

MEIN KAMPF

Many years after his release from prison Hitler said his “self-confidence, optimism, and belief that simply could not be shaken” was a product of his time in Landsberg prison. He rethought his political tactics; more importantly, he set down his ideas in a more or less coherent form in that curious combination of autobiography and political manifesto known as *Mein Kampf*. He reinvented himself behind bars in a psychological sense as well, coming to the conclusion that he was not merely a political agitator but the man chosen by providence to shape the world into new political formations and create a great new German empire. Hitler pictured himself as a genius that combined the qualities of the “programatist” and the “politician.” The programatist was a theoretician who did not concern himself with practical realities, but with “eternal truth”, as the great religious leaders had done. Historical greatness in Hitler’s view combined both these qualities; among the great leaders of history, Hitler mentioned Martin Luther, Frederick the Great, and Richard Wagner and none of those figures really fit the mold of a traditional politician. He concluded: “*The combination of theoretician, organizer, and leader in one person is the rarest thing that can be found on this earth; this combination makes the great man.*” There can be no doubt that as Hitler wrote these words, he saw himself. **(Kershaw, p. 252)**

In 1925 when he was finally released from prison, his sense of reality had by no means disappeared beneath his messianic claims. He had no concrete notion how his aims might be achieved; in fact, he believed that goals could only be brought to fruition in the distant future. But since it consisted of a few basic, but unchangeable tenets, his ideas were compatible with short-term tactical adjustments. In the short run, what mattered for Hitler was the road to power. He was prepared to sacrifice most principles for that. But some ideas—and those were for him the ones that counted—were not only unchangeable, they formed the essence of what he understood by power itself. Let’s look at those ideas. **(Kershaw, p. 253)**

The Mind of Hitler

It is important to make two important qualifications about *Mein Kampf*: **1.** The book is a typical product of a self-educated author in that it is poorly organized, rambling and repetitive—even with considerable editorial re-drafting. Hitler himself was afraid that his book would be ridiculed as badly written and might become a political liability. He commented later: “*This much I know, that if I had suspected in 1924 that I would become Reichschancellor, I would not have written the book.*” But at the same time he added, “*As to the substance, there is nothing I would want to change.*” **(Fest, p. 214)** **2.** Secondly, *Mein Kampf* is Hitler’s work and certainly did not reflect the views of all Germans or even of all Nazis. For example, Gregor Strasser, a rival within the party, described it as “*a chaos of banalities, schoolboy reminiscences, subjective judgments, and personal hatred.*” **(Kershaw, p. 242)**

Eternal Struggle

In large part Hitler's thought can be characterized as Social-Darwinist. In Hitler, Darwinism is raised to the level of teleology. He detected a fundamental law of the universe in the perpetual struggle of all against all. History was simply the written record of that struggle. To understand human history, Hitler argues one must come to terms with this harsh but ultimately just reality:

If men wish to live then they are forced to kill others. Nature confers the master's right on her favorite child, the strongest in courage and industry. Only the born weakling can view this as cruel, but he after all is only a weak and limited man; for if this law did not prevail, any conceivable higher development of organic living beings would be unthinkable. Mankind has grown great in eternal struggle, and only in eternal peace does it perish. Only force rules. If one should ask whether this struggle is gruesome, then the answer would be: for the weak, yes, for humanity as a whole, no. **(Fest, p. 218)**

Reasoning from this bleak premise, Hitler reached such conclusions as: "all imaginable means" are permissible in the struggle for survival of nations: "persuasion, cunning, cleverness, persistence, kindness, wiliness, and brutality." Man has no choice but to look to the laws of nature and follow them; there can be no better system. Those who invoke morality are simply ignoring nature: "*Who is at fault when the cat eats the mouse? One being drinks the blood of another. By dying, the one furnishes food for the other. We should not blather about humanity.*" **(Fest, p. 219)**

For Hitler peace was not an end to achieve, but rather a tactical breathing space to digest prey—a policy for the weak. His tendency to write and speak of "eternal struggle," reveals another aspect of his psychology. Hitler had no real sense of history; he had no belief or hope that we as human beings are moving towards something; in short, Hitler did not recognize or believe in the idea of progress. For Hitler the winning the future meant seizing the past—an imaginary past in which racially pure Germans overthrew the Roman Empire by force and so the chalice passed into German hands. The world will always be as it is now and as it has ever been: divided into the strong and weak, masters and slaves, hammer and anvil.

