had been achieved, the national mission of Germany. In his efforts to bolster claims of a German national mission, Treitschke revealed his chauvinistic enthusiasm for imperialistic and militaristic policies, as well as his exaggerated emphasis on the importance of the state.

The German historian had not always held such views, however, nor had he always been so sure of Prussia's destiny as the defender of all "German" interests. In 1848, while only fourteen years old and too young to take part in the revolution, Treitschke watched the events unfold in his home city of Dresden. An adolescent with liberal sympathies, he desperately hoped for the adoption of the proposed liberal constitution. After 1848, however, Treitschke's political views changed greatly from his youthful liberal idealism. The formative intellectual influences of Treitschke's life pushed him increasingly to the right of the political spectrum toward a narrowly nationalistic realism. As he evolved intellectually, Treitschke increasingly defined his political goals as national unification at any and all costs and, with ever growing intensity, he called on the Prussian state to complete this mission.

Born into a military family, Heinrich von Treitschke was born on September 15, 1834 in Dresden in Saxony. Eduard von Treitschke, Heinrich's father, made his living in

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1 Gooch, 138.
the military; he had become a lieutenant in the Saxon army fighting against Napoleon’s forces in the Wars of Liberation. Treitschke’s grandfather had even served under George Washington in the American Revolution. By 1834, Eduard had risen to the rank of general. He had been born a commoner, but was knighted by the Saxon king prior to Heinrich’s birth. An avowed Saxon, not a German nationalist, Eduard generally opposed efforts toward German unification, especially under the yoke of the hated Prussians.

Eduard von Treitschke was also devoutly Protestant, an aspect of his character that would lead to many disputes with his son.

As a child, Heinrich suffered from poor health and began to go deaf at an early age, an affliction that prevented him from following his father’s career in the military. Dorpalen has addressed the impact of Treitschke’s deafness—he was virtually completely deaf when he died in 1896—upon his political ideas. As he grew older and his affliction worsened, Treitschke lost the ability to comprehend completely reactions to his extreme statements. He was unable to truly see his “effect upon his audiences” and his deafness “cut [him] off from exchanges of views.” It would be impossible to quantify the impact Treitschke’s handicap made on his intellectual development, but there can be no doubt that Treitschke’s deafness was a significant influence on the evolution of his political and social worldview, a factor that most historians have probably underestimated.

Treitschke spent his youth in conservative Dresden. As the young Saxon developed political and social views independent of his family’s, his increasing liberalism and nationalism led to much feuding between Heinrich and his family, who remained

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3 Ibid., 2.
defenders of the old order. Disputes between the younger and elder Treitschke became especially intense. In spite of the conservative and anti-Prussian sentiments of his family—or perhaps because of and in rebellion against them—Treitschke developed very independent political views. He once wrote,

I was brought up in the atmosphere of the Court of Dresden, in circles whose political idea was hatred of Prussia. If therefore I think highly of Prussia, this conviction is at least the fruit of independent study.5

Ultimately, even Heinrich's decision to pursue a career as a historian spawned the ridicule of family members, who did not regard an academic career as a suitable endeavor for nobility. Adolf Hausrath, a friend of Treitschke's, wrote in his biography of the historian that one of Heinrich's relatives once suggested "the stable career" (taking care of horses) as a suitable alternative to military service, a remark for which Heinrich never forgave him.6

Treitschke was first exposed to liberal and nationalist ideas when he entered the public Holy Cross Gymnasium in 1846. "For the first time the boy learned something of the aspirations of the national and liberal movements," explains Dorpalen. "His history teacher spoke to him about the power and glory of a united Germany. Other instructors aroused his interest in their efforts to obtain a liberalization of Saxony's government."7

As mentioned above, Treitschke was too young to participate in the revolutions of 1848, but the events did not go unnoticed. One of his gymnasium teachers was even active as a leader in the revolution.8 As he watched the revolutionary activity Treitschke "was torn between his hope for an acceptance of the constitution and his hostility toward the

5 Heinrich von Treitschke, Briefe ii, no. 428, quoted in Davis, 1.
6 Adolf Hausrath, Treitschke, His Doctrine of German Destiny and of International Relations, Together with a Study of his Life and Work (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 42.
7 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 5.
8 Davis, 2.
elements which supported it."9 The Saxon King Frederick Augustus's ultimate refusal to accept a constitution appalled Treitschke.10

Eventually, the Saxon government had to request the aid of the Prussians to quell the revolt, an experience that helped convince Treitschke that German unification could only be brought about by a powerful Prussia.11 In a lecture delivered to his classmates at Holy Cross, he "vindicated the services of Prussia to the cause of German unity."12 Dorpalen notes that the "vacillations of the Saxon king" during the revolutions aroused in Treitschke nothing but scorn.13 He was appalled by Saxony's dependence on its stronger neighbor. A letter to his father reveals that even as a youth of fourteen, Treitschke had begun to develop a serious aversion to small states and their political impotence, a sentiment that would become one of the major themes of his mature thought. "Wretched, wretched," he wrote, "is it to see how Saxony waits and waits till the decision comes, in order then to set her sails to the wind and humbly join the victorious side."14

In April of 1851, shortly after graduating from high school, Treitschke left his native Saxony to begin his university studies at Bonn,15 where he was exposed to two great influences that helped confirm his conviction in Prussia's national mission and also pushed his political views farther to the right. Perhaps most importantly, at Bonn Treitschke met Dahlmann, who supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy for Germany and political unification under Prussian leadership.16 In his study of

9 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 8.
10 Davis, 2.
11 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 9.
12 Davis, 3.
13 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 8.
15 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 12.
16 Davis, 3.
Treitschke's intellectual development, Walter Bussmann has written that Dahlmann made the greatest "human" impression on Treitschke. From Dahlmann Treitschke acquired a belief that "conviction" was a legitimate base for political and historical judgment. Dahlmann’s *Politik*, published in 1835, stated that political negotiation must derive from conviction, and that government officials should “not be the advocates of an assignment, they should be the representatives of a political conviction.” Moreover, Dahlmann instilled in Treitschke the belief that historical writing “must lead in the present, if possible with stronger current than our Rhine.”

At Bonn Treitschke was certainly exposed to the Anglophilic views of Dahlmann. Charles McClelland has assigned Dahlmann to a group of German “constitutionalists,” who “looked upon England as an elder brother to be emulated or at least admired.” These constitutionalists, who also included Friedrich Murhard and Karl von Rotteck, consistently expressed several common themes. First, they envisioned the British political system as the embodiment of Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, with legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government all checking the power of the others. McClelland maintains that Dahlmann always held the false image of Britain as a “great, strong, balanced constitutional monarchy.” The second theme of this school of historians, and also a second misconception, saw the British monarchy as the ultimate power within the state. They failed to recognize the dominant position of the British Parliament, and envisioned “a strong king, of course, to guarantee social justice within

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17 Bussmann, 33.
19 Treitschke in *Preussische Jahrbücher* 7 (1861), quoted in Bussmann, 34.
21 Ibid., 72.
the system."^22

Early in his academic career Treitschke shared Dahlmann’s and the constitutionalists’ admiration of Great Britain and her political system. In 1852, while still at Bonn, the liberal Treitschke expressed great enthusiasm for the English constitution: “I derive great pleasure from it because it is a subject which necessarily awakens admiration and enthusiasm.”^23 Macauley’s—“whose judgment was swift and simple”—and other Whig histories of England further aroused Treitschke’s admiration and contributed to his belief that “conviction” was a legitimate foundation for historical assessment.^24 Treitschke called Macauley’s History of England a “splendid book, a magnificent conception of history.” He “could think for hours about a single phrase tossed out by Macauley.”^25 Six years later Treitschke still expressed high regard for English history. In 1858 he wrote, “Admiration is the first feeling which the study of English history calls forth in everyone.”^26 Treitschke’s advocacy of the English model for the German constitution persisted for over a decade until the events of 1866 and 1870 convinced him of what he perceived to be the inherent flaws of such a form of government.

The philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Hegel, whose thought helped solidify in Treitschke his conviction of a Prussian national mission and his enthusiasm for state power, represented the other significant influence upon Treitschke’s intellectual development at Bonn. Hans Kohn has argued that the thought of Treitschke owed much

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22 Ibid., 72-73.
24 McClelland, 171.
to Hegel, who championed the notion of "history and the state as vehicles for the Divine."\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, much of Treitschke's thought shared Hegel's admiration of the state as a moral end. "The state is the true embodiment of mind and spirit," Hegel once wrote, "and only as its member the individual shares in truth, real existence and ethical status."\textsuperscript{28} Kohn suggests that Hegel's philosophy "diverted the German mind farther and farther from the liberalism of Western civilization."\textsuperscript{29} In light of the work of the historians Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, who have successfully refuted notions that Germany's political and social development represented some type of aberration in Western civilization, Kohn's statement about the mind of Germany may be somewhat questionable.\textsuperscript{30} There can be no doubt, however, that under the influence of Hegel Treitschke's mind wandered farther and farther from the liberalism of its youth. The young historian began to view the state as the supreme end of society; it was the "Divine Will as it exists on Earth."\textsuperscript{31}

In his *Machiavellism*, Friedrich Meinecke analyzes the thought of Hegel, especially his conception of the state and its role. Like Treitschke after him, Hegel found much to praise in the writings of Machiavelli. He wrote that the Florentine statesman had "grasped with a cool circumspection the necessary idea that Italy should be saved by being combined into one state."\textsuperscript{32} Hegel maintained the "necessity" of this idea, and Meinecke writes that Hegel fully excused Machiavelli's methods, "pour[ing] scorn on the

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\textsuperscript{28} Hegel as quoted in Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 118.

\textsuperscript{29} Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 112.


\textsuperscript{31} Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 119.

\textsuperscript{32} Hegel quoted in Meinecke, 358.
trivialities of ordinary morality.\textsuperscript{33} Hegel did not see the means advocated by Machiavelli as necessarily timeless, but he strongly supported the notion that the creation of a nation-state justified often immoral methods: "The only part that seemed to him valid for all time was the root-kernel of the doctrine, that the idea of a State, which ought to form one nation, should be brought to realization by means of all the methods necessary for that purpose."\textsuperscript{34}

Hegel linked state morality to the idea of personal duty:

The morality of the State is not the moral, the reflective element, whereby personal conviction is the ruling element; the latter is more accessible to the modern world, whereas the true and ancient type has its roots in the principle that everyone has his duty.\textsuperscript{35}

This assertion that the state itself possessed an inherent moral value took hold of Treitschke perhaps more than any other theory to which he was exposed. He began to advocate state power and the enhancement of that power with increasing vehemence. Later in life he would write,

Hegel was the first to press into the sanctuary itself. He understood the state as the reality of the moral idea, as the national moral will, and with one blow overthrew all the doctrines of natural law and political \textit{Romantik}, which deduced the state from original contract or divine foundations. In this way the exaggerated idea of the state of classical antiquity acquired new life, and to the state was assigned an omnipotence which does not belong to it, since the Christian world has recognized the rights of conscience. But the deification of the state did little harm among a people which had so long sought its ideal in a stateless freedom. Only by overvaluing the state could the Germans attain to a powerful feeling for the state.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to giving the state innate moral value, Hegel had also assigned the state a civilizing and cultural mission. An important part of a state’s duty was to develop its citizenry intellectually and spiritually:

The supreme goal that a State can achieve, is that art and science should be developed in it, and a height attained which corresponds to the mind and spirit of the people. This is

\textsuperscript{33} Meinecke, 358.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{36} Treitschke quoted in Headlam, 741.
Treitschke adopted a very similar conception of the state’s role. He saw it as a civilizing force, working to develop the nation morally, spiritually, and intellectually. Because he held a very pessimistic view of human nature, Treitschke was convinced of the need for a strong state that could function as a moralizing agent in society.

In 1852, Treitschke returned to his native Saxony to attend the university at Leipzig, where he studied under the economist Wilhelm Roscher, whose influence contributed to Treitschke’s increasing tendency to interpret political and economic events in narrowly nationalistic terms. At Leipzig Treitschke attended a series of Roscher’s lectures that were later published as *Die Grundlagen der Nationalökonomie*, in which the professor argued that just as different countries were better suited to different forms of government, so were they better suited to different types of economic organization. Universal, or natural, laws did not apply to economic relations in every country. Roscher rejected the theories of the classical economists Smith and Ricardo, whose laws supposedly governed all economic relations, everywhere. “There was no one perfect economic system, he taught, no more than there was one perfect government,” explains Dorpalen. Dorpalen points out that Roscher remained very cautious in his scholarship, “[deducing] his conclusions from careful, objective comparisons” and maintaining some vestiges of universalism.

Treitschke, on the other hand, limited his comparisons to a select number of living peoples, pointedly chosen for his specific political purposes. In his thinking there was no longer room for those last vestiges of a universal approach which still survived in the teachings of Dahlmann and Roscher.

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38 Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 19; and Davis, 3.
40 Ibid., 20, emphasis added.
Aside from Roscher’s lectures, Treitschke found little that interested him in Leipzig. At Bonn he had formed many satisfying relationships with other like-minded students, but he thought the Leipzig students possessed a repulsive “crassly materialistic” approach to their studies in which they saw mere gateways to profitable careers.\(^{41}\) Treitschke did enjoy the company of several of Leipzig’s elite to whom his father introduced him. In this group of well-to-do professionals the young student was pleasantly surprised to find some men of similar political inclinations. The enjoyment he got from these associations was not enough, however, to allay his utter distaste for life in Leipzig. Frustrated with life there, Treitschke returned to Bonn in 1853, where he once again formed satisfying friendships with other students.\(^{42}\)

After one term at Bonn, Treitschke transferred to Tübingen, to which he “took an instant dislike.”\(^{43}\) Treitschke’s greatest complaint against the Tübingers was their staunch south German particularism. “Particularism is in full bloom,” Treitschke once wrote, “few [of the students] have ever crossed the borders of black and red territory. We North Germans (all in all twenty) are quite isolated, for we are ‘heartless and superficial,’ as the Swabian thinks.”\(^{44}\) Dorpalen writes that Treitschke simply could not understand the particularist mentality of the Swabians, nor did he ever make any effort to understand it, curtly dismissing it as “unnatural” and “corrupt.”\(^{45}\) After Tübingen, Treitschke studied in Freiburg and then Heidelberg, where he finished his career as a student in March of

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\(^{41}\) Ibid.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 20-23.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 25.  
\(^{44}\) Treitschke quoted in Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 25. Treitschke’s term “black-and-red territory” refers to the black and red colors of Württemberg.  
In his student days Treitschke had dabbled in poetry. In fact, before finally deciding to pursue a career as a historian, the young Saxon seriously considered devoting his life to poetry. In 1856 he even published a book of verses entitled *Vaterländische Gedichte* (*Patriotic Songs*). As the title of the collection implies, Treitschke's obsession with the political ideal of German unification infiltrated even his poetry. These poems were no flowery verses about romantic love. Rather, like all of Treitschke's other publications, they promoted the single goal of German national unification. He even opened the volume with an excerpt from Machiavelli's *Golden Donkey* that urged the people around him to take action to achieve German unification instead of waiting idly for some divine miracle. In 1857 he published a second volume, *Studies*, which revealed an even harsher distaste for what he saw as political apathy and shallow materialism. He attacked the "selfish greed" of his generation, which was "[e]ngaged in breathless, never ending deals" with hearts "as smooth as glass."

After several months at home with his family in Dresden, Treitschke traveled to Göttingen, where he spent the years 1855-1856 occupying himself with Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Aristotle's *Politics*, two works that would become major influences upon the German historian's social and political worldview. Treitschke was deeply indebted to Aristotle for molding his conception of the state. From the ancient Greek Treitschke adopted a belief in the state as the "core of all national life." Again revealing his highly

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47 Davis, 4.
50 Davis, 4-5.
pessimistic view of human nature, Treitschke permitted the state
the right to be omnipotent over the individual because the individual could never develop
or live a worthy life without the State's protection and guidance; because the state was
the supreme moralizing and humanizing agency in human life. 52

The thought of Machiavelli made a powerful impact on Treitschke as well and
had the effect of strengthening his enthusiasm for a strong state. In an 1856 letter to his
father, Treitschke lauded the philosophy of the Florentine:

He sacrifices right and virtue to a great idea, the might and unity of his nation. This
fundamental idea of the book—the fiery patriotism and the conviction that even the most
oppressive despotism must be welcomed if it warrants the might and unity of the
fatherland—these are the ideas which reconcile me with the many objectionable and
terrible opinions of the great Florentine. 53

On another occasion Treitschke wrote of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*,

He is indeed a practical statesman, more fitted than any other to destroy the illusion that
one can reform the world with cannon loaded only with ideas of Right and Truth. But
even the political science of this much-decried champion of brute force seems to me
moral by comparison with the Prussia of to-day [sic]. Machiavelli sacrifices Right and
Virtue to a great idea, the might and unity of his people; this one cannot say of the party
which now rules in Prussia. This underlying thought of the book, its glowing patriotism,
and the conviction that the most oppressive despotism must be welcomed if it ensures
might and unity for his mother country—these are the ideas which have reconciled men
to the numerous reprehensible and lawless theories of the great Florentine. 54

Many of Treitschke’s later writings revealed his intellectual debt to the Italian statesman,
for this type of Machiavellian realism constituted a dominant aspect of his political
worldview.

In 1857 Treitschke defended his doctoral dissertation at Leipzig. In it he attacked
a growing trend among German academics, namely the notion that state and society
represented completely separate entities that acted independently of each other and thus
should be studied independently of one another. Treitschke, by contrast, recognized a
limited but necessary relationship between state and society. He argued that “[s]ociety

52 Davis, 6.
53 Treitschke, Letter from Göttingen, March 4, 1856. Max Cornelius (ed.), *Heinrich von Treitschke’s
54 Treitschke, *Briefe* 1: 136, quoted in Davis, 5.
has unbounded claims upon the allegiance of the individual,” explains Davis, “but the State is only needed for definite and circumscribed objects, and has only to be obeyed in so far as the interests of society demand such obedience.”

The successful dissertation revealed the influence of Roscher upon the young historian. Whereas Roscher had argued that every state had to have its own economic system, Treitschke suggested that “every nation must have its own peculiar form of State.”

The favorable reception of Treitschke’s dissertation secured him a lecture post at Leipzig, where he earned the nickname “Apostle of Prussia.” It was at this point that Treitschke got the first impulse to write his German History. Originally, he only planned to write a history of the Germanic Confederation, based only on existing printed sources and intended as an “indictment” of the Bund, illuminating its political shortcomings.