Struggle, battle and war played the same role in Hitler's conception of history that the idea of "Class struggle" plays in Marxism. Hitler, like many other late nineteenth century social Darwinists, viewed war as the supreme test of history—battle is the court of last resort and those who fail there should expect neither mercy nor survival. The closest thing to a moral imperative in Hitler's thinking is the simple commandment: CONQUER OR DIE! In the winter of 1941, as the *Wehrmacht* faced its first serious defeats before Moscow, Hitler commented:

On this point, I am icily cold. If one day the German nation is no longer sufficiently strong or sufficiently ready to stake its blood for its existence, then let it perish and be annihilated by some other stronger power. I shall shed no tears for the German nation. In any event, what remains after this struggle are only the inferiors, for the good have died in battle. **(Haffner, p. 160)**

Helmut Greiner who kept the official war diary in Hitler's headquarters, wrote, "*I have never heard a word come over his lips which even suggested that he had a warm or compassionate heart.*" (Schramm, p. 93)

Race and Racism

If human life comes down to this bleak struggle for survival, who is it that fights? To Hitler it was a struggle among peoples, races, and nations—he used these terms interchangeably. The concept of a cosmic struggle runs all through *Mein Kampf*. There are many passages in the book that take on the rhetoric of universal dimensions. "*The Jewish doctrine of Marxism,*" he wrote, "*as a foundation of the universe would bring about the end of any order intellectually conceivable to man.*" (Fest, p. 218) Hitler was convinced that he was in the midst of a struggle whose importance outweighed any possible political event. He wanted to save the world. In such a struggle, Hitler argued that the state must carry on the struggle for existence:

The state is a means to an end. Its end lies in the preservation and advancement of a community of physically and psychically homogenous creatures. This preservation itself comprises first of all existence as a race. Thus the highest purpose [of the state] is concern for the preservation of those original racial elements which bestow culture and create the beauty and dignity of a higher mankind. Politics is the art of carrying out a people's struggle for existence. Domestic politics is the art of preserving the necessary force for this in the form of its race value and numbers. Foreign policy is the art of safeguarding the necessary living space. (Spielvogel, p. 141)

Yes, Hitler was a racist, but it no simple matter to determine what he actually meant when he used terms like "master race." Did he equate this "master race" with the German nation or with the Aryan race? He is equally unclear in his usage of the term Aryan. Does it equate to Germans, all northern Europeans, or all whites except Jews? He was not consistent in his racial preferences. When the opportunity presented itself, he chose alliances with Arabs, Japanese, Chinese, Romanians, while fighting his "Nordic" or "Aryan" enemies. The real racial differences among white, black, and yellow-skinned people did not much interest him. What *did* interest Hitler was the struggle within the white race, between the "Aryans" and the Jews. (Lukacs, pp. 120-21)

Hitler divided the world into three basic groups of people: **1. Culture Creators.** All people are definitely not equal and everything good and vital in our world—from great art to great states—has been the work of the Aryans. Let's say for convenience, Northern Europeans. Once again, Hitler's definition of Aryan is extremely vague. The ancient Greeks were the first Aryans and the Germans and British and other racially useful people like Scandinavians and Dutch are part of this group. Other nations, for example, France have fallen from grace. The ideal for Hitler would be a melding of Greek spirit and German technology. **2. Culture Bearers.** Most of the rest of the world fall into this category. These are people who create little but maintain the creations of others. Hitler included the French, Americans, Slavs, Asians, and Africans in this group.

3. Culture Destroyers. Here we come to another fundamental tenet of Hitler's thinking. The culture destroyers are a people incapable of creating anything of their own—they produce no real art and cannot even maintain a state of their own. They are parasites that live off the creative spirit and labor of others. Who are these people? The Jews.