Before long, though, Treitschke had decided to expand his project in order to capture the complete essence of his nation’s past. “The kernel of the subject,” explained Treitschke, “is not to be found in the Congresses and the negotiations of the Estates, but in the truly marvelous development of public opinion, or of the soul of the people or whatever else you like to call it.”

In 1861 Treitschke published his important essay “Die Freiheit,” essentially a review of John Stuart Mill’s On Liberty, in which he attacked the Briton’s utilitarianism and advocated the need for a strong state. Yet, as Davis has pointed out, although Treitschke rejected Mill’s particular brand of liberalism, he did maintain a lot of his liberal inclinations in this essay. “Everything new which the nineteenth century has

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55 Davis, 6-7.
56 Ibid., 7.
57 Treitschke quoted in Davis, 19.
58 Davis, 9.
59 Treitschke, Briefe 2, no. 332, quoted in Davis, 8.
created," wrote Treitschke, "is the work of liberalism."^60 Davis observes that in 1861 "political Liberalism meant first and foremost the idea of a united Germany."^61 Treitschke, who desired a national state that could protect liberal ideals, defined political liberty as "ruling and being ruled at the same time."^62 He envisioned a reciprocal relationship between the state and the citizen; the state's "claim upon the loyalty of the citizens is to be absolute because its government is their government."^63

In 1863 the government of Baden appointed Treitschke to the position of University Deputy Professor for Political Science in Freiburg, where he lectured on German history, the history of the Reformation, and other topics.^64 Baden's government was strongly pro-Prussian at the time and welcomed the arrival of the outspoken Prussophile. Some in the south German principality could barely believe that such a prominent figure would accept a chair in such a politically unimportant place as Freiburg. "This is no place for a man like Treitschke," wrote Karl Mathy, a high-ranking official in Baden's government, in a letter to the prominent German dramatist Gustav Freytag. "But since he is interested, we are getting him of course with both hands."^65 Treitschke, whose reputation preceded him, enjoyed great popularity as a lecturer at Freiburg.

While he enjoyed the admiration of his South German students, Treitschke did not reciprocate their warm sentiments. While lecturing in south Germany, he became quickly disillusioned by the South Germans' lack of commitment to German unification, and developed in himself a strong distaste for what he called the "abominable South German

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^60 Treitschke, "Die Freiheit," quoted in Davis, 9.
^61 Davis, 10.
^62 Treitschke, "Die Freiheit," in Davis, 10.
^63 Davis, 10.
^64 Hausrath, 3-4.
^65 Karl Mathy, quoted in Dorpalen, Treitschke, 80.
The South Germans’ strong regional loyalties and their evident Prussophobia led Treitschke to doubt the likelihood of the peaceful and voluntary unification of Germany. He concluded “that our fate will clearly be decided by conquest.”

Political events of the mid-1860s accelerated Treitschke’s protracted transition from the liberal idealism of his youth to the realism and narrow chauvinism of his later years and convinced him that his growing conservatism was the most effective and appropriate political stance for the time. Prussia’s wars against Denmark and Austria represented for Treitschke unquestionable proof of Prussia’s national mission. Her sweeping victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the consequent founding of the German Reich seemed to vindicate his spirited calls for a strong Prussian state. In response to the wars of unification Treitschke completely abandoned the liberal idealism of his youth and became one of Prussia’s and Bismarck’s most vocal defenders.

On January 21, 1864, Austrian and Prussian forces invaded Schleswig-Holstein to oppose the provinces’ official incorporation into the Danish state via the Danish constitution of 1863. The ensuing war against Denmark represented a major influence in this period of transition in Treitschke’s thought, as he expressed strongly pro-Prussian political views, calling for the Prussian annexation of Schleswig-Holstein. The Vienna Peace agreement of October 30, 1864, represented for Treitschke a great step toward the goal of German unification, as it indeed was. In his excitement over this monumental event, Treitschke proclaimed, “The day will come, when both of the natural allies, the

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66 Treitschke, as quoted in Hausrath, 10.
67 Ibid.
68 Holborn, Modern Germany 3: 169-170.
Prussian state and the German Volk, will again find each other together.” The victory over the Danes aroused in Treitschke the belief that the occasion represented the “wonderful activity of our history.” He continued to call it—in a letter to his father, no less—“the greatest success that our foreign policy has achieved in fifty years.”

The Prussian military victory and Bismarck’s skillful diplomatic maneuvering further confirmed Treitschke’s belief in the Prussian state’s German mission. Around this time Treitschke expressed in a private letter his conviction that unification could only occur under the Prussian crown, and only by war. The letter revealed a sincere commitment to German unification, as well as the historian’s intellectual abandonment of the liberalism of his youth and a movement toward the staunch monarchism of his later years:

There is only one salvation; a single state, a monarchical Germany under the dynasty of the Hohenzollern; expulsion of the princely houses annexation to Prussia [sic]. That is, in clear and definite words, my programme. Who believes that this can be done peacefully? But is not the unity of Germany under the emperor William I an idea which outweighs 100,000 lives? Compared with this idea my life is not worth a farthing.

During the debate over Schleswig-Holstein, Treitschke softened his opposition to Bismarck, to whom he had previously felt reluctant to give his full-fledged political endorsement due to the chancellor’s repressive domestic policies. Evidently, some of Treitschke’s earlier liberal idealism still persisted. The Prussian victory over Denmark, however, converted him to unwavering support of the Iron Chancellor. “When...the war of 1864 was over,” writes Headlam,

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70. Treitschke, May 7, 1864, quoted in Langer, 104.
71. Treitschke, August 14, 1864, in Briefe 2: 339, quoted in Langer, 104.
72. Treitschke, quoted in Headlam, 733.
Treitschke was first to applaud the policy of the man who, having by the sword torn Schleswig-Holstein from the Danes, instead of helping the re-establishment of the state under its own dynasty, began the process of annexation.73

Many German liberals experienced a similar change of heart toward Bismarck. Dorpalen explains that the liberals “had for some time been suggesting that Bismarck might find absolution for his sins if they were committed to advance the cause of German unity.”74 The rift in the party left the pro-annexationist camp of Altliberalen standing on one side of the debate and the “doctrinary-moral” Progressives on the other.75 For those who continued to oppose Bismarck, Treitschke offered the following condemnation: “You want the unity of Germany, but you refuse to accept the only means by which it can be brought about.”76

At this time, Treitschke’s radical conservative views began attracting criticism from many anti-Bismarckian German liberals, as well as from his own family. The left liberal Jacob Venedey accused Treitschke of shameful opportunism, charging that the historian hoped to gain a much desired appointment to the university at Kiel by advocating Prussian annexation of Schleswig-Holstein.77 Eduard von Treitschke also expressed distress over his son’s evolving political beliefs and political life. In particular, the elder Treitschke complained of his son’s loss of religious devotion and the growing “secularization” of his life and thought.78 In 1865, Treitschke’s father Eduard continued to express his displeasure with the intellectual and political course his son had taken, pinpointing the dominant—and indeed accurate—criticism many historians have since leveled against Treitschke:

73 Headlam, 734.
74 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 92.
75 Langer, 112.
76 Treitschke quoted in Headlam, 724.
77 Langer, 110.
78 Ibid., 105.
It hurts me deeply, that my son lets his inborn sense of justice be entirely exhausted by his party fanaticism...it has damaged you greatly, that you have presented yourself not as a writer of history, but rather as a man of the party.\footnote{Eduard von Treitschke, 5/5/1865, quoted in Langer, 111.}

In an 1865 letter to his father Treitschke provided a rebuttal to such accusations, writing, “That bloodless objectivity which does not say on which side is the narrator’s heart is the exact opposite of the true historical sense. Judgment is free, even to the author.”\footnote{Treitschke, quoted in Gooch, 141.} This statement revealed Treitschke’s commitment to being a “political” historian who could use and manipulate historical truth to influence present political developments.

Following the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein, Treitschke’s enthusiasm for the Prussian state grew even more vehement. In an essay titled “The Solution of the Schleswig-Holstein Question,” Treitschke expressed his strengthening “unitarianism,” a term that Treitschke used to qualify the high degree of political unity that he desired, in a phrase that seemed to sum up the entirety of his political thought: “We sacrifice to the unity of Germany every other political good.”\footnote{Treitschke, “Die Lösung der schleswig-holsteinischen Frage,” Preussische Jahrbücher 16 (1865), quoted in Langer, 109.}

Treitschke’s most acute articulation of this conception of the state appeared in his 1865 essay Bundestaat und Einheitstaat (Federal State and Unitary State), in which he wrote, “In the first place, the second place and in the third place, the essence of the State is power.”\footnote{Treitschke, Bundestaat und Einheitstaat, quoted in Meinecke, 399.} Of course, the German liberals of 1848, such as Dahlmann, had come to perceive power as a precursor to, and vehicle for, their liberal aspirations. But they had seen power as a means to an end, a necessary evil to achieve future good,\footnote{Dorpfalen, Treitschke, 91-92.} whereas Treitschke increasingly demanded state power as a moral end in itself. Meinecke explains that power is indeed a necessary component of any state, but the essence of a
state comprises other qualities such as justice and morality to form a whole “essence.”

“But Treitschke,” he writes,

repeatedly continued to announce that the essence of the State was nothing else but power, thereby limiting it and corrupting those countless people who in life’s struggles hanker after simple pithy maxims, and causing them to overestimate and revere simple power, and thus see the basic problem of the state in much cruder terms.44

By the mid 1860s Treitschke had made a name for himself as a publicist, attracting wide readership. His popularity and influence upon the German public are indicated by an offer from the Prussian minister president in 1866 to employ Treitschke in the service of the Prussian state. On the eve of the Seven Weeks’ War, Bismarck requested the services of Treitschke as a publicist in an attempt to garner popular support for the government, telling the historian that he knew and sensed the “deep currents of the German spirit.”85 He even promised the historian access to the Prussian archives, which must have been an almost irresistible offer. Treitschke declined, however, citing his opposition to Bismarck’s conservative domestic policies. Apparently, some of Treitschke’s earlier liberal convictions still lingered.

If Treitschke still harbored any ambivalence regarding the idea of the state in 1866, then Prussia’s crushing victory over Austria in the Seven Weeks’ War and the founding of the North German Confederation certainly solidified the historian’s thought. Meinecke argues that the events of 1866 marked a crucial point in the growth of Treitschke’s philosophy, “fixing his ideas on the State, which had hitherto been in flux.”86 Langer notes that Treitschke clearly defected from the camp of idealism to realism during the Prussian war against Austria in 1866. Following Prussia’s resounding

84 Meinecke, 398-99.
85 Bismarck’s letter to Treitschke, 6/11/1866, quoted in Langer, 118.
86 Meinecke, 398.
victory over the Austrians at Königgrätz, Treitschke credited the Prussian monarchy with the great success. In “Der Krieg und die Bundesreform” he wrote,

Today history put an end to doctrinal disputes over power and freedom with one blow. It asks little about our theories, it crushes the fool who imagines he masters destiny with his wishes. The struggle about power dawns, and it would be the pinnacle of foolishness if we now rejected the parliament we have longed for, because the single hand that is strong enough to actualize it, the Prussian crown, offers it to us.

In July of 1866 he expressed in a letter to his then fiancé, Emma Bodman, his optimism that a German state united by the Prussian sword was all but inevitable: “A great piece of bloody work still lies before us, but I have no more doubts about the final outcome.”

In 1866, with Prussia’s victory over Austria, Treitschke fully pledged his allegiance to Bismarck and abandoned his concerns of a proper liberal constitution in Prussia, putting his full support behind the Iron Chancellor. Even his friend Gustav Freytag referred to the professor as “Bismärckchen.”

“Always mindful of the primacy of the state,” writes Dorpalen,

he opposed the inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the constitution of the new Prussian-led North German Confederation, objected to the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, and regretted that the Confederation turned out to be less Unitarian than he had hoped.

In addition, Treitschke appealed to the Prussians to annex Saxony, Hanover, and several of the small German states. These demands of Treitschke signaled a clear and incontrovertible farewell to his earlier liberal sentiments, as state power and political unity became the only worthwhile political goals that he could possibly imagine.

This type of realism characterized Treitschke’s thought until the founding of the Reich in 1871. Langer writes, “The establishment of German unity now justly

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87 Langer, 127.
89 Treitschke’s letter to Emma Bodman, 7/4/1866, as quoted in Langer, 119.
90 Gustav Freytag, quoted in Hausrath, 18.
subordinated all other political objectives. Treitschke was not alone in this conviction. James Sheehan observes that a host of German liberals, among them Heinrich von Sybel and Hermann Baumgarten, shared Treitschke’s sentiments. This right-wing faction of the liberal party’s support for Bismarck was not a sudden rift with its prior position, but rather the end of a period of transition in their political thought. “[M]ost champions of Bismarck in the late sixties,” writes Sheehan, “had been persistent exponents of a ‘new realism’ and had often expressed their willingness to accept national unity from any source.”

Other German intellectuals at that time shared Treitschke’s sentiment that power should trump all other ideals. Gordon Craig writes that “the bulk of the liberal party now gave up the attempt to reconcile the demands of freedom and the requirements of power.” He cites Karl Twesten, a moderate, whose comment on the issue sounds as if it had come straight from Treitschke’s lips: “No one may be criticized for giving precedence to the issue of power at this time and maintaining that the issues of freedom can wait, provided that nothing happens that can permanently prejudice them.”

Bismarck’s victory was consolidated with the passing of the Indemnity Bill that absolved him of past constitutional violations, which had been a sore point for many German liberals, and established him as a hero in the eyes of those same liberals. Wilhelm Liebknecht caustically commented, “the angel of darkness has become the angel of light, before whom the people lie in dust and adore.”

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92 Langer, 119.
95 Karl Twesten, as quoted in Craig, *Germany*, 10.
With his now unconditional acceptance of the Prussian state, Treitschke also began heralding the benefits of a strong monarchical government, in the process revealing the genesis of his later Anglophobia. Treitschke’s advocacy of a strong monarchy as a complementary aspect of his German mission grew ever stronger, as the house of Hohenzollern became for Treitschke what the house of Medici had been for Machiavelli. The maxim “le roi règne mais il ne gouverne pas” struck Treitschke as wholly unacceptable; he had now deserted his earlier liberal principles and placed his full allegiance behind the monarchy. Langer writes that for Treitschke a strong monarchy presented a guarantee against a potential “tyranny of the majority” and encroaching socialism. Treitschke argued that “because our society is more democratic than the English, that’s why our government must remain in deed and truth monarchic.” His earlier Anglophilia vanished completely. “In regard to the monarchy,” writes Langer, “Treitschke ordered the German liberals to no longer try to emulate the English model, but rather finally to understand that the monarchic attitude was unshakably anchored in the German nation.”

After 1866, Treitschke focused all his efforts on the task of German unification. He became frustrated when Bismarck failed “to arouse the moral energies of the nation.” The chancellor was a political genius, but he was too much the Realpolitiker for Treitschke, who regarded German unification as a moral and emotional calling. In an essay he wrote about the Italian statesman Cavour, for which he was awarded the Italian

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97 Langer, 138.
98 Ibid., 140-41.
99 Treitschke, “Das constitutionelle Königthum in Deutschland,” quoted in Langer, 140.
100 Langer, 137.
Commander Cross, Treitschke implied that even deception of the people was justified in pursuit of a goal as virtuous as national unification: "To warm one's hands over the smoking ruins of the Fatherland with the smug self-praise: I never told a lie—this is the virtue of a monk, not of a man." According to Treitschke, the "virtuous" goal of national unification exempted states and statesmen from the moral constraints of ordinary men.

Although the 1866 war had united the north German states under Prussian guidance, the south German states such as Bavaria and Württemberg remained independent of Prussia. It seemed as though a war with France would be necessary to pull these territories into the Prussian orbit. In his memoirs Bismarck wrote that he had always believed that "a Franco-German war must take place before the construction of a united Germany could be realized." Craig cautions that this statement should not necessarily be taken at face value since Bismarck never saw a war with France as "inevitable" and because the chancellor believed that Napoleon III could have been persuaded to relinquish the south German lands if he was convinced that that was what the people in those territories wanted. In any case, war with France was always a distinct possibility, and indeed war erupted in 1870.

Elated by this turn of events, Treitschke published "What We Demand from France" in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, in which he "combined contempt for the beaten foe with an unabashed imperialism." He called for the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, arguing that the territory was "German" and rightly belonged under the control

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102 Hausrath, 54.
106 Ibid., 30.
of the German Empire: "These provinces are ours by right of the sword; and we will rule
them in virtue of a higher right, in virtue of the right of the German nation to prevent the
permanent estrangement from the German Empire of her lost children."\textsuperscript{107} Treitschke
argued that by annexing the two French provinces Germany would grow stronger as a
nation, particularly because the region offered promising economic opportunities. The
soil of Alsace-Lorraine "oozes with fertility," wrote Treitschke, and Germany was "by no
means rich enough to renounce so precious a possession."\textsuperscript{108}

Treitschke was not alone in his enthusiasm for Prussia's defeat of Napoleon III's
forces. The following year, his friend Gustav Freytag wrote of the war,

\begin{quote}
There never was a struggle fought for a greater ideal than this; never perhaps did Nemesis
strike down the guilty so violently; never perhaps did any army have such a warmth, such
inspiration, and such a deep poetic sense of the fact that the dreadful work of the
battlesfields served a higher ethical purpose; never perhaps did the working of divine
providence in the apportionment of rewards and punishments seem, in human terms, to
be so just and logical as on this occasion. Hundreds of thousands perceived this as the
poetry of the historical process...\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

On January 18, 1871, Emperor Wilhelm I was crowned in the Hall of Mirrors at
Versailles and Treitschke's dream of a unified German state, including the disputed
provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, under Prussian leadership had been realized.