The Eternal Jew

Behind all of Germany's problems, Hitler detected the power of the Jew. Jewish conspiracies provided a plausible explanation for everything from a lost world war to the hyper-inflation. The Jew lay behind Versailles and the excesses of the Bavarian soviet republic, the evils of the capitalist system, the outrages of modern art, night life and syphilis—all could be explained as part of the age-old struggle lesser races had carried on against the Aryan. And hidden behind it all, instigator, mastermind, and relentless foe stood the Eternal Jew.

He was infernal phantom, “a growth spreading across the whole earth,” the “lord of the antiworld,” a complex manipulator. Hitler made the figure of the Jew the incarnation of all possible vices, literally “to blame for everything,” for the tyranny of the stock market and for Communism, for pacifism and for the 30 million people killed in the Soviet Union “in veritable slaughterhouses.” In a conversation with Dietrich Eckart, Hitler insisted upon the connection between Judaism, Communism, and Christianity by quoting Scripture. He argued that the Jews had been expelled from Egypt because they tried to foment revolution against Pharaoh by inciting the rabble with humanitarian phrases (“just as they do here”). From this it followed that Moses was the first leader of Communism. And just as St. Paul virtually invented Christianity in order to undermine the Roman Empire, so Lenin employed the doctrine of Marxism to bring about the end of the present system. Thus Hitler insisted, the Old Testament already provided the pattern of the Jewish assault upon the superior, creative race—a pattern repeated again and again through the ages. **(Fest, pp. 221-22)**

Communism was nothing new; it was nothing more than the latest tool employed by the Jew in his endless war against humanity. The purpose of Marxism was to destroy culture, reduce civilization to chaos, and ultimately allow the Jews to finally achieve their goal of world domination. To Hitler, “the Jew Karl Marx” knew precisely which policies would lead to world chaos:

Actually Karl Marx was only the one among millions who, with the sure eye of the prophet, recognized in the morass of a slowly decomposing world the most essential poisons, extracted them, and, like a wizard, prepared them into a concentrated solution for the swifter annihilation of the independent existence of free nations on this earth. And all this in service of his race. **(Spielvogel, pp. 139-40)**

Here is another common pattern in Hitler's writing—the world is divided into a group of good guys, and a group of bad guys, and a large mass of more or less useful people lying between. Hitler's ideal was a world in which the culture creators were masters, the culture bearers were slaves, and the culture destroyers were exterminated. How should a great people like the Germans work to ensure their position at the peak of

the evolutionary scale? They must look to proper breeding practices to maintain the quality and quantity of children. An increased birthrate works to provide the quantity for the population base; a strict program of eugenics ensures that the right sort of people—and only the right sort—is allowed to reproduce.

Hitler saw himself as a moral leader, but more importantly, he saw himself as a prophet who ultimately had achieved an understanding of the universe. As Führer of the German Reich, he wished to educate the German people to its biological as well as its political destiny. That destiny involved conquest and depended upon a racial vision. Hitler preached a lot of muddled pseudo-scientific nonsense; for example, he did not want to see Germans mating with other “races”, above all with Jews. He argued that to do so was to violate a fundamental law of nature. *“The fox does not mate with the goose.”* In other words, Hitler argued that ethnic and racial groups are, or at least ought to be, species specific. In 1935, the Nazi regime made this principle law. The second Nuremberg Law, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, banned marriages and sexual relations between Jews and Germans. German law now recognized the concept of “race defilement.” The law included a number of specific provisions: Jews were forbidden to fly the national flag and to employ female Germans who were under forty-five years of age. **(Spielvogel, p. 274)**

The misery of Germany could be traced to the flouting of nature, especially to race mixing. Without guidance, people are prone to forget the laws of nature and commit biological adultery. The decline of nations is always simply the revenge of nature for those who forget her laws: *“Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures; for men do not perish as a result of lost wars, but by the loss of that force of resistance which is contained only in pure blood. All who are not of good race in this world are chaff.”* **(Fest, p. 220)**

Lebensraum

All of this biological musing is leading up to something important; ultimately, it will serve as a justification for a policy of conquest, the conquest of land. A great people must have the land it deserves. If the German population is to be purified and increased according to the policies of racial science, there must be somewhere to put these people. The eternal racial struggle may ultimately be a battle between good and evil, but in the short run, the stakes in this struggle is land. Once again Hitler invokes another law of nature: the best people must have the best land. He was fond of saying, *“The earth is like a chalice passed from hand to hand. [This explains Nature’s efforts to] always get it into the hand of the strongest.”* Therefore imperialism is entirely moral and proper. A superior people need not justify its wars of conquest anymore than a lion need justify killing its prey.