In spite of the creation of a German empire, Treitschke was not wholly satisfied
with Bismarck's efforts at unifying the German nation. The Reich of 1871 did not
possess the political unity that he had wished for. "[Q]uite considerable powers were
[indeed] left to the individual states," explains Craig.\textsuperscript{110} Education and law enforcement
lay within state jurisdiction, as did the right to collect taxes. Treitschke felt that the
chancellor had allowed the south German states too much autonomy and that Prussia's

\textsuperscript{107} Treitschke, "Was fordern wir von Frankreich?" in Deutsche Kämpfe 1, quoted in Davis, 110.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 112-113.
\textsuperscript{109} Gustav Freytag, as quoted in Craig, Germany, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{110} Craig, Germany, 40.
position in the empire was not strong enough.\textsuperscript{111} He always hated the special rights of Bavaria and Württemberg, which had even retained certain military rights, and complained that the empire’s structure was too federalist.\textsuperscript{112} Adolf Hausrath, a friend of Treitschke’s, wrote that Treitschke always remained disappointed in the nation:

\begin{quote}
The more he disliked the remnants of particularism in the new Constitution, the less he was disposed to admire the Germans, who, in his opinion, had forfeited the greatest reward of great times by their own individualism.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

On the heels of the 1871 Reichegründung Treitschke won election to a seat in the Reichstag as a pro-Bismarckian National Liberal. He served the same constituency, the district of Kreuznach-Simmern near Heidelberg, for his entire parliamentary career, which lasted until 1884.\textsuperscript{114} Treitschke’s deafness relegated him to a somewhat unique role in the Reichstag; “he saw himself raising his voice on special occasions only,” explains Dorpalen.\textsuperscript{115} Overall, Treitschke was severely disappointed with the German parliament, expressing serious doubts about its ability to affect any legislation. Interestingly, he also resented Bismarck’s methods of dealing with the Reichstag, complaining once in a letter to his wife Emma of the “scornful treatment” the body received from the chancellor.\textsuperscript{116}

In 1874 Treitschke left Heidelberg for a cherished position at the University of Berlin, where he remained until his death in 1896. It was there that Treitschke built a reputation as one of the most, if not the most, vocal defenders of the German Reich of 1871. His lectures on politics at the university and his seven-volume German History, published between 1879 and 1894 and discussed in detail below, defined his years in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{111} Dorpalen, “Heinrich von Treitschke,” 28.
\bibitem{112} Hausrath, 60.
\bibitem{113} Ibid., 61.
\bibitem{114} Davis, 117; Dorpalen, \textit{Treitschke}, 180.
\bibitem{115} Dorpalen, \textit{Treitschke}, 181.
\bibitem{116} Treitschke, quoted in Dorpalen, \textit{Treitschke}, 183.
\end{thebibliography}

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Berlin. They represented the crystallization of the historian’s thought and reveal the
dramatic shift his political outlook had taken since his youth. The lectures and History
espoused the values of a powerful state apparatus and lauded the efforts of the
Hohenzollerns and Prussia as sincere defenders of all German interests. His lectures and
History established Treitschke as a national hero in the eyes of many Germans.

While in Berlin Treitschke finally shed any remnants of his earlier liberalism. While his political worldview had become decidedly illiberal by the 1870s, Treitschke had remained a member of the National Liberals. In July of 1879, however, frustrated with liberal efforts to check the activities of Bismarck, the fiery historian parted ways with his former partisans and spent his remaining five years in the Reichstag as an independent. Ten years later, in 1889, Treitschke severed his last remaining connection to the liberalism of his earlier days. On the opening page of the July 1889 issue of the Preussische Jahrbücher, the ranks of which he had joined at the journal’s inception in 1857 and which he had edited since 1866, Treitschke formally “[bade]
farewell to [his] readers,” marking the end of his career with one of Germany’s most influential political journals. The Jahrbücher had provided a medium for Treitschke to publish some of his most important treatises. The conservative Treitschke had fallen out with his younger co-editor, Hans Delbrück, who had once described himself as a “conservative Social Democrat.” The younger editor had also grown frustrated with Treitschke’s increasing dogmatism and his combative attitude toward political opponents.

117 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 217.
118 Treitschke, Preussische Jahrbücher (July 1889), in Dorpalen, Treitschke, 270.
119 Delbrück quoted in Dorpalen, Treitschke, 270.
120 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 271.
Treitschke died in 1896 in Berlin while still trying to complete his *German History*. In his obituary of the national historian, Friedrich Meinecke described Treitschke as “one of the mightiest men Germany had ever produced.” By 1896 the historian had certainly become a prominent national figure. In his life Treitschke had witnessed monumental political events in Germany and had been instrumental in encouraging and procuring popular support for national unification in 1871. In his youth Treitschke was drawn to liberal idealism with its advocacy of constitutional and parliamentary government, but he grew increasingly committed to the concept of a powerful monarchical state. Indeed, by the time he moved to Berlin in 1874 Treitschke had solidified his belief in Germany’s national mission, which he presented to the German people in his lectures and in his *German History*.

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CHAPTER TWO

TREITSCHKE’S NATIONAL MISSION:
THE GERMAN HISTORY AND POLITICS
I. Introduction

In 1874 Heinrich von Treitschke secured a chair at the University of Berlin and moved to the German capital, where he lived until his death in 1896. During his years in Berlin, Treitschke authored his monumental *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, a seven-volume history of his nation that spanned the course of German history from the days of the Reformation to the eve of the 1848 revolutions. Treitschke hoped that his history would instill in his countrymen a common national consciousness and an awareness of their national mission. In the dedicatory preface to the first volume, which first appeared in 1879, Treitschke proclaimed that his aim was to "awaken in the hearts of his readers...a delight in the fatherland."¹

While in Berlin, Treitschke also made a name for himself by giving his now notorious lectures on "Politics" at the University. Almost all the literature published on Treitschke makes at least a cursory reference to the throngs of Germans who turned out to hear him lecture. These crowds included enrolled students, auditors, and people from the general public, such as professionals and businessmen.² Many, hoping to watch the renowned orator, were turned away disappointed, as Treitschke regularly filled his lecture hall to capacity. "[Treitschke’s] course on Politics," writes Andreas Dorpalen,

be...
The content of both the *German History* and the lectures on politics—compiled from the notes of Treitschke’s students and published posthumously in 1897 as the two-volume *Politics*—reveals the mature thought of the German nationalist historian. In these two works Treitschke combined the political beliefs he had developed in earlier treatises to create a coherent system of thought regarding German national development and international relations. The historian, viewing relations among states as a quasi-Darwinian struggle for survival and dominance, presented a rigidly deterministic conception of history. Treitschke devoted most of his work to explaining how Prussia had emerged from this struggle as the defender of “German” interests and the unifier of the German state.

According to Treitschke the German nation-state owed its current strength and unity to the complementary forces of the Prussian state and German religious and intellectual freedom. In the opening pages of his *German History* he wrote,

It is to two forces that we owe the restoration of our declining nation, which since those days has transformed its life politically and economically, in faith, in art, and in science, to make that life ever richer and ever wider in its scope: the force of religious freedom, and the force of the Prussian state.\(^5\)

The historian presented the Hohenzollern monarchy and the Prussian state as the political forces sincerely committed to German national unity. He devoted the bulk of his history to discussing the methods by which the Prussian kings and statesmen endeavored to realize German political unity. Moreover, Treitschke presented the German lands, and Prussia in particular, as a haven of religious tolerance and free thought at a time when Rome dominated the consciences of most Europeans. Because of the Hohenzollerns’


\(^5\) Treitschke, *German History* 1: 6.
commitment to intellectual freedom, they rightly inherited the role of leaders of civilization.

By developing these two points—religious freedom and the national mission of the Prussian state—Treitschke provided his audiences with two fundamental aspects of their national consciousness. First, his interpretation of Prussia as the traditional defender of German interests assigned to that power the mission of founding a German national state. Since Prussia had accomplished this mission when Treitschke wrote his history and delivered his lectures on politics, the political historian delegated to the unified German state the task of maintaining and enhancing state power. Secondly, Treitschke's view of Prussia and Germany as defenders of religious and intellectual freedom designated the German nation as a chosen people. With Luther's Reformation Germany became a Protestant Israel, and Treitschke encouraged the nation to become the leader of humanity.

Lastly, Treitschke's *German History* gave his countrymen a final component of their national consciousness—a common national history. As mentioned above, Treitschke wanted his history to inspire in his readers "a delight in the fatherland" and in their common past. In doing so, however, the historian's national bias often led him to misinterpret the course of German history. In his effort to establish a Prussian national mission and to present Germany as a promised land, Treitschke frequently misinterpreted the motives of Prussian sovereigns and statesmen.

II. The State

For Treitschke, state power represented the most fundamental and necessary objective of any society. Because he perceived society as a collection of competing
groups each seeking to secure its own interests, Treitschke was convinced that only the state could stand above this struggle as an impartial mediator. Only the state could ensure social harmony. "Treitschke did not believe in the possibility of a self-regulating society," writes Karl Metz. "The force holding the variety of groups together and thereby forming such a thing as 'society' was political dominance, i.e. the state." As the state represented the goal of any nation, Treitschke identified the tendency of nations to develop into states as the motive force of history.

Treitschke argued that humans carry an innate disposition for government, which eventually and inevitably leads them to found a state. A "natural" and "inevitable" product of human nature, "the State is the people" and each citizen represents a "fragment of the State." He saw this trend as such a necessary part of human nature that "the idea of a stateless humanity...is without historical warrant." The state represents the "outward form which a nation has moulded for itself." Not all states are the same, nor should they be. The peculiar character of every nation determines the character of its state, and this in turn shapes the nature of the mission that the nation-state shall pursue.

Treitschke drew from the thought of Machiavelli to support his theory of the state. He celebrated the "brilliant" Florentine's "great idea that the State is Power" and stressed that "[w]e must never forget our debt to Machiavelli." He credited Machiavelli with "[setting] the State upon its own feet" and "[freeing] it from the moral sway of the Church." It was Machiavelli who "[said] that the State should only strive towards the

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7 Treitschke, *Politics* 1: 3-4.
8 Ibid., 7.
9 Ibid., 182.
10 Ibid., 85.
goal of its own power.” Treitschke condemned those who attacked Machiavelli’s theory of the state on moral grounds, such as the Jesuits, whom he portrayed as hypocrites who “daily practiced” what Machiavelli had preached.12

While Treitschke admired Machiavelli and lauded the realism of the Italian statesman, he did perceive one shortcoming in the Florentine’s ideal of the state. The German historian observed that Machiavelli’s theories provided no moral justification for state power; Treitschke maintained that the state indeed served a moral function. It represented the highest moral ideal of any people. Treitschke espoused “the principle that the State is in itself an ethical force and a high moral good.”13 As its “highest moral duty,” the state shall “uphold its power.”14 Its primary duty is to maintain and increase its strength, as weakness is “the most disastrous and despicable of crimes, the unforgivable sin of politics.”15

The state must subordinate everything to its own power and will, both internally and externally. Domestically, Treitschke attacked “[t]he ridiculous idea of the State subordinate to Personal Rights” and demanded the “[s]teadfast loyalty” of citizens, as it was “proof of the healthy condition of a State and a nation.”16 Treitschke drew the conclusion that “[e]very moral judgment of the historian must be based on the hypothesis of the State as power, constrained to maintain itself as such within and without, and of man’s highest, noblest destiny being co-operation in this duty.”17

Exhibiting an extremely pessimistic view of human nature and convinced that a

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11 Ibid., 84.
12 Ibid., 87.
13 Ibid., 106.
14 Ibid., 94.
15 Ibid., 95.
16 Ibid., 189 and 195.
17 Ibid., 99.
self-regulating society was "just another English illusion,"¹⁸ Treitschke asserted that the state must function as a moralizing and educating force, developing the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the nation. "The State is a moral community called to positive labours for the improvement of the human race," Treitschke wrote, "and its ultimate aim is to build up real national character through and within itself, for this is the highest moral duty of nations as well as individuals."¹⁹ He demanded of the state, "the instrument of civilization," "positive labour for the economic and intellectual welfare of its members."²⁰

The state should function as a "great institution for the education of the human race." For this reason the state should be subject to moral law, but this appeal to morality drowned in a sea of fiery claims about the unqualified power of the state.²¹

Treitschke also found support for his theory of the state in the thought of Hegel, whose philosophy seemed to Treitschke to justify a strong, powerful state. Hegel, who "had the keenest intelligence in political matters" of all German philosophers, had "regarded the state as the actualization of the moral ideal."²² Treitschke celebrated Hegel’s rejection of "the doctrine of natural rights" and the idea of contract government and credited the philosopher with

resurrect[ing] the somewhat hyperbolic conception held by classical antiquity, and an omnipotence accorded to the state which it had never possessed since the Christian world had recognized the right of the individual conscience.²³

Treitschke saw this idea as an appropriate antidote for the German people:

But to this people of ours, which had so long sought its ideal in an anarchic freedom, the idolization of the state could do little harm. Only through an overvaluation of the state could the Germans attain to a vigorous sense of the state.²⁴

¹⁸ Metz, 272.
¹⁹ Treitschke, Politics 1: 74.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Ibid., 89.
²³ Ibid., 572-573.
At the head of the strong state prescribed by Treitschke should sit a monarch, not an elected official or body. He regarded a strong monarchy as the political institution best suited to governing the national state, and the Hohenzollern monarchy most fit to lead Germany on her national mission. Treitschke's enthusiasm for the monarchical state may have been an effort to legitimize the existing Hohenzollern regime in Germany and the lack of strong parliamentary and constitutional government, but the vehemence with which he promoted monarchical government seems to reveal a sincere commitment to monarchism. For Treitschke, the monarchy represented an impartial mediator that stood above petty class interests; it could justly and efficiently settle social conflict, ensure social harmony, and, most importantly, promote national unity.

Treitschke referred to his teacher Dahlmann to strengthen his arguments about the superiority of monarchical government, paying tribute to his political conception of the state and monarchical government. In his Politics of 1835 Dahlmann, who had held "strictly monarchical inclinations," had successfully "dragged political science from the charmed circle of the formulas of natural law."^25 Like Hegel, he rejected the notion of a social contract. Rather, he saw the state as "an original order, a necessary datum, an asset of mankind."^26 For Treitschke, it was Dahlmann who realized that a constitutional state could indeed "embody a vigorous political life" and who also championed the ideal of monarchical government.^27 He "termed the monarchy the sole bond of custom in the world of German states."^28

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^24 Ibid., 573.
^26 Treitschke, German History 5: 574.
^27 Heinrich Leo quoted in Treitschke, German History, 5: 574.
^28 Treitschke, German History, 5: 575.
Treitschke argued that the Prussian form of monarchy was inherently superior to the British parliamentary system. He chastised Montesquieu for his allegedly false conception of English government as the realization of the ideal of “the separation of these three authorities [the legislative, the judicial, and the federative], which must never be united in a single grasp.” The historian accused the French philosophe of a “stupendous error” for not recognizing that “the House of Commons both made laws and controlled the policy of the nation so completely that whoever had its confidence necessarily became the inspirer of England’s foreign policy.”

For Treitschke, the dominance of Parliament in British political life conflicted with his firm belief in the need for a strong monarchy that could ensure the unity of the state: “The essence of the State is its unity, and that State is the best organized in which these three powers are united in one supreme and independent hand.” “[S]ince the State is primarily power,” he opined, “that State which gathers authority most completely into the hand of one and there leaves it most independent, approaches most nearly to the ideal.” Obviously, Britain, with its emphasis on the representative institution of Parliament, had failed to do this. In Treitschke’s view, “It is an ancient experience that monarchy presents more perfectly than any other form of government a tangible expression of political power and national unity.”

III. Prussia and the Hohenzollerns

As mentioned above, Treitschke saw the force of the Prussian state as one of the

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29 Treitschke, *Politics* 2: 3-4.
30 Ibid., 4.
31 Ibid., 5.
32 Ibid., 13.
33 Ibid., 59.
two fundamental forces working toward German national unity. Only Prussia, he argued, had been committed to establishing a German national state. Throughout his *German History* Treitschke chronicled the efforts of the Hohenzollern and other Prussian statesmen to achieve national unity. In doing so he ascribed to Prussia motivations more in accord with the German national cause than with reality.

Treitschke found inspiration for his argument about Prussia’s national mission in the thought of Hegel. Not only did Hegel provide an attractive theory of the state, but he also helped bolster Treitschke’s claims of a Prussian national mission in Germany. Hegel had acknowledged the necessity of a “vigorous” state, but he had also recognized “the abundant civilizing activity which the Prussian state had long been accustomed to display in practice.” By the 1830s, Hegel, who had opted out of the national movement during the wars of liberation, approvingly pointed out “what [the Germans] possessed in Prussia.” According to Treitschke, Hegel had seen in Prussia “the noblest and most rational of the German states.”

According to Treitschke, the real resurgence of the Prussian state, and consequently of Germany, began with the Great Elector, Frederick William of Brandenburg. “The greatest German of his day,” Frederick William arrived on the German political scene in order “to inspire the slumbering forces of his state with the might of his will. Never since that time has the strength of the purposive monarchical will of the developing German power known any decline.” In the Elector, Treitschke saw the personification of his ideal monarch, a leader who could stand above the

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34 Treitschke, *German History* 4: 572-573.
35 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 33.
squabbling masses, justly mediating between interest groups within society. As a monarch, Frederick William possessed

the two virtues upon which its greatness depends: a bold and far-seeing idealism which sacrifices the convenience of to-day to the greatness of tomorrow; and that strong sense of justice which ever constrains self-interest in the service of the whole...It was only in the sense of duty to the crown, in the idea of the monarchical state, that the mutually hostile tribes and estates, parties and churches, which were comprised within this microcosm of German life, could find protection and peace.\(^{36}\)

In Treitschke’s view, the Elector’s state-building efforts in Brandenburg threatened the status quo of the Holy Roman Empire: “its monarchical order threatened the whole structure of feudal and theocratic institutions which supported the imperial crown.”\(^{37}\) Frederick William planted the seeds of future German greatness. “At length Germany had again found one who could extend the empire,” Treitschke wrote. “With the rise of Prussia there began the long and bloody task of the liberation of Germany from foreign dominion.”\(^{38}\) The work of the Great Elector rekindled a sense of national pride in Germany such that Treitschke could even equate Brandenburg to ancient Rome.

While tainted by an unbridled glorification of Frederick William and the Hohenzollerns, Treitschke’s account of the efforts of the Great Elector is not entirely inaccurate. After his ascension to the throne in 1640, the Elector’s efforts were unquestionably crucial to the formation of the Prussian state. Frederick William made a conscious break with his diplomatic policy of securing and then violating defensive alliances by building a Prussian army in order to take a more independent approach to state security. In a 1653 agreement in which Frederick William granted the Junker nobility extended powers and privileges in exchange for 530,000 Thalers, the Elector

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 39.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 38.
secured for himself the means to pay for a reliable standing army, which soon became the backbone of the new Prussian state, growing from a few thousand mercenaries in 1640 to 30,000 men by 1688.\footnote{Gordon Craig, \textit{The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 2-5.}

Treitschke's portrayal of the efforts of the Great Elector as pivotal in the genesis of the Prussian state is supported by Gordon Craig, who agrees that the work of Frederick William had "revolutionary political consequences."\footnote{Ibid., 3.} However, Treitschke, either intentionally or accidentally, confused the Great Elector's efforts at state construction with an effort at nation building. The historian's suggestion that the Great Elector's efforts revived in Germany "the ancient stout-hearted pride in the fatherland" imposed too much of Germany's present political situation onto the past.\footnote{Treitschke, \textit{German History} 1: 38.} German national sentiment was not important to the Elector. Nor did he attempt to rally patriotic support of Brandenburg-Prussia, although he did "[instill] into the rag-bag collection of territories he inherited the beginnings of a common sense of statehood."\footnote{E.J. Feuchtwanger, \textit{Prussia: Myth and Reality; the Role of Prussia in German History} (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1970), 31.}

The Great Elector's heir, Frederick I, did not receive such hagiographic treatment from Treitschke. In fact, Treitschke only devoted a couple paragraphs to this first king in Prussia. Frederick did secure for the Hohenzollern the royal title of "Kings in Prussia" in exchange for aiding the Habsburgs in the War of Spanish Succession. Treitschke acknowledged the significance of this development, but he found few other acts of the first king praiseworthy. He wrote that Frederick had a "weak spirit" and lacked the admirable pride in the state that his father had had and his son and grandson would
Treitschke did, however, compliment Frederick's efforts to build universities in several Prussian cities and to sponsor some spectacular building projects. Treitschke's interpretation of Frederick I was fairly accurate. James Sheehan presents Frederick in a similar manner, portraying him as a rather decadent ruler "who want[ed] to spend what the preceding generation had earned."^44

King Frederick William I, the Great Elector's grandson, continued the centralization of the Prussian state in the eighteenth century. "[E]ven the laws of Stein and Scharnhorst and the reforms of our own days," wrote Treitschke, "could serve only to develop and not to destroy the work of the founder...[I]t was he who introduced into our history a new form of government, the circumscribed national unity of the modern monarchy."^45 But Frederick William I did not embark on a policy of state construction for personal advantage; he did not regard the new state as a mere appendage of his own house. Rather, in the mind of the unlettered prince, was there conceived, clearly and vividly, a notion of the state that was accordant with the new doctrine of natural law: the notion that the state exists for the good of all, and that the king is placed at its head to administer with unbiased justice over all the estates of the realm, to pursue the public weal regardless of all private privileges and preferences.4^6

Treitschke presented a fairly accurate view of King Frederick William, although it was perhaps overly complimentary. In his history of Prussia, E.J. Feuchtwanger contends that although the king devoted all his energies to the health of his state, he was "driven by an unbalanced sense of mission and duty."^47 He was not motivated to act for the sake of his subjects or the development of the German nation, however. The desire for personal and

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^43 Treitschke, German History 1: 41.
^45 Treitschke, German History 1: 43.
^46 Ibid., 44.
^47 Feuchtwanger, 39.
dynastic aggrandizement, as well as his deeply Calvinistic convictions, motivated the king.48

Frederick William I also instituted administrative reforms that, in Treitschke’s opinion, proved vital for Germany’s national development. In addition to the “liability to taxation” the king also imposed “universal military service and compulsory education, thus establishing the threefold group of general civic duties by which the people of Prussia have been trained in an active love of the fatherland.”49 As a result of these efforts, wrote Treitschke, “the road was unconsciously prepared for a strong national sentiment.”50 In this case, at least, the historian recognized that Frederick William had not consciously sought national unity. Treitschke’s praise of Prussian conscription under Frederick William comes as no surprise, as he often commented on the instructive ability of military service. Ultimately, the historian concluded that the civic reforms of the king created a sense of unity among the people of several dispersed regions: “the men of Magdeburg and Pomerania, of the Mark and of Westphalia, were welded together into a single Prussian people.”51 These efforts doubtless contributed to the unity of the Prussian state, but by suggesting that they were intended to breed German patriotism, Treitschke again misrepresented the true motives of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

Treitschke found the epitome of his ideal monarch in Frederick the Great, who reigned from 1740 to 1786 and once remarked, “My only God is my duty.”52 Treitschke welcomed his “pitiless and cruel German realism,” the defining trait of his reign.53

48 Ibid., 48.
49 Treitschke, German History 1: 46.
50 Ibid., 47. Emphasis added.
51 Ibid., 50.
52 Frederick II quoted in Treitschke, German History 1: 82-83.
53 Treitschke, German History 1: 57.
Because of his selfless devotion to the well being of his subjects, Frederick represented the model of a German king. Other countries, like France, had suffered under inferior monarchs: “The Bourbons never fully emerged from the vain notion of courtly deification and contempt for mankind, hence their shameful fall.”^54 In contrast, Treitschke argued that Frederick reawakened among Germans “the monarchical sentiment which was in our people’s very blood.”^55 The rule of Frederick instilled in the German people a faith in the monarchy as the one form of government that could fairly and effectively stand above societal divisions and justly govern the people. “In no other nation of modern history was the task of kingship understood in so great and lofty a sense,” Treitschke wrote, “and for this reason the German people remained...the most monarchical in sentiment among all the great civilized nations.”^56

In Treitschke’s view, Frederick’s reign truly marked the beginning of Prussia’s rise and the growth of German national consciousness. Of course, Treitschke had praised the efforts of all the Hohenzollerns, but in the achievements of Frederick Europe truly witnessed “the formation of a great German power which should defend the fatherland with the strong hand in the east and in the west.”^57 Under Frederick Prussia became strong enough to pursue a genuinely independent policy free from the interference of Austria, France, Britain, or Sweden. Unlike any of his predecessors, Frederick succeeded in asserting “a policy that was Prussian, and Prussian only. To this policy belonged Germany’s future.”^58 To account for Frederick’s lack of true patriotic enthusiasm, Treitschke argued that he possessed a silent, almost divine, dedication to the German

^54 Ibid., 84.
^55 Ibid.
^56 Ibid.
^57 Ibid., 60.
^58 Ibid.
cause. "It was not the way of this hater of phrases to talk much of the fatherland," wrote
Treitschke, "and yet his soul was animated by a vigorous national pride." 59

Treitschke presented Frederick’s great military victories, such as his conquest of
Silesia, as victories for the cause of German national unity. While the king’s military
efforts certainly challenged Austrian hegemony in Central Europe, Treitschke’s
assertions that the king’s conquest of Silesia was “a genuinely German deed” and that
“his soul was animated by a vigorous national pride” blatantly misinterpreted the motives
of the king. Frederick’s designs on Silesia stemmed from a desire for personal, not
national, glory. 60 At the beginning of the second Silesian War in 1744, Frederick did
indeed try to rally imperial opinion against Austria and even suggested the formation of
an imperial army under the command of the Bavarian Emperor Charles VII to oppose the
Austrians, but this was by no means an effort to cultivate German patriotism. 61

Feuchtwanger concedes that Prussia’s victorious emergence from the Seven
Years’ War did arouse “the first faint stirrings of national sentiment,” and says that a
patriotic attitude did begin to emerge under Frederick, but these sentiments centered not
on the abstract idea of a German nation, but rather on the heroic figure of Frederick.
“Neither [the Great Elector nor Frederick the Great] felt conscious of any German
mission,” writes Dorpalen, “nor did anyone else in their time.” 62 In fact, Dorpalen
reiterates the position of Franz Schnabel, who says that Frederick II’s policies
represented a “revolt against the German unity embodied in the empire.” 63 Moreover,
despite his popularity, Frederick failed to win popular support for his state. The

59 Ibid.
60 Holborn 2: 208.
61 Feuchtwanger, 58.
62 Dorpalen, Treitschke, 219.
63 Franz Schnabel quoted in Dorpalen, Treitschke, 220.
Frederician state consisted of a mass of automatons who felt little patriotic attachment to Prussia and expressed little remorse when Napoleon crushed the Hohenzollern forces at Jena in 1806. Following Prussia’s defeat at Jena, the task of advancing Prussia’s—and Germany’s—national mission was assumed by a set of Prussian statesmen who instituted a series of reforms in an effort to modernize the Prussian state. These men worked to reinvigorate the Prussian state in the midst of Napoleon’s domination, and their reforms laid the foundation for the German Reich of 1871. “In this time of sorrow and self-knowledge,” wrote Treitschke, “were first formed all the political ideals for whose realization the German nation is working to this day.” These reforms were indeed vital to Prussia’s resurgence after years of Napoleonic domination, and for the first time the Prussian state genuinely sought to generate patriotic sentiment in Germany. The Prussian reformers—among them Stein, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau—consciously attempted to replace the “mechanistic” Frederician state with a more organic state to which Germans would feel bound by a strong sense of duty. The reformers wanted a citizenry morally committed to its state, envisioning the reformed state as a moral institution; “they demanded from the rejuvenated German state that it should protect religion, art, and science, all the ideal aims of the human race.”

In his analysis of the reform era, Treitschke emphasized the work of Heinrich von Stein, “the pioneer of the age of reform.” Appointed minister of foreign and domestic affairs in 1807, Stein, a non-Prussian hailing from Nassau, held a deep conviction and

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64 Feuchtwanger, 65-72.  
65 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 314.  
66 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 325; Holborn 2: 393; and Feuchtwanger, 108.  
67 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 315.
commitment to the ideal of German unity, a conviction that “was instilled in the cradle into this proud lord.”\textsuperscript{68} Treitschke maintained that Stein’s political convictions derived from a “powerful moral idealism” fostered “by the hard school of the Prussian official service.”\textsuperscript{69} Stein’s monarchist sentiments appealed to Treitschke, as did Stein’s “Prussian sense of duty,” which the baron opposed to the “greedy [French] revolutionary sentiment, which demanded from the state unending human rights.”\textsuperscript{70} Treitschke found the work of Stein invaluable to the development of the German nation: “Every advance in our political life has brought the nation back to Stein’s ideals.”\textsuperscript{71} Stein “undertook…the completion of the unity of the state.”\textsuperscript{72} He created ministerial offices for the departments of “home affairs, finance, foreign affairs, war, and justice,”\textsuperscript{73} centralizing the Prussian state and making it a more efficient governing apparatus.

In 1807, King Frederick William III entrusted General Gerhard von Scharnhorst with the task of reorganizing the army. Treitschke noted that the king saw in the army a useful apparatus for the education of the nation and “[he] impressed it upon the officers that they should never cease to realize their honourable position as educators and teachers of a noteworthy portion of the nation.”\textsuperscript{74} Treitschke himself was very attracted to the notion of the army as a sort of “school of the nation,” a theme evident throughout many of his writings. For Treitschke, the army reforms greatly contributed to the growth of German patriotism: “The fundamental idea of all these reforms was that henceforward the army was to consist of the people in arms, it was to be a national army, to which

\textsuperscript{68} Treitschke, \textit{German History} 1: 315.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 318.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 319.  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 328.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 329.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 342.
everyone capable of bearing arms must belong.”^75 These reforms helped to affect what Scharnhorst called “the intimate union of the army with the nation.”^76 Treitschke, who associated the reforms of the army with the birth of national consciousness, quoted Scharnhorst approvingly:

The sense of independence must be instilled into the nation, which must be given an opportunity of becoming acquainted with itself, and learn how to gain respect from others. All that we can do is work towards this end. We must loosen the bonds of prejudice, guide the rebirth of the nation; care for its growth, and not hinder its free development; more than it is not in our power to do.\(^77\)

In his effort to glorify the Hohenzollern monarchy Treitschke credited Frederick William III with the initiation of the military reforms, asserting that the king “gave the first impetus” for the reorganization of the army.^78\(^78\) Treitschke’s praise may have been misplaced. Gordon Craig points out that the king looked upon Scharnhorst’s plans for a national militia “with disfavour from the very first.”\(^79\) So, while Frederick William III certainly played an important role in approving the military reforms, he cannot really be credited for their content or success.

Treitschke’s contention that the army reformers sought to build a truly “national” army that could rally the sentiment of the nation accurately interpreted the motives of the reformers. Stein once remarked that a combination of a standing army and a national militia could successfully “inculcate a proud warlike national character” upon society.\(^80\) Hermann von Boyen, a Prussian commander, remarked that a national army would constitute a “school of the nation.”\(^81\) Another, August Gneisenau wanted to “awaken”

\(^75\) Ibid., 343.
\(^76\) Scharnhorst quoted in Treitschke, German History 1: 337.
\(^77\) Ibid.
\(^78\) Treitschke, German History 1: 336.
\(^79\) Craig, Prussian Army, 49.
\(^80\) Stein quoted in Craig, Prussian Army, 47.
\(^81\) Boyen quoted in Craig, Prussian Army, 48.
the energies “asleep in the bosom of the nation.”

Treitschke argued that the Prussian reformers sought to form a state radically different from that of the French, who “pursued a tendency of secondary importance, directed to the simple manifestation of power.” Greatly influenced by Edmund Burke, the conservative Stein despised the French Revolution for its destruction of the monarchy. He and the other reformers envisioned a German state that would “protect religion, art, and science, all the ideal aims of the human race, for their own sake.”

Treitschke cited another key figure of the army reforms, General August Gneisenau, who once proclaimed, “First make the human race enthusiasts for duty, and only after that for rights!” For Treitschke, all of the Prussian reforms were inherently superior to the violent transition of the French Revolution: “From the first, the Prussian officers conceived the ideas of universal military service in a freer and juster sense than did the bourgeoisie under the French Directory.”

Treitschke’s interpretation of the reform period is in many ways accurate. Yet his insistence that men like Stein, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau sought to mould a state fundamentally different from that of France falsely represented their motives. While they wished to avoid a violent revolution, they modeled their reform program on the political and social reforms they witnessed in France and “sought to adapt many of [the French] reforms for the strengthening of their own country.” Koppel Pinson observes that Stein,

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83 Holborn 2: 396.
84 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 325.
85 Holborn 2: 396.
86 Gneisenau quoted in Treitschke, *German History* 1: 337.
87 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 344.
Scharnhorst, and especially Karl August von Hardenberg, wanted to integrate revolutionary ideals into the Prussian monarchical system. The reforms did have, as Treitschke suggested, the ultimate effect of invigorating German national consciousness. “It was during these days of convulsive excitement,” wrote Treitschke approvingly, “that there first awakened in North Germany the idea of German unity.”

Finally, with the benefit of hindsight, Treitschke presented Prussian efforts to create a German Customs Union as vital to the development of the German national state. Since Austria’s influence in the Bund deterred Prussia from taking political steps toward unity, Prussian statesmen, particularly F.C.A. Motz, pursued the national mission by economic means, a tactic to which the Austrians were completely oblivious. Of Motz, appointed minister of finance by Frederick William, Treitschke wrote that he held “[m]easureless...contempt for the petty courts,” viewed himself as “a pioneer of German civilization,” and “lived entirely for the state.” The historian credited Motz with consciously initiating the process of Germany’s revolt from Austria:

At a time when the official German world regarded the perpetual league between Austria and Prussia as an inviolable law, [Motz] marched unhesitatingly towards the attainment of another end, the permanent union, of all Germany, Austria excluded, by the indestructible bond of economic interests.

Treitschke portrayed New Year’s Day 1834—the day the Customs Union officially came into being—as a national festival with jubilant crowds gathered at toll booths. He even wrote that “from a remote distance could already be heard the guns of Königgrätz,” a phrase that reduced the significance of the event to a “pathetic cliché,” in the words of

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89 Ibid.
90 Treitschke, German History 1: 349.
91 Treitschke, German History 4: 251-252.
92 Ibid., 288.
93 Treitschke, German History 5: 461.
one historian.\textsuperscript{94}

Treitschke clearly saw—or at least sought to portray—the Customs Union as a crucial development in Germany’s struggle for unity, and he did not miss the opportunity to praise the Hohenzollern for its role in the accomplishment. While he lauded the efforts of Motz and other statesmen such as J.A.F. Eichhorn and Karl Georg Maassen, who played a pivotal role in establishing the \textit{Zollverein}, he claimed that their efforts would have come to naught had it not been for the work of King Frederick William. “The unpretentious simplicity of his nature,” explained Treitschke, “enabled him...to sow the seed \textit{sic} of a great future.”\textsuperscript{95}

In his interpretation of the \textit{Zollverein}, Treitschke again misrepresented the true motives of the Prussian state, an error that, as James J. Sheehan observes, many historians of Wilhelmine Germany committed. Wilhelm Roscher, one of Treitschke’s former mentors, once called the Customs Union “not only the most beneficial, but also the greatest event in German history between Waterloo and Königgrätz.”\textsuperscript{96} Sheehan describes the \textit{Zollverein} as “perhaps the period’s most famous bureaucratic accomplishment,” but maintains that it “was essentially a fiscal measure.”\textsuperscript{97} In reality, the \textit{Zollverein} played little or no role in encouraging German political unity: “In retrospect, of course, the Zollverein seemed to fit perfectly into the story of Prussia’s ‘national mission’ to unify Germany. Actually, the tariff union had little to do with the nation...”\textsuperscript{98} In fact, Sheehan even doubts the economic benefits of the Union, noting that some goods such as tobacco and wine remained taxable, that the \textit{Zollverein} lacked a

\textsuperscript{94} Langer, 369.
\textsuperscript{95} Treitschke, \textit{German History} 5: 495.
\textsuperscript{96} Wilhelm Roscher quoted in Sheehan, \textit{German History}, 503.
\textsuperscript{97} Sheehan, \textit{German History}, 434.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 504.
uniform system of weights and measures, and that international influences continued to affect the domestic economies of the German states. David Blackbourn agrees that “it is important to recognize that the customs union was a product of Prussian geographical division and fiscal interests, not part of a long-term ‘German’ programme.”

IV. Religious Freedom

In addition to the centralizing and unifying force of the Prussian state and the Hohenzollerns, Treitschke also identified religious freedom as the second important aspect of her national mission. He presented the German Reformation as a rebellion against the intellectual and spiritual imperialism of Catholicism, supported by Rome and the Habsburgs. The national historian saw Prussia, writ large as the German nation, as a chosen land; the Germans had become God’s chosen people. Because of this tradition of religious tolerance and intellectual liberty, argued Treitschke, Germany rightly deserved to occupy a position of world hegemony and become the next leader of civilization.