Hitler believed that land was the key to military strength in the twentieth century. Germany had lost World War I because her economy was vulnerable to the Allied economic blockade. In other words, Germany lacked the land to feed itself. Hitler was determined to prevent such an outcome in the future by seizing *Lebensraum* (Living Space) in the beginning stages of the next war. At the end of the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, he left no doubt where a Nazi regime would seek this land:

We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future. If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states. **(Fest, p. 227)**

How he arrived at this idea, as logical as it was monstrous, really does not matter. Some of it was original, some of it an extension of current academic theories. For example, Karl Haushofer, a professor of geography at Munich, preached the principles of geo-politics including the cardinal principle of *Lebensraum*. One of Haushofer's most enthusiastic students was Rudolf Hess, Hitler's devoted follower and secretary. It was Hess who introduced Hitler to Haushofer's theories in 1921. Hess also wrote the original text of *Mein Kampf* in Landsberg prison. **(Fest, p. 227)**

Hitler's racial ideas convinced him that such a policy was not only feasible but necessary. The Russian Revolution of 1917, by replacing the old Russian state with Jewish Communism, had made the east vulnerable and ripe for conquest. Hitler saw the Soviets as a weak, transitional state largely in the hands of small Jewish elite (i.e. the Communist party). *“Impossible as it is for the Russian by himself to shake off the yoke of the Jew by his own resources, it is equally impossible for the Jew to maintain the mighty empire forever. The end of Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state.”* **(Fest, p. 228)** Or put more simply, *“Russia will be our India and the Russians will be our Negroes.”*

Forces in Opposition

Hitler believed that three forces stood in the path of Germany achieving his vision for its destiny. **Internationalism:** The idea that all peoples are the same and that states can and should cooperate to ensure international peace and harmony as embodied by the League of Nations charter. Internationalism, in Hitler's thinking operated against strong, creative peoples like the Germans. The worst form of internationalism was Marxism—an ideology that denied the fundamental idea of struggle that rejected the idea of race, and tried to replace the true vision of historical development with a Jewish ideology.

Another general idea stood in the path of the Nazi vision, **Pacifism**—the almost universal fear of another war. Pacifism was an enormously widespread idea in the 1920s as Europeans tried to come to terms with the wounds of the Great War. Pacifism is the antithesis of militarism and national aggression; it denies the essence of Hitler's ideal that might makes right. Hitler saw pacifism as a dangerous oppositional idea that might lure Germans astray. Pacifism might work to weaken the resolve of Germans to seek justice, to challenge the Versailles system, and to defend themselves against the forces working to keep Germany in chains.

Finally, Hitler rejected the very idea of **democracy**. He claimed to believe—with a nod to Darwin—in what he called the “aristocratic principle of nature.” Democracy, by involving large numbers of people in the decision making process, flies in the face of nature where the strongest and best always rule. Democracy brings indecision and weakens the national will. Inevitably, as Hitler put it, *“democracy puts in the place of*

the eternal principle of strength, the mass of numbers and their dead weight.” Hitler did not see these ideas as mere abstractions; he saw them embedded in specific social groups and races. These forces produced Social Democracy and international communism. Most important of all, these forces emerged as a result of a vast international Jewish conspiracy. Jews were behind everything that threatened the destiny of the German race. It was this point that drew Hitler’s ideas together into a coherent ideology. The Nazis had to destroy the Jews in order to restore the meaning of human history. If the Soviet Union was the headquarters of the international Jewish conspiracy, a war to the death against the Soviet Union was necessary. A victory in that war would accomplish the “work of the Lord”—i.e. the annihilation of the Jews—and guarantee the German race the living space it required.