Germany truly realized her national mission during the Reformation. Treitschke portrayed Martin Luther as the great savior not only of the Germans, but also of all humanity. The effect of Luther’s reform was to free “the State from the dominion of the Church.” Treitschke wrote that “the nation hailed the Monk of Wittenberg with shouts of exultation, and, moved to the depths of its being, awaited an entire transformation of the empire.” Luther became a true national hero as a crusader for spiritual and intellectual freedom. Treitschke portrayed “the free movement of ideas” as the defining trait of the

99 Ibid., 503-504.
100 Blackbourn, Long Nineteenth Century, 96.
101 Treitschke, German History 1: 4.
German nation. It was the "holy of holies of the nation of Martin Luther."102

While perhaps a bit exaggerated, Treitschke's suggestion that the German Reformation was partly a national movement is not entirely false. Luther did gather many supporters, and Hajo Holborn has acknowledged that "national sentiment was a subordinate element in Luther's opposition to Rome."103 Moreover, most of the German estates were opposed to papal authority and the imperial diet in Augsburg "had shown passionate aversion to Rome."104

Not only had Luther's attack on the Church resulted in a break between Germany and Rome, but it also marked the beginning of an Austro-Prussian and, for Treitschke, an Austro-"German" antagonism, even though many South Germans remained Catholic during the Reformation. The empire of the Habsburgs, which remained Catholic, would "[remain] henceforward, until its inglorious fall, the enemy of all that was truly German."105 Throughout the rest of his seven-volume history Treitschke presented Austria and the Habsburgs as the historical enemy of all German interests, which were untiringly defended by the Prussian state and the Hohenzollern crown. In Treitschke's opinion "Austria did nothing for Germany, while Prussia alone was in a position to do justice to the longings of the nation."106 Treitschke likely portrayed Austria as a traditional enemy of "Germany" in order to legitimize the kleindeutsch unification of the empire in 1871. To account for the fact that a large population of German-speaking Austrians lay outside the Kaiserreich, Treitschke suggested that they were historical

102 Treitschke, German History 3: 211.
104 Ibid., 134.
105 Treitschke, German History 1: 4.
106 Treitschke, German History 2: 135.
enemies of Germany, an assertion based in part on their loyalty to the Catholic Church.

The Thirty Years’ War, or the “war of the religions”, as Treitschke called it, represented another landmark in Germany’s national mission, as it was this catastrophe that alerted Germans to the above-mentioned fundamental forces that built their nation: religious freedom and the Prussian state. “In a disturbance without parallel, the old Germany passed away,” Treitschke wrote. “Those who had once aimed at world-dominion were now, by the pitiless justice of history, placed under the feet of the stranger.” All the lands of Germany became the “captives of foreign nations…Never was any other nation so forcibly estranged from itself and from its own past.” It appeared as though the religious wars signaled “the destruction of the German name.” Miraculously, though, “[I]n those days of misery, in the time of the Peace of Westphalia, our new history begins.”

In the midst of religious upheaval and warfare, Prussia emerged as the guardian of religious freedom. Because the German lands contained Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews, the Hohenzollerns had to defend all four. “Thus originated,” wrote Treitschke, the peculiar duplex attitude of the Hohenzollerns towards our ecclesiastical life: with the fall of the power of the Palatinate they became the leaders of militant Protestantism in the empire, but had also to represent the fundamental idea of the new German civilization—freedom of religious belief.

Prussian monarchs, such as the Great Elector, Frederick I, and Frederick the Great, did indeed champion the ideals of religious tolerance, yet Treitschke’s celebration of Prussia as a religious haven may have been intended to serve more contemporary objectives. In a state containing Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews, Treitschke did not wish to

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107 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 5-6.
108 Ibid., 6.
109 Ibid., 31.
alienate any group from the national cause. The only way to bring these disparate groups together was through an emphasis on tolerance and “freedom of religious belief.”

Treitschke portrayed the Great Elector as a champion of Germany’s mission and the guardian of spiritual freedom. The Prussia of Frederick William was “the first state in Europe in which complete religious freedom was secured...in Brandenburg the throne stood free above all the Churches and protected their equality.”\textsuperscript{110} In fact, according to Treitschke, Prussia offered asylum for religious refugees from across the continent and became a magnet for persecuted peoples. When Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, the Elector responded with his own Edict of Potsdam, which “offered protection and shelter to the children of the martyr-Church.”\textsuperscript{111} Frederick William also granted religious freedom to Jews, who traveled to Brandenburg from Vienna, while Protestants flocked from Heidelberg.

Treitschke’s portrayal of Frederick William as a defender of Protestantism and of religious freedom is also accurate. The Elector’s Calvinism certainly motivated him to strengthen his state, as he recognized a need for a strong Protestant German state to ensure the future of the faith.\textsuperscript{112} His devotion to the Calvinist faith also prompted Frederick William to offer shelter to his French co-religionists. In 1685 he issued his Edict of Potsdam, which inspired the widespread immigration of French Huguenots into Brandenburg. As a Calvinist in a Lutheran land, the Elector likely also saw this maneuver as a means of bolstering political support in his territory. In 1671 he also lifted restrictions on Jews in Brandenburg.\textsuperscript{113}

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\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 33-34.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{112} Holborn 2: 67.
\textsuperscript{113} Feuchtwanger, 30.
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Frederick the Great also stood as a crusader against “Roman” tyranny in Treitschke’s eyes. The historian suggested that Prussia’s victory in the Seven Years’ War represented the greatest blow to the Roman church since the heresy of Martin Luther. To him Frederick was like Luther—a crusader for the well being of humanity. “King Frederick had in truth,” wrote Treitschke, “been fighting for the freedom of the human race.”

Treitschke lauded Frederick’s conquest of Silesia, a predominantly Catholic region, in the War of the Austrian Succession as “a genuinely German deed,” rather than the power-based political move that it really was. The region’s prosperity after the Prussian conquest apparently confirmed “that the new province had found its natural master.”

Prussia’s victorious emergence from the Seven Years’ War proved the “irrevocable necessity” of “the new order of German affairs, which had begun with the foundation of the Prussian power.”

V. The Struggle of Nations

In addition to his efforts to establish the national mission of the Prussian state as the defender of German interests and a leader of humanity, Treitschke’s *German History* reflected its author’s conception of international relations, which he perceived as a quasi-Darwinian struggle among nation-states. Many scholars have labeled Treitschke a social Darwinist, but Paul Crook smartly observes that Treitschke’s theory of international relations should not be interpreted as Darwinian “solely by virtue of the fact that [his]

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114 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 70.
115 Ibid., 66-67.
116 Ibid., 68.
bellicose utterances succeeded the publication of Darwin’s *Origin.*” Mike Hawkins further explains that Treitschke’s doctrine of *Machtpolitik* was not really Darwinian because Treitschke did not provide a “materialist rationale for power politics,” as Bernhardi and others did after him. In other words, Treitschke’s work was not Darwinian because for him the struggle among nations was a struggle for prestige, for what he called the right to lead civilization, rather than a struggle for resources necessary for national survival.

Within this struggle, vigorous nations rose to positions of regional and global dominance while weaker nations declined. During the late 1800s, Treitschke portrayed Great Britain and her overseas empire as the hegemonic power in the world. He also portrayed Austria as the hegemonic power in Central Europe and France, for a short time at least, as the hegemon in Europe. The story of his *German History* is in large part the story of Prussia’s struggle against these three imperialist powers. The *German History* worked to expose the alleged tyranny of these hostile powers and celebrated Prussian efforts to throw off the yokes of France and Austria and to challenge Great Britain’s global position. In both his lectures and his *History* Treitschke encouraged his fellow Germans to take up the national cause and bring Germany to a position of world hegemony through colonial expansion overseas. The whole future of the nation, he argued, depended on it. This type of imperial expansion would almost certainly entail war with other imperialist nations, something that Treitschke celebrated for its ability to unite peoples and strengthen nations.

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Revolutionary and Napoleonic France represented for Treitschke one of the most detrimental forces acting against the goal of German national unity. Most unfortunate in Treitschke's view was the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine in July of 1806, when "[s]ixteen German princes separated themselves from the empire, declared themselves to be sovereign, and further declared that every law of the ancient and honorable national comity was null and inoperative." Furthermore, "they recognized Napoleon as their protector" and pledged military support for France in the case of war. Designed by Napoleon "as a counterweight to Prussia and Austria," the Confederation represented for Treitschke a tragic development in the history of the German nation. With the founding of the Rhenish Confederation, the old Holy Roman Empire and the unity it embodied ceased to exist.

Treitschke was extremely suspicious of the French desire to spread revolutionary republican ideals throughout the continent and even the world: "the French now regarded themselves as the Messiahs of freedom." He lamented that the French saw themselves as cultural leaders and noted that General Lafayette prophesied "that the [new tricolor] should wave round the world." As mentioned above, Treitschke worked to discredit the violent upheaval of the French Revolution and the reforms that it entailed. French hegemony in Germany threatened to destroy the Prussian monarchical order. Fortunately, however, "Frederick William was not inclined to allow the prestige of his

119 Treitschke, German History 1: 268-269.  
120 Blackbourn, Long Nineteenth Century 62.  
121 Ibid.  
122 Ibid.
The reforms of Stein and his other ministers effectively rejuvenated the Prussian state, enabling it to defeat Napoleon's forces in 1813.

France's defeat in the Wars of Liberation and Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo did not, however, eliminate the French threat to Germany. Treitschke remained hostile to France for the rest of his life. As late as 1870, in his pamphlet entitled "What We Demand of France," he promoted the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine and advocated harsh peace terms for the French following that country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. In his *Politics* he declared that Germany was involved in a "latent" war with France, even though the two powers were "outwardly friendly."124 In his *History* Treitschke had written that "[t]he [French] nation was accustomed to despise every foreign power."125 Treitschke almost certainly sought to portray the French as inherently xenophobic and hostile, a characteristic he believed to be no less true in 1896 than it was in 1806.

After the expulsion of the French from Germany in 1813, the Habsburg Empire stood as the greatest obstacle to German national unity. In the opening pages of the *German History*, Treitschke railed against the Habsburgs, who had supposedly exploited their favorable position within the Holy Roman Empire to dominate all of Germany. "For our people," he wrote, "the imperial rule of the Hapsburgs was a foreign dominion."126 In his biography of Treitschke, Andreas Dörpelmen has pointed out the inaccuracy of such a statement: "it was an entirely unhistoric view to describe the

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123 Ibid., 280.
125 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 138.
126 Ibid., 11.
Habsburg phase of the Holy Roman Empire as one of alien rule in German eyes.”

Treitschke made other efforts to alienate Austria from the greater cultural and geographical Germany; in the opening pages of the *German History* he argued that since the Peace of Westphalia “Austria has remained apart from the community of German life.”

For Treitschke, the Congress of Vienna and the subsequent meetings of the European concert represented a conspiracy of the Great Powers to thwart German national unity and foil the aspirations of Prussia. According to Treitschke, the Prussian representatives at the Congress of Vienna were committed to promoting their state’s mission as the defender and unifier of the German nation. “To them,” wrote Treitschke, “the national political development was a matter in which they put their whole hearts.”

Their efforts came to naught, however, in the face of the opposition of the other European powers. In fact, Treitschke went so far as to say that at Vienna “the whole world was united in fighting Prussia.”

Treitschke’s chief villain in this story was Austrian foreign minister Clemens von Metternich. The historian demonized Metternich, “the Adonis of the drawing rooms,” for his German policy that aimed at keeping the German states in political disunity and subordinate to Habsburg dominance. He was Prussia and Germany’s arch nemesis, a man who worked to ensure “[a] persistent state of disintegration in Germany, so that the sovereign petty kings should voluntarily turn to Austria for protection against Prussia and

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128 *German History* 1: 12.
129 *Treitschke, German History* 2: 112.
130 Ibid., 32.
131 *Treitschke, German History* 1: 409.

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against 'the dangerous idea of German unity.'"\textsuperscript{132} Treitschke remarked that this policy "had no inkling of the motive forces of history," revealing his conviction that nations naturally evolve into states with young and vibrant nations rising to challenge old and decaying ones.\textsuperscript{133} Metternich was joined in his opposition to German unity by the Habsburg Emperor Francis, "the sworn enemy of all innovations, the suspicious opponent of the two ambitious neighbor powers, Russia and, above all, Prussia."\textsuperscript{134} Treitschke's arguments about the Austrians' efforts to squash the German national movement are probably not inaccurate. However, Treitschke's vehemence toward Francis and especially toward Metternich, whom he called the "vainest of men,"\textsuperscript{135} certainly discredited their accuracy.

One of Metternich's greatest triumphs in opposing German national development was the Federal Act of 1815, which established the German Confederation. Intended to replace the old Empire, the Confederation, or \textit{Bund}, represented a loose alliance of German states, including Austria and Prussia, who competed for influence within it. Those who had wanted greater German political unity at the time were greatly disappointed with the Confederation because it ensured a significant degree of sovereignty for the individual states within it. According to Treitschke, Metternich saw the Confederation as "the most suitable means for effectively checking Prussian ambition!"\textsuperscript{136} The Federal Act of June 8, 1815, which recognized the "independence and inviolability of the individual German states," was a "catastrophe" and ensured "the

\textsuperscript{132} Treitschke, \textit{German History} 2: 13.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{136} Treitschke, \textit{German History} 3: 184.
\textsuperscript{136} Treitschke, German History 2: 125.
triumph of particularism” in Germany.\textsuperscript{137}

Political developments that Treitschke witnessed during his own life also greatly influenced his scholarly bias. After the Reichsgründing, the historian increasingly saw Britain as Germany’s chief rival in fulfilling her national mission. Britain had enjoyed her tenure as the dominant world power, now it was the young and vigorous Germany’s turn to assert herself on the international stage. Treitschke hurled many of his harshest criticisms at the British, whom he portrayed as crass, materialistic Mammon worshipers:

The hypocritical Englishman, with the Bible in one hand and a pipe of opium in the other, possesses no redeeming qualities. The nation was an ancient robber-knight, in full armor, lance in hand, on every one of the world’s trade routes... The English possess a commercial spirit, a love of money which has killed every sentiment of honor and every distinction of right and wrong. English cowardice and sensuality are hidden behind unctuous, theological fine talk which is to us free-thinking German heretics among all the sins of English nature the most repugnant. In England all notions of honor and class prejudices vanish before the power of money, whereas the German nobility has remained poor but chivalrous.\textsuperscript{138}

Treitschke reserved some of his harshest words for British statesmen such as Castlereagh and Canning. The Britons at Vienna, he wrote, were “crotchety” and possessed a “preposterous arrogance.” He described Lady Castlereagh as “gigantic.”\textsuperscript{139}

Treitschke interpreted Great Britain’s policy as opportunistic and imperialistic and maintained that English statesmen had intentionally played the continental powers off against one another in order to build their own world empire with minimal European competition. In his discussion of Canning’s policies, Treitschke noted that

British commerce would thrive most securely if the continent were never at rest, if the economic energies of the nations of Europe were paralysed by civil wars; then the fortunate island nation could consolidate undisturbed that dominion over the seas which she regarded as her natural heritage.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{137} Federal Act quoted in Holborn 2: 445; and Treitschke, German History 2: 125.  
\textsuperscript{139} Treitschke, German History 2: 13. 
\textsuperscript{140} Treitschke, German History 4: 15.
Treitschke traced this attitude toward continental affairs back to the Pitts, who "had employed the high-sounding phrase of the European balance of power as an oratorical wrapping for the concealment of their policy which aimed at England's command of the sea."

England's position as Europe's dominant maritime power represented for Treitschke not merely a position of strength but also one of tyranny. Treitschke, who described British maritime policy as that of "privileged rapine," wrote that an international balance of power "was not secure, so long as one single state could act upon all the seas in accordance with her own arbitrary caprice." At the peace negotiations following Napoleon's defeat, both Russia and Prussia campaigned for "the principles of a humane sea power which could not be oppressive to neutral trade," but Great Britain opposed their efforts because she felt "that this would threaten the very basis of her power." Ultimately, the continental powers' preoccupation with more pressing problems meant that "the foulest spot of modern international law was not touched upon during the peace negotiations of Chatillon, Paris, and Vienna." This conclusion of the debate about maritime law represented for Treitschke yet another example of Britain exploiting her insular position to protect her own interests and world empire.

Treitschke's treatment of George Canning, appointed foreign secretary upon Castlereagh's death in 1822, serves as another telling example of his interpretation of British policy in general. According to Treitschke, Canning continued Britain's single-minded policy of securing commercial gains; with his appointment to office "a resolute

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141 Ibid., 17.
142 Treitschke, *German History* 1: 639.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., 640.
representative of English interests and English commercial policy once again acquired a predominant influence in Downing Street.” “From his youth upwards,” wrote Treitschke, “Canning had lived solely for the idea of England’s power.”  The historian argued that Canning, rather than recognizing the French Revolution as a profound ideological struggle, saw it only as “a contest for the British mastery of the sea.” In order to cover up his true commercial aims, Canning often appealed to the liberal and national aspirations of continental Europeans:

The fine phrases about national freedom introduced into his speeches were to serve only as a means by which the approval of public opinion on the continent was to be won on behalf of the harsh commercial policy of England.  

Treitschke’s Anglophobia skewed his history to such an extent that he even attempted to portray the British abolition of the slave trade as an attempt to expand British commercial interests. He wrote that British statesmen supported abolition “with an ardour that was altogether too conspicuous, while the British commercial world used language of almost fanatical vehemence against the slave traders.”  

Treitschke attempted to account for this alleged enthusiasm with an explanation of the trade in coffee. He noted that “barely one-twentieth” of all coffee imports came from English possessions and that British colonies already “had long been overstocked with blacks.” For those reasons, the cessation of the slave trade could do little harm to British commerce, but “it would inevitably give rise to severe economic disturbances in the colonies of the other naval powers.”  

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145 Treitschke, German History 4: 14.  
146 Ibid.  
147 Ibid., 609.  
148 Ibid., 32-33.  
149 Ibid., 32.  
150 Ibid.
Christian brotherly love” simply masked the true aims of British policy—namely, commercial interests.\textsuperscript{151}

In order to challenge Britain’s world hegemony, Treitschke advocated a vigorous policy of colonial expansion. He conceded that Germany had missed a great opportunity for colonization, as much of the globe had already been claimed by the British: “The consequences of the last half century have been appalling, for in them England has conquered the world.”\textsuperscript{152} In light of this development, Treitschke viewed colonial expansion as absolutely necessary to the future of the German nation, writing that “the whole position of Germany depends upon the number of German-speaking millions in the future.”\textsuperscript{153} He proclaimed that “all great nations” have pursued an impulse “to set their mark upon barbarian lands.” Furthermore, “The colonizing impulse has become a vital question for a great nation.”\textsuperscript{154} Treitschke passionately encouraged Germany to take her rightful place among the great colonizing nations of the world:

\begin{quote}
  every colonizing effort which retains its single nationality has become a factor of immense importance for the future of the world. Upon it depends the share which each people will take in the domination of the earth by the white races.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

Such a policy of imperial expansion would almost surely lead any nation into war, a risk that Treitschke welcomed. He accepted and even celebrated the fact that international relations, when perceived as a continuous struggle of nations, necessarily entailed wars among states. While he argued that the political and military reforms of men such as Frederick and Stein had made great contributions to German national unity and the growth of a common national sentiment, Treitschke strongly believed that war

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Treitschke, \textit{Politics} 1: 117.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 115-116.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 119.
had even greater ability to unite a people. For that reason, Treitschke celebrated the experience of war throughout his works.

The national historian insisted that states and nations built and strengthened themselves through conflict. Throughout history conflict had worked to unite nations. This trend could be traced back to ancient tribal peoples, among whom “[t]he gregarious instinct...was strengthened as much by the impulse of hostility to the alien as by the other impulse of adherence to the tribe to which a man belonged.” Treitschke untiringly argued that war benefited states and nations: “it is war which turns a people into a nation.” In his Politics the nationalist historian wrote, “We learn from history that nothing knits a nation more closely together than war...War and conquest, then, are the most important factors in state construction.” War functions as “the one remedy for an ailing nation.” Treitschke shamelessly celebrated the “grandeur of war,” which “[annihilates]...puny man in the great conception of the State.”

In his analysis of the Prussian Wars of Liberation against Napoleon’s forces, Treitschke revealed his view of war as a constructive force in the nation-building process. The historian celebrated the work of General Gebhart Blücher, who commanded Prussian forces at the Battle of Katzbach, which freed Silesia from French control. Treitschke approvingly noted Blücher’s “joy of battle,” and his brilliant victory, which “awakened what is absolutely essential to every national war, a delight in a national hero...Blücher’s name was in every mouth.” The emancipation of Berlin produced a similar effect on

156 Ibid., 107.
157 Ibid., 51.
158 Ibid., 108.
159 Ibid., 66.
160 Ibid., 66-67.
161 Treitschke, German History 1: 559, 590.

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the national consciousness:

What bursts of joy and sorrow; there was no end to expressions of thankfulness and to embracing; in a thousand moving lineaments was displayed the holy power of love which a just war awakens in noble nations.\textsuperscript{162}

Such an interpretation of the Wars of Liberation may not be entirely accurate. David Blackbourn argues that “the ‘war of national liberation’ described by later nationalists was largely a legend.” He notes that attempts to petition the German nation “met with widespread indifference.” High rates of desertion also indicate the lack of national enthusiasm on the part of the soldiers. Blackbourn finally concludes, “There was no spontaneous Prussian uprising in 1813, let alone a German-wide movement...The role of the volunteer detachments was exaggerated by nationalist historiography.”\textsuperscript{163}

The creation of the German Confederation destroyed any hopes of a peaceful political integration of Germany; now the ideal of a German nation could only be realized through war. “The new Germany,” wrote Treitschke, “could be created only with the aid of the sword.”\textsuperscript{164} He did, though, see a silver lining to this dismal situation. While the Germanic Confederation effectively stifled the German national movement and kept the German states in a subordinate position to Austria, it failed “to prevent the increase in strength of the one really living German state.” That state—Prussia, of course—“was destined at a later date to destroy that Federation, and to bestow upon our unhappy nation a new and worthy order.”\textsuperscript{165} Yet again, Treitschke had made the mistake of suggesting that the German \textit{Reich} of 1871 had been the historical objective of Prussian statesmen.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 565.
\textsuperscript{163} Blackbourn, \textit{Long Nineteenth Century}, 88.
\textsuperscript{164} Treitschke, \textit{German History} 2: 126.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 136.
VI. Conclusion

Throughout his career as a historian, Heinrich von Treitschke committed what David Hackett Fischer has called simply the “historian’s fallacy,” namely the mistake of portraying the moves of past actors as consciously working to achieve present reality. In other words, “this fallacy consists in the tendency of historians, with their retrospective advantages, to forget that their subjects did not know what was coming next.”¹⁶⁶ This particular fallacy points up the central flaw of Treitschke’s work. Whether they were acting in 1670 or 1870, Treitschke maintained that all Prussian statesmen sought German national unification when, in fact, their actions were usually not motivated by desires for German unity. For instance, Treitschke could look back on the work of Motz and the creation of the Zollverein and argue that it was a conscious move toward unification. The reality, of course, was that Motz was not concerned with national unity at all, even though in retrospect the customs union had provided a useful framework for unification in 1866 and 1870.

Despite the fallaciousness of Treitschke’s history and its historical inaccuracy—or probably because of it—the effect of his works was to create a coherent national mission for Germany. Through his German History he constructed a German past that celebrated the role of the Prussian state in defending and promoting the interests of the German people and working to achieve German national unity. This mission was often accomplished in the face of opposition from Austria, France, and Britain. Treitschke also presented Prussia—and later Germany—as the defender of religious and intellectual

freedom. This Protestant land was a haven from the spiritual tyranny of Rome and the overweening domination of Austria.

Of course, when Treitschke wrote his *History* and delivered his lectures on politics, German political unity had already been achieved. This development did not make the message of his *History* obsolete, though. He intended his compatriots to adopt the Prussian mission as their own, strengthening their national state and asserting Germany as a world power. Treitschke wanted Germany to become a leader of humanity, a "new Israel." This call did not go unnoticed. Treitschke’s *History* was widely read in late nineteenth-century Germany and many shared the historian’s enthusiasm for state power, imperial expansion, and war.
CHAPTER THREE

FRIEDRICH VON BERNHARDI'S USE OF TREITSCHKE FOR HISTORICAL AUTHORITY
Treitschke enjoyed tremendous popularity as both a lecturer and a publicist. His widely read *German History* went through several editions. The ideas Treitschke presented had a significant impact on many Germans and the way they thought about their nation. Friedrich von Bernhardi, who was the first Prussian soldier to ride under the *Arc de Triomphe* in 1871, "swinging his sabre [as] he led his squad of horse" through the French national monument, was one German whom Treitschke's national mission had greatly influenced. After beginning his career in the Prussian army in 1869, Bernhardi had served in the German military in various capacities until his first retirement in 1909. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 he came out of retirement to serve during the First World War. Throughout his career he had made a name for himself publishing books on military theory, but in the years prior to the Great War Bernhardi also published several highly politicized works calling on Germans to assert themselves as a great world power. These works revealed his enthusiasm for a radical policy of imperial expansion and militarism.

Bernhardi’s extreme views have attracted the attention of many scholars of political science and international relations, who have attempted to analyze the German general’s theories of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism. Mike Hawkins has classified Bernhardi’s theories as unmistakably social Darwinist, arguing that he “inferred the inevitability of conflict from the pressure of population on resources.” While Bernhardi’s work closely resembled that of Treitschke, Hawkins rightly points out that “Bernhardi went beyond Treitschke to argue that the interests of the nation-state had

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3 Hawkins, 208.
to be understood within the context of biological imperatives." Paul Crook agrees that
Bernhardi’s work, with its arguments for the “biological necessity” of war and
imperialism, had a distinct Darwinian component. 5

Another scholar has classified Bernhardi’s worldview as both “hierarchic realist,”
a classification that “postulates that nations live in a state of conflictual super- and
subordination,” and “militaristic imperialism,” a fairly self-explanatory category. 6
Hierarchic realists, explains Jürg Martin Gabriel, reject the existence of an equilibrium of
approximately equal states and instead view international relations as an endless struggle
for hegemony. They accept war as an unavoidable and even desirable feature of
international life. For these theorists war possesses a positive moral value and is viewed
as an end in itself rather than a means to some other end. Hierarchic realist theorists also
tend to view history and international relations as cyclical, with strong actors rising to
hegemony as their competitors decline, and so on. 7

All of these observers have underscored that Bernhardi encouraged Germany to
rise to hegemony in Europe and eventually in the world by a policy of imperial
expansion. To further that end he advocated war as a positive and, indeed, a necessary
exercise in his nation’s struggle for world power. Bernhardi’s work had a strongly
Anglophobic component. For Germany, an impending hegemonic showdown with Great
Britain was inevitable.

Gabriel has observed that Bernhardi’s philosophy of idealism saw in man a need
for spiritual and moral development, not simply material comfort. Bernhardi often

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4 Hawkins, 209.
5 Crook, 82-83.
6 Jürg Martin Gabriel, Worldviews and Theories of International Relations (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 3 and 42.
7 Gabriel, 163.
juxtaposed his conception of idealism to Anglo-Saxon materialism, which he viewed as a shallow and single-minded pursuit of material gain.\(^8\) Like Treitschke, Bernhardi saw a need for a strong state that could stand above the masses, mitigating differences among interest groups and cultivating the nation’s moral fiber.

These radical ideas were presented in a number of widely read books that Bernhardi published during his first retirement from 1909 to 1914, except for one essay published in 1890. These works, namely *Videant Consules* (1890), *Germany and the Next War* (1912), and *Our Future—A Word of Warning to the German Nation* (1912), closely mirrored the doctrines presented by the national historian Heinrich von Treitschke, whom he frequently cited, particularly his *German History* and his *Politics*. Treitschke undoubtedly had an impact on the intellectual development of Bernhardi, but more than anything the General could rely on the historian to provide legitimacy for his own radical ideas. By including the ideas, and indeed the very words, of Treitschke in his own works, Bernhardi added a degree of “scientific” authority to his own theories of international relations and Germany’s national mission.

In his intellectual development, Bernhardi was strongly influenced by his father Theodor von Bernhardi. Although born in Berlin on February 6, 1803, the elder Bernhardi grew up under Tsarist control in Estonia. In part due to his inability to advance within the Russian bureaucracy and his failure to secure a position at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Theodor emigrated to Germany in 1851 and eventually settled at Kunnersdorf in Silesia. Probably as a result of his professional frustrations, Bernhardi developed vehemently anti-Russian sentiments. Loren Campion observes that “[b]y the year 1851 he already felt so convinced of a coming showdown

\(^8\) Gabriel, 44.
between Germandom and Slavdom that he left the Tsarist Empire in order that his two sons would not have to fight on the Russian side.\textsuperscript{9}

After settling in Prussia, Theodor made a name for himself as a writer, publishing several highly acclaimed historical and political works. In 1854, in the midst of the Crimean War, Bernhardi traveled to Warsaw to get a sense of the political situation in the Russian Empire and wrote “Russia in March and April 1854” upon his return to Prussia. The memorandum made the rounds among the Prussian political elite, finally reaching the hands of Prince William, the future King William I, who was impressed by the work.\textsuperscript{10} The following year Bernhardi produced “Russia as Nicholas I Leaves It,” which made an even greater impression than his first memo. A biographical study of Carl Friedrich von Toll, an allied general-quartermaster at the Battle of Dresden in 1813, in 1856 brought Bernhardi literary renown and gained him access to Berlin high society.\textsuperscript{11} In 1863 he drafted “On the Polish Uprising of 1863.”\textsuperscript{12} In 1881 he wrote two volumes entitled \textit{Frederick the Great as a Military Commander}.\textsuperscript{13}

Theodor von Bernhardi’s writings revealed all of the Russophobic biases that he harbored in his personal life. Campion provides some valuable insight into the writings of Bernhardi, noting that in his work on Toll—which was essentially a military history of the years 1812-1814—the author gave Prussia’s role in the Wars of Liberation a “forceful shove into the foreground.”\textsuperscript{14} He lauded the actions of Prussians and ethnic Germans, while downplaying the contributions of General Kutuzov and other Russians. Of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9} Campion, 40-41.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Theodor von Bernhardi, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben des kaiserlichen-russischen Generals von der Infanterie Carl Friedrich Grafen von Toll} (Leipzig, 1856-1858), cited in Campion, 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Campion, 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Theodor von Bernhardi, \textit{Friedrich der Grosse als Feldherr} (Berlin, 1881), cited in Campion, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Campion, 44.
\end{itemize}
particular importance in Bernhardi’s interpretation was the Livonian-German general Michael Barclay de Tolly. “Bernhardi went so far as to give the Livonian chief credit for saving the Tsar’s army from destruction at Borodino,” explains Campion. “In fact [he] designated him as the hero of Borodino purely and simply.”15 Bernhardi’s other writings and the records of his conversations continued along these lines, criticizing Russian society and revealing their author’s anti-Russian inclinations.16

With his literary success, Theodor von Bernhardi quickly rose to the top of Prussian society and socialized with many of the state’s elite, including the crown prince and princess, Field Marshall von Moltke, and the historian Heinrich von Treitschke.17 Bernhardi was indeed popular and influential as a publicist, but despite all his acclaim he attracted some notable critics. Both Bismarck and the novelist and critic Gustav Freytag, a close friend of Treitschke, failed to share the great admiration of Bernhardi that so many other Germans had. Freytag had a low opinion of his Russian history and was also repelled by his apparent egotism.18 Bismarck acknowledged Bernhardi’s contributions as a military writer, but offered some scathing criticism of the author’s work:

He writes agreeably and as for a *feuilleton*, but when I go through his closely, minutely, and ornamentally written reports, there is really nothing there, what with all their lengthiness.19

In spite of his opinion of Bernhardi’s works, the chancellor apparently recognized some talent in the man. In 1866 Bernhardi served as a representative of Bismarck in Italy and was also active diplomatically in Italy and in Spain until 1871. Theodor von Bernhardi died in Kunnersdorf on February 12, 1887.20

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 45-47.
17 Ibid., 42-43.
18 Ibid., 48.
19 Bismarck quoted in Campion, 49.
Theodor's son, Friedrich von Bernhardi, was according to Campion an "Even Harder Chip Off the Old Block,"\(^1\) a fitting characterization considering the even more intense German chauvinism of the younger Bernhardi, who shared his father's Russophobia. Over time, though, Friedrich von Bernhardi began to see England, not Russia, as Germany's true rival in her rise as a world power. In the years leading up to World War I, Bernhardi's works revealed an intense Anglophobia as he attempted to rally Germans to oppose British designs around the globe.

Born on September 22, 1849, in Petersburg, Friedrich von Bernhardi grew up on his father's manor in Silesia and was educated in Berlin. In 1869 he became an officer in the Fourteenth Hussar Regiment in Kassel. During the Franco-Prussian War he fought in the Battle of Worth, receiving the Iron Cross for his performance. Although not active at Sedan, Bernhardi did have the previously mentioned honor of being the first Prussian soldier to pass through the Arc de Triomphe.\(^2\)

After the war, Bernhardi continued his career in the military. In 1872 he joined the Fifth Dragoons in Frankfurt and that same year entered the War Academy in Berlin. While in Berlin in the 1870s Bernhardi made the acquaintance of Treitschke and Droysen, two men whom he credited in his memoirs "for a large part of [his] education."\(^3\) In 1879 he was appointed to the Grand General Staff's Topographical Department and in 1882 sent to Greece with orders to map the southern part of Attica for the Greeks. In 1883 Bernhardi returned to the Grand General Staff to direct a surveying department. 1886 witnessed Bernhardi's appointment to the German army's 15\(^{th}\)

\(^{2}\) Campion, 49.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{21}\) Bernhardi quoted in Campion, 62.
Division at Cologne; 1888 saw his move to Düsseldorf as squadron chief of the 5th Uhlans.24

Like his father before him, literary skills won Friedrich von Bernhardi considerable acclaim and admiration. In 1890, writing on behalf of the General Staff, he penned *Videant Consules, Ne Quid Respublica Detrimenti Capiat*, which appeared anonymously in German bookstores in spring of that year.25 Appearing in the wake of Bismarck’s retirement as chancellor, the pamphlet reflected the strongly anti-Russian sentiments of the German General Staff and the anti-Bismarckian faction in the Imperial government. Led by Count Alfred von Waldersee, this group sensationalized the threat of a concerted Franco-Russian attack on Germany and advocated a preventive war against these enemies.26

In *Videant Consules* Bernhardi’s chauvinism shined through. The overriding message of the work was one of impending battle with threatening “Slavdom” in the East. Bernhardi warned that Russia “[was] preparing itself methodically and energetically for an aggressive war against Germany” and that “all circumstances [in Russia] press for an offensive war.”27 The writer alerted his audience to the dangerous menace of Pan-Slavism, which “recognizes its greatest adversary in newly-strengthened Teutondom, which today is the chief torchbearer of all truly humanitarian cultural efforts.” Bernhardi observed among the Pan-Slavists “a profound national hatred for Germany and everything German.” He saw war as inevitable and unavoidable: “Pan-
Slavism must by nature press for war, as expansion is its condition for existence.28

The author’s hierarchic realist worldview is apparent. In Videant Consules Bernhardi reminded Germans that they must increase their political influence and spread their culture and revealed his militarist imperialist approach to international relations as well as his debt to Treitschke. “For a great people like ourselves cannot renounce dissemination of its culture,” wrote Bernhardi,

[and] a gradual enlargement of its spheres of interest and influence. It cannot at all escape doing those things without retrogressing in its political and historical importance. This we can learn on every page of world history.29

Bemhardi went so far as to insist that it was Germany’s cultural mission to battle with Russia: “we too will again resume our age-old cultural mission against Slavdom, and in so doing will clash with the latter’s need to expand.”30 “[The] Battle of German Teutonism against Pan-Slavism,” wrote Bemhardi, “that will be the hallmark of the next historical epoch.”31 Bernhardi argued that all of Germany’s political resources must be concentrated on the task of the impending showdown with Russia:

our whole policy must be borne by the fundamental concept of settling accounts and reaching an understanding with France, in order to be able to throw all the vital forces of the nation into the balance for the great Teutonic cultural missions against Russia.32

Videant Consules revealed Bemhardi’s attitude toward war as a sometimes necessary and even beneficial phenomenon in human development. He argued that “individualism, the formation of states, the separate development of nations” achieve a “higher meaning” only when “those endeavors contend together in the great contest for

28 Ibid., 77.
29 Ibid., 125-126.
30 Ibid., 126.
31 Ibid., 127.
32 Ibid.
the highest goals of the human race.” Furthermore, “it is the moral and historical duty of the state to intervene with all its might.” The state can intervene “through the peaceful competition of toil, but when circumstances call for it, with the sword.” The state must fight “for the ideas and ideals which appear to it…as necessary requisites for progress.” Finally, Bernhardi stated that war “is also one of the most necessary requisites of all human progress, and as such in some circumstances is a moral obligation.”