These musings led Hitler to three further conclusions. **1. German politics—all domestic concerns—were really merely only a means to an end.** The “idea” that Hitler stood for was not a political agenda—it was a “mission” a “vision” of long-term future goals and his part in accomplishing them. He saw the hand of “Providence” in his work. His goals were simple enough: national salvation through “removal” of the Jews and the seizure of “living space” in the east. Since democracy was both corrupt and ineffective, the new Germany would by necessity, be a dictatorship—a *Führerstaat*. Only a leader of true genius could see the real dynamics of history and make the hard choices that the German people required. **2. Hitler’s second conclusion was that the German people had one eternal enemy: the Jews.** The annihilation of the Jews was implicit, was the logical conclusion of Hitler’s thought. The Holocaust must come in some form, sooner or later. The only questions are when, where, and how? **3. Finally, sooner or later, Germany will have to fight to seize the land it needs.** There is only one sentence in *Mein Kampf* in all capital script: *GERMANY WILL EITHER BE A WORLD POWER OR THERE WILL BE NO GERMANY!*

Conclusion

During the Second World War and for years afterwards it was very common to simply dismiss Adolf Hitler as an evil madman and to see his career as some monstrous historical aberration. Historians tended to trivialize Hitler and to regard him as a man of limited intelligence at best. In his famous 1947 essay, *The Mind of Hitler*, the British historian Sir Hugh Trevor-Roper corrected this view but added this caution:

Hitler had a mind. [It was] imposing in its granite harshness and yet infinitely squalid with miscellaneous cumber—like some huge barbarian monolith, the expression of giant strength and savage genius, surrounded by a festering heap of refuse—old tins and dead vermin, ashes and eggshells and ordure,—the intellectual detritus of centuries. **(Fest, p. 217)**

But Trevor-Roper cautioned, “*It is a mistake to infer a low level of intelligence from a low level of morality.*” **(Schramm, p. 11)** It was also a mistake to dismiss the driving force of Hitler’s ideas, few and crude as they were. Joachim Fest concurred: “*His mind, one might say, hardly produced thoughts, but it did produce energy.*” **(Fest, p. 217)**

So far, I have refrained from commenting on the moral implications of Hitler's ideas. *Mein Kampf* revealed Hitler's complete blindness to the rights of others. The idea that other human beings might have a legitimate aspiration to happiness is completely missing in Hitler's thought. Any sense that other peoples have a right to an independent existence is also missing. Moral values simply did not exist for him. Everything must ultimately bow before his Darwinian view of Nature and "the divine laws of existence." In the words of Joachim Fest, "*It would also seem that such a creed provided Hitler with a lofty justification for his personal coldness and lack of feeling.*" **(Fest, p. 220)**

It is impossible to convey in mere words just how bad a government the Third Reich was—both for its neighbors and for the German people. Twenty years after the publication of MK, in the closing stages of war and genocide, Hitler asserted with complete complacency, "*I have always had a clear conscience.*" **(Fest, p. 220)** Peoples' lives meant nothing to him. He had countless people put to death for no military or political purpose but merely because he concluded that "*All who are not of good race in this world are chaff.*" The historian John Lukacs concluded that, "*Hitler was not a sadist, not even when it came to his hatred of Jews. For sadism is a form of lust—that is, a weakness of the flesh. Hitler's evil inclinations were spiritual, not physical.*" **(Lukacs, p. 43n.)** But then Adolf Hitler ultimately regarded all nations and all peoples—even the German people—as players in the great drama of his personal mission. The psychologist G.M. Gilbert, after conducting interviews with many of the Nazi leaders during the first Nuremberg trial concluded that evil cannot be defined by the presence of any simple idea like sadism. Evil is more the lack of empathy for our fellow human beings. Adolf Hitler was "*outwardly normal, but lacked something essential for normality, the quality of empathy, the capacity to feel with our fellow men.*" **(Persico, p. 320)** Perhaps this is the best definition of Hitler's particular type of evil. In the words of Joachim Fest, he was "*the worst of the 'terrible simplifiers' of history, the most systematic, the most historical, the most philosophical, and the yet the coarsest, cruelest, least generous conqueror the world has ever seen.*"