At the time of the publication of *Videant Consules* Bernhardi also experimented in spiritism and “dabbled in the occult,” allegedly practicing telepathy with a fellow officer’s wife. It was a revealing aspect of his personality that may partly explain his almost mystical belief in the creative and rejuvenating aspects of war, his glorification of the state, and utter rejection of materialism. Bernhardi had married Armgard von Klitzing in 1881, who died in the summer of 1890. Campion suggests that “[t]his last event helped shove him farther still in the direction of occultism and preoccupation with life beyond the grave.” The General began frequenting Berlin mystics and “[h]is long-standing interest in thought- and will-transference, second-sight, and Doppelgängerei, etc., now intensified.”

After the publication of *Videant Consules*, Bernhardi made a number of career moves. In 1891 he was appointed German military attaché in Bern. After a failed attempt to transfer to Turkey, Bernhardi married Fraulein von Colomb in 1893 and was appointed commander of the Baden Body-Dragoons Regiment No. 20 in Karlsruhe. In 1897 he became chief of the General Staff of the XVIth Army Corps at Metz. Very

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33 Ibid., 135-136.
34 Ibid., 136.
35 Campion, 51.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
shortly thereafter he took charge of the Military History Department of the Grand General Staff, where he worked for three years until 1900. Following his stint as a historian, the General accepted several other military appointments, climbing nearly to the top of the German army. In 1909, then 60 years old and in bad health, he retired from active duty.38

During this time Bernhardi continued to write, publishing two very important theoretical works: *Cavalry in Future Wars* (1899) and *Cavalry in War and Peace* (1910).39 These two works brought him wide acclaim as a military theorist. The General had portrayed the American Civil War as “the best model for the future use of cavalry” and his theories were especially well received in the United States.40 Despite the dramatic changes that modern technology had wrought on modern warfare, Bernhardi still believed that the cavalry represented a valuable unit of any army. In fact, Antonio Echevarria observes, “Bernhardi believed that the deadliness of tactical means had only increased the strategic value of cavalry.”41 In particular, he argued that cavalry could be especially useful for several kinds of operations. First, armies could take advantage of cavalry “to execute more long-range or strategic reconnaissance missions.”42 Secondly, because modern warfare would increase the length and importance of lines of communication, as the immensity of armies eliminated the possibility of “[living] off the land,” “cavalry should execute raids more frequently against the enemy’s lines of

38 Campion, 50-52.
40 Antulio J. Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers Before the Great War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 130 and 137.
41 Ibid., 132.
42 Ibid., 130.
communication and supply." He believed that Germany would not only face the new challenges of modern military technology, but that Germany's opponents would also be "more determined and capable" than they had been in 1870-71.

Bernhardi's publications in the immediate prewar years demonstrated most clearly the influence of Treitschke upon his thought, as well as his use of Treitschke to give his theories a higher degree of scientific authority. Bernhardi cited Treitschke in varying degrees in these publications, extensively in some and not at all in others, but the core ideas of Treitschke's thoughts are clearly evident in all of these works. As Gabriel writes, "reckless militarism and their glorification of war" are what join Bernhardi and Treitschke. Moreover, the nationalistic aspects of Treitschke's works were most clearly reflected in Bernhardi's *Germany and the Next War* (1912), *Our Future—A Word of Warning to the German Nation* (1912), and *On War of Today* (1912). These publications mirrored Treitschke's German chauvinism, veneration of the state, Anglophobia, imperial enthusiasm, and strong belief in the benefits and moral value of war.

It is in *Germany and the Next War* (1912) that Bernhardi most obviously relied on Treitschke both as an inspiration and as an authority. Carlton Hayes correctly observes, "Bernhardi cites Treitschke no less than twenty times within a hundred pages and utilizes his phrases as texts about which to construct elaborate theories of imperialism and militarism." In this book the German general set for himself the same task that Treitschke had adopted roughly four decades earlier—to "most effectually rouse the

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43 Ibid., 131 and 132.
44 Ibid., 131.
national feeling in my readers’ hearts, and strengthen the national purpose.” The practical consequences of Bernhardi’s book remain uncertain, but Paul Kennedy maintains that in 1912 *Germany and the Next War*, along with the president of the Pan-German League Heinrich Class’s *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär*, was one of the country’s “two political ‘best-sellers.’” Gabriel notes that the book was “an immediate sensation.”

The ideas Bernhardi presented in *Germany and the Next War* represent a prime example of what Gabriel calls “militaristic imperialism” in international relations theory. In fact, Gabriel presents Bernhardi as his only model for this approach to international politics, although it seems that Treitschke would make an equally appropriate model for this classification as well. The most pervasive and profound theme of *Germany and the Next War* is that the pre-World War I peace of Europe was not beneficial. Rather, it was a hindrance to the healthy development of national life. As Gabriel points out, Bernhardi begins his book with an indictment of Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, claiming that it unjustly convinced many of the general’s contemporaries “that war is the destruction of all good and the origin of all evil.” He chastised the Germans’ for their alleged “strongly-marked love of peace,” which he blamed in part on the materialism of the masses, who did not wish to disrupt their commercial life. He wrote that German political power was “fettered” by this “love of peace,” which “threaten[s] to poison the souls of the German people.” Finally, this ubiquitous desire for peace must be extinguished, for

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47 Friedrich von Bernhardi, iv.
48 Kennedy, 448.
49 Gabriel, 42.
50 F.v Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, 16, quoted in Gabriel, 43.
51 F.v Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, 10-11.
52 F. v Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, 12 and 14.
“the maintenance of peace never can or may be the goal of a policy.”

Obviously, the alternative to peace is war, which was exactly what Bernhardi wanted for his nation. In the first two chapters of his book, titled “The Right to Make War” and “The Duty to Make War,” the author attempted to prove the necessity of war by arguing that it was an inevitable and desirable aspect of nature and the relations among nations. Bernhardi’s discussion of war revealed the social Darwinist element in his thought. He asserted that “[w]ar is a biological necessity” and “the father of all things.” It has “destructive as well as creative and purifying power.” War, unlike peace, had the ability to “arouse national life and to expand national power [more] than any other means known to history,” an argument made by Treitschke before him but without the Darwinian basis that Bernhardi included. Bernhardi attempted to give war a deep cultural significance, asserting that it represented “an indispensable factor of culture, in which a true civilized nation finds the highest expression of strength and vitality.” He assigned moral value to war and called it “a moral necessity, if it is waged to protect the highest and most valuable interests of a nation.”

In his analysis of the drawbacks of peace and the virtues of war, Bernhardi drew on Treitschke to bolster his argument. He included several quotations from Treitschke’s *Politics* and his *German History* that lent some legitimacy to his extreme statements. In regard to the undesirability of peace he included Treitschke’s statement that “[i]t has always been the weary, spiritless, and exhausted ages which have played with the dream

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53 Ibid., 37.
54 Ibid., 18.
55 Ibid., 16.
56 Ibid., 27.
57 Ibid., 14.
58 Ibid., 26.
of perpetual peace.” He also cited Treitschke to reinforce his statements on war: “God will see to it that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race.” In another instance he quoted the historian to ‘prove’ that war held an unmatched positive value: “A thousand touching traits testify to the sacred power of the love which a righteous war awakes in noble nations.”

In *Germany and the Next War*, Bernhardi also blatantly appealed to the German nation to increase the power of the state, an ideal undoubtedly borrowed directly from Treitschke. Bernhardi assigned moral value to this task, for the state “cannot attain its great moral ends unless its political power increases.” The state ultimately exists for the benefit of mankind: “[I]t is only the State which strives after an enlarged sphere of influence that creates the conditions under which mankind develops into the most splendid perfection.” The national state should exist as a high authority standing above the struggling masses “not merely to protect, but actively to promote, the moral and spiritual interests of society.” In a state that fails to enhance its power or even loses power, “its citizens become stunted.” In order to protect its power and other “higher interests,” the state must not only possess the requisite power, but also increase its power. For Bernhardi that was “the first and foremost duty of the State.” The General offered a very pessimistic view of human nature—man cannot perfect himself by his own efforts, so he requires a strong state to promote his intellectual and moral development.

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63 F. v. Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, 20, quoted in Gabriel, 43.
65 Ibid., 47.
66 Gabriel, 45.
Bernhardi the propagandist relied on Treitschke the historian to provide legitimacy and authority to his theories of the state, its duties, and its powers. Both shared the same notions of the state’s moral duties and responsibilities. As Treitschke wrote, “The State is a moral community. It is called upon to educate the human race by positive achievement, and its ultimate object is that a nation should develop in it and through it into [sic] a real character; that is, alike for nation and individuals, the highest moral task.”^67 Like Treitschke before him, Bernhardi also voiced his debt to Machiavelli, “the first to declare that the keynote of every policy was the advancement of power.” For Machiavelli, though, the state should seek to solidify and enhance its power simply as an end in itself. It was Treitschke who qualified power as a means to moral ends: “power must justify itself by being applied to the greatest good of mankind.”^68 Bernhardi acknowledged his debt to Treitschke for this idea: “I have thought it impossible to explain the foundations of political morality better than in the words of our great national historian.”^69

Bernhardi’s synthesis of militarism, imperialism, and state power constituted what he called “idealism.” He railed against shallow materialism. For him man was a moral being who could not be satisfied by mere material comforts: man’s “final purpose does not rest on enjoyment, but on the development of intellectual and moral powers.”^70 According to Bernhardi, materialistic nations like the British were inherently weak and thus sought to maintain peace. By contrast, strong states do not fear wars that cultivate morality. “It is political idealism which calls for war,” wrote Bernhardi, “while

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^70 Ibid., 25.
materialism—in theory, at least—repudiates it."71 Bernhardi found support for his
idealism in a passage from Treitschke’s Politics:

War is elevating, because the individual disappears before the great conception of the
State. The devotion of the members of a community to each other is nowhere so
splendidly conspicuous as in war...What a perversion of morality to wish to abolish
heroism among men?72

Bernhardi associated militarism, war, and a powerful state, with his conception of
idealism, while “[l]iberal individualism [was] put on the same footing as materialism,
egoism, weakness and peace.” As for his view of British society, it was “quite common
in Germany at the time.”73

In Germany and the Next War Bernhardi also argued for the historical and
cultural mission of Germany as the leader of civilization. In his chapter “Germany’s
Historical Mission,” Bernhardi offered a chauvinistic interpretation of German history
and culture. He made reckless claims about Germany’s invaluable contributions to world
civilization, at one point writing, “a high, if not the highest, importance for the entire
development of the human race is ascribable to this German people.”74 He portrayed
Germany as the guardian of intellectual freedom, describing the Reformation as a
German crusade against the “intellectual yoke, imposed by the Church, which checked all
free progress.” Also vital to the “intellectual and moral progress of man” was the
intellectual movement of “the Critique of Pure Reason,” the work of Kant that rightly
“pointed out the way knowledge is really possible.”75

Like Treitschke, Bernhardi looked to the German past to support his claims about
Germany’s mission. In Germany and the Next War, he noted that Frederick the Great

71 F. v. Bernhardi, Germany and the Next War, 26, quoted in Gabriel, 44.
72 Treitschke, Politik 1: 74, quoted in F. v. Bernhardi, Germany and the Next War, 28.
73 Gabriel, 44.
74 F. v. Bernhardi, Germany and the Next War, 72.
75 Ibid., 73.
“recognized the ennobling effects of war,” and he viewed the Wars of Liberation as having a great unifying effect on the German people.\textsuperscript{76} Bernhardi supported his theories of war with historical examples, arguing that Frederick’s conquest of Silesia was significant for Germany only because it was obtained by “a war of unparalleled heroism,” rather than by peaceful means of arbitration.\textsuperscript{77} It was Frederick the Great who astutely realized that “it had become essential to enlarge the territory of the State,” if Prussia was to survive in its precarious position in Central Europe.\textsuperscript{78} Bernhardi also celebrated the efforts of Scharnhorst, who “grasped the idea of universal military service,” and of Stein, who “laid the foundations of self government in Prussia.”\textsuperscript{79} The author credited Kant for teaching “the gospel of moral duty” and for contributing to “a revolution of duty,” whereas the French had experienced an inferior revolution of “rights,” which ultimately led to “individual irresponsibility and to a repudiation of the State.”\textsuperscript{80}

Bernhardi also assigned to Germany “duties of the greatest importance for the whole advance of human civilization.”\textsuperscript{81} In order to meet her responsibility as the leader of world civilization, Germany must expand her international political power. “[T]he German nation,” wrote Bernhardi, “from the standpoint of its importance to civilization, is fully entitled not only to demand a place in the sun…but to aspire to an adequate share in the sovereignty of the world far beyond the limits of its present sphere of influence.”\textsuperscript{82} He contended that if Germany was to compete with the other Great Powers she “must not

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 63-64.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 76.
hold back in the hard struggle for the sovereignty of the world.” He wanted to “stamp a great part of humanity with the impress of the German spirit.”

To become a world power, Bernhardi argued that Germany must pursue a determined policy of overseas conquest and colonization. In addition to solidifying her position within Europe, “an extension of our colonial possessions...must be the basis of [Germany’s] future development.” Germany must expand her colonial possessions in order to rise to world power status. If she did not, history proves that she would inevitably decline. This type of cyclical interpretation of history was common at the time, not only in Germany. Gabriel explains,

It was particularly fashionable to personalize the life of nations, to think of them as having been born, then reaching maturity and manhood, and finally growing old and beginning to decline. Such ideas prevailed in many countries and were not a specifically German invention.

According to this view, Great Britain had reached its age of decline. Now it was Germany’s turn to reach “manhood” and assert itself as a world power.

Throughout his discussion of Germany’s historical mission, Bernhardi inserted salient passages from Treitschke’s Politics and German History. In his Politics Treitschke proclaimed that “it is quite imaginable that a country which owns no colonies will no longer count among the European Great Powers, however powerful it may otherwise be.” A statement from Germany and the Next War appears as if it was lifted directly out of Treitschke’s Politics: “In the future...the importance of Germany will rest on two points; firstly, how many millions of men in the world speak German? Secondly,
how many of them are politically members of the German Empire?" In his *Politics*
Treitschke had asserted "that the whole position of Germany depends on the number of
German-speaking millions in the future."*

Finally, *Germany and the Next War* revealed Bernhardi's vehement Anglophobia,
which may have developed from his realization that Great Britain's world empire and
powerful navy stood in the way of German colonial development. He claimed that
England had historically sought to maintain a balance of power on the Continent "to
prevent any one of [the nations of Europe] attaining a pronounced supremacy." While
the continental nations at times occupied one another, England was able to build its
"world Empire" unopposed. In light of this, argued Bernhardi, "England's aim must be
to repress Germany, but strengthen France."* He warned of an attack from France in the
event of an Anglo-German confrontation. To prevent such an attack, "France must be so
completely crushed that she can never again come across our path."* He later wrote,
"[English policy] doubtless wishes, by all and every means, even the most extreme, to
hinder every further expansion of German international influence and of German
maritime power."*

Maritime power was a major concern of Bernhardi's. He devoted an entire
chapter of his book to "The Next Naval War," which he believed would inevitably "be
waged with England."* He did not argue that Germany must necessarily crush England
and rise to world dominance. Rather, he was concerned primarily with Germany's rise to

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*Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics* 1: 118.
world power status, which theoretically could happen in concert with Britain or without her. He considered the chances of this happening peacefully and in cooperation with England, but concluded that it would more likely happen unilaterally through war. He did not instruct Germany to conquer, destroy, or dominate England. He did maintain, however, that Germany must somehow reckon with the British if she were to achieve her rightful place among the powers of the world. In the ensuing war with England, he wrote, “we must conquer, or, at any rate, not allow ourselves to be defeated, for it will decide whether we can attain a position as a World Power by the side of, and in spite of, England.” According to Bernhardi, Germany’s reckoning with England would benefit not only the Reich, but the entire world; he portrayed the Germans as crusaders against England for the international freedom of the seas.

In 1913, a year after the publication of Germany and the Next War, Bernhardi’s Our Future—A Word of Warning to the German Nation appeared in German bookstores. J. Ellis Barker, the work’s English translator, gave it the provocative title “Britain as Germany’s Vassal,” and correctly observed that it “is more popular in tone” than Bernhardi’s earlier work. Our Future was offered for only one-fifth the price, had a wider readership, and made a greater impact on the German public than had Germany and the Next War. In his preface to the English edition Barker maintained that Our Future “urges Germany to acquire by war first the supremacy in Europe and the Mediterranean, and then the mastery of the world.” Barker clearly intended to stir up

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94 Ibid., 164.
95 Ibid., 165.
96 J. Ellis Barker in his preface to F v. Bernhardi, Britain as Germany’s Vassal, translated by J. Ellis Barker (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1914), 5.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
anti-German sentiment with his translation of Bernhardi’s book and his title and various aspects of his introduction are certainly overstated. Still, his assessment of the work is basically accurate, although Bernhardi did not call for German “mastery” of the world, but rather her emergence as a world power among other powers. Throughout the book Bernhardi presented his audience with an existential dilemma: “The question which calls for an answer is whether Germany is to become a world-Power or is destined to decline.” Bernhardi gave a clear answer: “[Germany] is a world-Power which is able and entitled to give Germanism that position in the world which, by right, is its due.”

In Our Future Bernhardi reiterated many of the same ideas he had presented in Germany and the Next War. He argued that “[n]ational policy stands in the most intimate relation with national civilization. It follows that national policy must be justified by aiming at serving the high purposes of civilization.” Again the idea of state power and expansion acquired a moral character, and again the German people, as “the most important promoters of modern civilization,” were designated as the nation most able to lead the development of the human race. As in Germany and the Next War, Bernhardi traced Germany’s civilizing mission back to the Reformation, claiming that “[t]he fight between Germanism and the papacy was a battle for the free development of human civilization.” Although he did not quote Treitschke nearly as extensively in this work, the resemblance to and the influence of the historian’s writings are evident. Indeed, Bernhardi turned to Treitschke to lend authority to his claims of Germany’s cultural role when he wrote, “Germany has enriched European civilization with new ideas and ideals,

99 F. v. Bernhardi, Britain as Germany’s Vassal, 17.
100 Ibid., 26-27.
101 Ibid., 32.
102 Ibid., 34.
and she is now occupying a place in the civilized world which cannot be filled by any other people.”

According to Bernhardi, Germany had to expand her political power. “Confidently relying upon German strength and German civilization,” he wrote in Our Future, “we Germans must try by all means in our power to acquire that political pre-eminence which corresponds with our importance in the world.” He advocated German colonial expansion and the “[creation] everywhere [of] bases for the promotion of German civilization.” German civilization should be promoted “in the interest of the world’s civilization.” As with Treitschke, the power of the state played a central role in Bernhardi’s political thought. He also revealed the centrality of the state in his conception of idealism: “To the idealist the State is a teacher of mankind...the State requires a constantly growing political power.”

Finally, as the title of Barker’s translation made abundantly clear, Our Future revealed Bernhardi’s strongly anti-British attitudes. He portrayed England as the most formidable obstacle to Germany’s necessary expansion of political and economic influence. “England,” wrote Bernhardi, “opposes us throughout the world with hostility, and prevents us [from] acquiring colonies, the possession of which is for Germany a question of life or death.” The members of the Triple Entente “strive to keep down Germany.” In order to permit Germany’s rise as a world power, “England must give

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103 Treitschke quoted by F.v. Bernhardi, Britain as Germany’s Vassal, 50.
104 F. v. Bernhardi, Britain as Germany’s Vassal, 57.
105 Ibid., 80.
106 Ibid., 83.
107 Ibid., 91.
108 Ibid., 120.
109 Ibid., 138.
up her claim to a predominant position throughout the world."

In 1912, another of Bernhardi’s important works, *On War of Today*, appeared in German bookstores. A condensed version of Hugh Rees’s English translation was published in London in 1914 under the title *How Germany Makes War*. As the original German title implies, its author likened himself to a modern Clausewitz. Daniel J. Hughes has aptly described Bernhardi as “a self-styled successor to Clausewitz as Germany’s philosopher of war.” Bernhardi agreed with Clausewitz’s famous maxim that war is “a continuation of policy by other means.” Yet he differed with Clausewitz on one very fundamental point: “Clausewitz considers the defensive the stronger form of conducting war. I do not share this opinion.” Bernhardi sought to demonstrate the changes in military strategy and theory necessitated by “three factors pressing a distinct stamp on war of to-day—the masses, the improved arms of defence and offence, and the modern means of communication.” In short, Bernhardi attempted to reconcile the traditional techniques of warfare with the consequences of modernization.

*On War of Today* offered a critique of Schlieffen’s conception of modern war, arguing that it was too “mechanistic.” “Conducting war under these conditions can scarcely be any longer called an art,” wrote Bernhardi. “It becomes a trade, and the commander is, as it were, a mechanic.” As an alternative to Schlieffen, Bernhardi presented what he called the “ingenious” theory of warfare. Whereas Schlieffen’s

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110 Ibid., 82.
113 Bernhardi, *How Germany Makes War*, 149.
114 Ibid., 125.
115 Ibid., 234.
“mechanistic” approach devised plans for battle before any evaluation of a particular battle’s circumstances, Bernhardi’s “ingenious” approach did not devise a plan of attack until after a “due observation and assessment of the circumstances of the conflict.”

While mainly a theoretical work, Bernhardi’s preface to On War of Today did expose some of the above-mentioned political attitudes of its author. He did not even get beyond his first page before he mentioned the “necessity” of a war—“on which the further development of our people depends”—in defense of Germany’s “most vital interest.” As before, Bernhardi advocated Germany’s colonial expansion and the buildup of her power in Central Europe, and he reminded his audience that Germany was “a powerful, as well as a necessary, factor in the development of mankind.” Finally, he warned of the opposition of the English, a nation that “will most seriously resist any real extension of Germany’s power.” In a later chapter on naval warfare Bernhardi cautioned, “The English would surely not hesitate to seize the German colonies in a war with Germany.” This prophecy of Bernhardi’s turned out to be accurate.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, British and American propagandists portrayed Bernhardi’s works as prime examples of the popular German mindset of the time. Paul Kennedy observes that by 1914 “[p]undits explained how the spirit of Treitschke and Bernhardi had conquered the German mind.” Books like Germany and the Next War and Our Future provided propaganda for German chauvinists—and support for allied propaganda against Germany. In 1915, Stanhope W.

117 Echevarria, 198.
118 Bernhardi, How Germany Makes War, ix.
119 Ibid., xi.
120 Ibid., xi-xii.
121 Ibid., 217.
122 Kennedy, 463.
Sprigg wrote that “neutral peoples have [reacted] with amazement and disgust [to] that revelation of the German soul.”

In response to such criticisms, Bernhardi published two pamphlets in 1915 in an attempt to answer his critics abroad. Both *Germany and England* and *The New Bernhardi: “World Power or Downfall”* reveal an attempt to downplay the militaristic and imperialistic rhetoric of his earlier political works. In *Germany and England*, Bernhardi argued that American critics based their condemnations on “an absolutely erroneous understanding of what I have written.” He suggested that his books were being used in the United States “for the purpose of stirring up public opinion against Germany as the Power really responsible for the war.”

For better or for worse, Bernhardi’s efforts to bolster his image fell on mostly deaf ears. In his preface to *The New Bernhardi*, Sprigg maintained that “Bernhardi, obedient with Potsdam obedience, has taken his orders to eat his words for the sake of American opinion.” Sprigg’s critique was accurate. Although he sought to repair his image overseas, Bernhardi made no apologies and continued to espouse his nationalistic views. He continued to justify war by explaining, “I have indeed proved, I think, that war is a necessity in the life of nations.” He retained his staunchly anti-British attitude: “everywhere the English have undertaken to limit our national development.” Bernhardi also continued to express his debt to Treitschke, confessing that “Treitschke undoubtedly contributed to the promotion of German consciousness of herself and to the

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126 Sprigg, 17.
128 Ibid., 17.
fostering of the longing for increased political power."[129] Bernhardi rejected, however, the claims of the British professor J.A. Cramb, who had vehemently criticized both Treitschke and Bernhardi for their chauvinistic views, that Treitschke had advocated German domination of the world. Overall, it was a poor attempt to mend his public image in Britain and the United States.

While Bernhardi's ideas were unquestionably reckless, they should not be viewed as unique or peculiarly German. As early as December 1914 Carlton Hayes could correctly observe that "the popular misconceptions of Darwinism and the application of biological hypotheses on modern nationalism is lamentably not a peculiarity of Germans."[130] Hayes pointed out the extreme enthusiasm in Britain for the royal navy and overseas empire. Furthermore, Britons widely accepted notions of the "manifest destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race" and Rudyard Kipling's "white man's burden." Hayes criticized Cramb's attacks on Bernhardi and Treitschke for ignoring "the parallel thought in Great Britain and France."[131] Bernhardi had presented the German nation with the option of "world-power or downfall," wrote Hayes. "For Great Britain, and for France too, patriots were soon to be found who would proclaim the same choice."[132]

In his valuable article on the "cult of the offensive," Stephen van Evera examines the general European enthusiasm for offensive warfare in the years prior to 1914. He argues,

Militaries [across Europe] glorified the offensive and adopted offensive military doctrines, while civilian elites and publics assumed that the offense had the advantage in warfare, and that offensive solutions to security problems were the

[129] Ibid., 41-42.
[130] Hayes, 706.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 702.
most effective. In Germany, Bernhardi was joined by General Alfred von Schlieffen, the mastermind of the infamous Schlieffen Plan, and General Helmuth von Moltke. In France, enthusiasm for offensive warfare was an "obsession" that affected French military men and civilians alike. Van Evera cites the French deputy Emile Durant, who in 1912 stated, "The idea of the offense must penetrate the spirit of our nation." In Britain, military strategists "resolutely rejected defensive strategies" and in Russia the Minister of War, General V.A. Sukhomlinov urged, "We must also follow this example [of the other powers]." Even the Belgians were swept away by enthusiasm for the offensive.

So, while Anglo-Saxon criticisms of Treitschke and Bernhardi that the two were indeed chauvinistic and imperialistic were certainly justified, their anti-German bias wholly discredits them. British and American publicists sensationalized the two Germans' writings while blatantly ignoring the work of national and military enthusiasts in their own countries. The historian should not regard Bernhardi as a peculiarly German phenomenon. In fact, most European powers could lay claim to at least one or two "Bernhardis" prior to World War I.

The fact that Bernhardi's theories can be seen as part of a greater European trend should not, however, excuse his recklessness or the flaws in his arguments. In his *Historians' Fallacies*, Fischer exposes the main fault in Bernhardi's method. By using Treitschke for scholarly authority, the general committed what Fischer has called the

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134 Emile Durant quoted in Evera, 60.
135 Evera, 60; General V.A. Sukhomlinov quoted in Evera, 61.
“fallacy of argument *ad verecundiam,*” or “an appeal to authority.”¹³⁶ One form of this type of fallacy is an “[appeal] to quotations.”¹³⁷ Bernhardi’s extensive references to Treitschke’s works did nothing to amass evidence in support of his arguments; quoting Treitschke simply reiterated points that Bernhardi had already made in his own words. Fischer would argue that Bernhardi’s points “cannot be sustained by attribution” to Treitschke. Rather, it was Bernhardi’s responsibility to “make an empirical case for them,” which he was not able to do.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Fischer, 283.
¹³⁷ Ibid., 285-287.
¹³⁸ Ibid., 287.
CONCLUSION

HEINRICH VON TREITSCHKE
AND GERMAN NATIONALISM
Treitschke’s words were received with approval and enthusiasm by large sections of the German population in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the years leading up to World War I. “In many German homes,” one observer has written, “the family sat together in the evening to hear a chapter of the German History.”\(^1\) Andreas Dorpalen asserts that Treitschke’s History “made its way into thousands of German homes,” where it was “[a]ccepted as theology rather than as history.”\(^2\) Peter Winzen agrees that Treitschke’s historical work had a great impact upon the German people:

The five volumes which appeared between 1879 and 1894 were usually quickly sold out and their contents often became the key talking points in Berlin salons and officers’ messes. Almost all the leading public figures of the Bismarck era as well as large sections of the well-educated young people read Treitschke.\(^3\)

Indeed, Treitschke’s work exerted such an influence on the popular mind of Germany that Gordon Craig contends, “the serious student of German history can neglect Treitschke’s writings only at the risk of losing an understanding of the psychological factors that contributed to the fateful course of German politics before 1914.”\(^4\)

Many of Treitschke’s colleagues commended his efforts. Heinrich von Sybel and his fellow editors at the Historische Zeitschrift issued complimentary reviews of Treitschke’s History. In an 1886 review of Treitschke’s third volume of the German History, G. Egelhaaf described the work as a “true pearl of the national literature” and added, “Treitschke has shown us, and will show us yet more in the coming three volumes, how the real foundations of the German state were gradually laid by the work of

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2 Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 223.
3 Winzen, 155.
Prussian statesmen.”

Not all readers, however, expressed such sycophantic approval of Treitschke’s scholarship. Upon the publication of the second volume of the *German History*, Treitschke became embroiled in a protracted debate with the historian Hermann Baumgarten regarding the scholarly integrity of his work. In a pamphlet entitled “Treitschke’s Deutsche Geschichte,” Baumgarten chastised Sybel’s *Historische Zeitschrift* for its favorable review of the *German History*. He also attacked Treitschke, charging, “Treitschke’s entire book demonstrated a thoroughly unhistoric method of research.” In his 1880 book about the Bismarckian era, Bruno Bauer branded Treitschke as a “worthy representative of a loud and arrogant chauvinism.” In 1895 Theodor Mommsen issued an equally damning critique of Treitschke’s work: “[Treitschke] is for me the appropriate expression of the brutalization that places our civilization in question.”

While Treitschke’s ideas received mixed reviews among the German academic community, they had a great and formative impact upon many of Wilhelmine Germany’s political elite. In an article entitled “Treitschke’s Influence on the Rise of Imperialist and Anti-British Nationalism in Germany,” Peter Winzen points out that Treitschke’s ideas influenced the policies and thought of men such as the Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow and the Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. In his memoirs Bülow plainly stated that Treitschke’s *German History* “became the basis of [his] political way of thinking.”

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8 Theodor Mommsen, Brief an Sybel, 7 May 1895, quoted in Leipprand, 263.
9 Bernhard von Bülow quoted in Winzen, 156.
Tirpitz wrote in a similar vein in his own reminiscences, calling Treitschke the “wonderful man whose lectures I heard at the university from 1876 onwards and who also allowed me to seek his advice privately by scribbling my question on a scrap of paper.” Kaiser Wilhelm II recalled that out of all the highly esteemed scholars who visited his home when he was a child, “Treitschke made the deepest impression on me.”

The work of Bernhardi provides a striking example of the importance of Treitschke’s thought among radical German nationalists prior to the First World War. Bernhardi could have had several possible motives for citing Treitschke as extensively as he did in his own works. First, Treitschke certainly had influenced the general’s intellectual evolution, perhaps to such an extent that Bernhardi wished to acknowledge this debt in his own publications. Second, even if Treitschke’s influence on Bernhardi had been minimal, Bernhardi recognized the appeal that Treitschke’s ideas had among the German public.

The most plausible conclusion is a combination of the two. The general undoubtedly received inspiration from the fiery Berlin professor, whom he acknowledged in his memoirs as a significant influence on his intellectual development. More than anything, though, Bernhardi relied on Treitschke to provide legitimacy for his own radical ideas. By including many of Treitschke’s most extreme statements in his own writings, Bernhardi provided his theories with “scientific” authority. In an age in which people grasped for a “key” to history, Treitschke provided a historical interpretation that suggested that the rise and fall of nations provided the stimulus for all historical change. If Bernhardi could support his claims with the statements of Treitschke, a

10 Alfred von Tirpitz quoted in Winzen, 163.
12 Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 225.
renowned historian, they must have been legitimate, or would have at least appeared to be so. Andreas Dorpalen explains that many Germans commonly held the ideas presented by Treitschke at the time, but “[s]trengthening and deepening them, he endowed them with an aura of scholarly respectability which added to their attraction.”¹³ Treitschke’s history and the national mission it championed provided legitimacy for the radical ideas of German nationalists in the pre-war years.

As mentioned above, following the outbreak of World War I scholars in Britain and the United States, basing their conclusions in large part on the writings of Treitschke and Bernhardi, determined that Germany represented a tragic aberration in western civilization. This type of attitude regarding the alleged peculiarity of Germany and that country’s political, social, and economic development raises an important issue in German historiography, namely the extended and controversial debate surrounding the notion of a German Sonderweg, or “special path.” In their valuable book, The Peculiarities of German History,¹⁴ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley clearly lay out the premises of the argument for a German Sonderweg. Essentially, in their attempts to explain German historical development, many historians have argued that unlike Britain, which had supposedly experienced a successful bourgeois revolution that entailed the construction of liberal parliamentary government, Germany’s bourgeoisie failed to assert itself in 1848 and then fell into a pattern of “ap[ing]” the aristocracy and its militaristic and authoritarian values.¹⁵ Blackbourn and Eley condemn such arguments, suggesting that they greatly oversimplify both German and British history, falsely treating all of

¹³ Dorpalen, Treitschke, 240-241.
¹⁵ Ibid., 7.
German history as the “ante-room of Nazism” and reducing British history to a formula.\textsuperscript{16}

Treitschke, a proponent of the 1848 Revolution who advocated state power and martial values with increasing vehemence after that revolution failed to create a liberal national state, would seem to be irrefutable evidence of a German \textit{Sonderweg}. In fact, Treitschke was himself a \textit{Sonderweg} theorist, but of a slightly different nature.

Blackbourn and Eley point out that while after World War II historians envisioned German history as uniquely negative, many historians (and others) before the war interpreted Germany’s political growth as uniquely positive:

> after unification, there was a widespread tendency, especially among the academic and professional \textit{Bildungsbürgertum}, to exalt the particular German combination of political, economic, military, and educational institutions: monarchy and industrial success, university and army.\textsuperscript{17}

Such thinking defined Treitschke’s writing. Moreover, “Germany’s special superiority was very often defined \textit{vis-à-vis} England,”\textsuperscript{18} another characteristic of Treitschke’s thought.

So at first glance, a study of Treitschke might appear to reinforce notions of a German special path. When one looks beyond Treitschke and considers many of the cultural and political trends throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century, however, it becomes clear that a study of Treitschke does far more to refute notions of a German \textit{Sonderweg} than it does to reinforce them. While the present study focuses on Treitschke and his impact in Germany, special care has been taken to demonstrate that he and Bernhardi had counterparts in other European countries. As discussed above, most European nations could boast of at least one or two national historians who presented

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 3.
their nation as a chosen people or as a people possessing a special national mission. European states prior to World War I also had many military and civilian elites who heralded the values of imperialism and militarism as Bernhardi did in Germany. Thus, a study of Treitschke and Bernhardi should be seen as a case study and nothing more.

In the end, of course, the greatest flaw in Treitschke's German mission was its exaggerated emphasis on state power, a criticism that can also appropriately be leveled against Bernhardi. "One also sees now," writes Friedrich Meinecke,

> how fatal it was for Treitschke himself to have restricted the essence of the State to power alone. A more comprehensive idea of the State would have saved him from taking the exaggerated view that concern for its own power was 'absolutely moral' and took precedence, as a *moral* task, over all its other obligations."^19

Meinecke's final indictment of Treitschke criticizes the historian's "much too [lavish]" use of the "predicate 'moral.'" Ultimately, Treitschke's careless and excessive use of the adjective proved to be "clumsy and dangerous."^20 While Treitschke cannot be held exclusively accountable for the extreme German chauvinism, imperialism, and militarism of late Wilhelmine Germany, he indeed helped promote those sentiments and also granted them a measure of scientific authority. "What he did," commented one of his listeners, "was to give, with his strong voice, expression and emphasis to the emotions of the national soul and the enthusiasms of our young people; he made the latter fully aware of their own feelings."^21

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19 Meinecke, 407.
20 Ibid., 408.
21 Quoted in Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 240.
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