

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

The counter-enlightened liberalism of Heinrich von Treitschke

March 11, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Heinrich von Treitschke is primarily remembered today for popularizing the phrase “Die Juden sind unser Unglück!” (In fact, Treitschke was an assimilationist on the Jewish Question.) Since then, it appears to have been overshadowed in popularity by the more artistically inspired “Gas the kikes, race war now!” as well as by various musings on group evolutionary strategies from renegade professors of psychology. Other than that, he is seen as the most visible ideological representative of a mad German chauvinism that ravaged the world twice in the 20th century before finally being stopped by the brave forces of the Atlantic Charter, who denazified and civilized the barbaric Huns. The real Treitschke: the out and proud illiberal liberal, is much less frequently told of.

To begin with, Treitschke was no reactionary. Not in the 19th century sense, at least. He was a staunch anti-Catholic and anti-Jesuit, going so far as to say.

(<https://archive.org/stream/historyofgermany03treiuoft#page/550/mode/2up>) (of Catholic counterrevolutionary publicists): “How easy was it to obscure the fact that the revolution of the sixteenth century [the Reformation] had not been merely a destructive force, but in addition, and even more, a force of conservation, that Martin Luther had saved for the modern world the primitive spirit of Christianity.”

Much more clearly (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/74/mode/2up>):

In Homeric times the prince was content with pronouncing judgment and, when necessary, conducting war. Even in the Middle Ages an administration was still non-existent, and the State only concerned itself with the most elementary necessities. Not until the splendour of the Holy Roman Empire was in German hands did German kingship begin its fuller, richer expansion. Then the growth of the cities forced the State to adopt new aims and wider activities. Experience teaches that the State is better fitted than any other corporate body to take charge of the well-being and civilizing of the people. Briefly put, what was the great result of the Reformation? The secularization of great portions of the common life of men. When the State secularized the larger portion of the Church's lands it also took over its accompanying public duties, and when we reckon how much the State has accomplished for the people's culture since the Reformation, we recognize that these duties fall within its natural sphere. It has accomplished more than the Church performed throughout the whole of the Middle Ages.

He mocked the counterrevolutionary circle of writers that formed around *Das Berliner Politische Wochenblatt* – of Karl Ludwig von Haller, Carl Ernst Jarcke, Friedrich Julius Stahl, Carl Wilhelm von Lancizolle, the brothers Gerlach and so on. Of Lancizolle, in particular, he quipped: “The faithful Hallerian, as before Schmalz and Marwitz, spoke of the various “states” of the royal house. The modern state and its legal unit, he regarded as an empty abstraction.” (Schmalz being Theodor Schmalz, a cameralist, and Marwitz being Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz, an enemy of the Prussian reforms of 1806-1815).

As is obvious, Treitschke held the old system of *Kleinstaaterei* in contempt. However, he did so from a rather unique angle. In vol. 5 of his *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, he stated (<https://archive.org/stream/treitschkeshisto05treiuoft#page/116/mode/2up>):

Small states are apt to appear ridiculous, for the state is power, and weakness stultifies itself immediately should it attempt to masquerade as power. But where the energy of a great nation finds its sole expression in the pitiful activities of petty communities, striking transformations in national life are frequently initiated by inconspicuous particularist movements which, though individually unimportant, in their totality become momentous. New political ideas cannot display their indispensability more convincingly than when they appear simultaneously in various regions among a disunited nation, forcing a channel for themselves despite manifold hindrances. The inner kinship between such isolated struggles betokens the creative elemental strength of the movement towards national unity.

Treitschke was a German liberal, and German liberalism meant one thing first and foremost: unification. So enamored was Treitschke with seeing Germany become one and great under Prussian stewardship, that his ideas evolved from the classical “harmony of interests” liberalism in his youth, into a stark position that I have trouble describing, except as a sort of right-Hegelian liberal-conservative realism, a civic *Machtpolitik*. The idealism of his youth is very much there and remains the foundation of his mature thought, but the end result is something that seems quite reactionary to the man of the 20th and 21st centuries, indeed.

But, most of all, the reason why Treitschke is relevant and what motivated me to write this, is to show a hypothetical way by which a contemporary liberal or progressive might be driven to the path of becoming at least one-fifth of a Treitschke – again a result that would be dangerously reactionary relative to where liberal orthodoxy stands nowadays.

In the United States, there exists a so-called “radical center,” the most prominent representative of which is probably Michael Lind and his New America think tank, which represents a form of neo-Hamiltonian American Whiggery and economic nationalism. Lind in particular is a fan of the 19th-century American System developmental policies of Harry Clay, Henry C. Carey, etc. (example of his coverage (<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/donald-trump-the-perfect-populist-213697>)). This type of “national-liberal realism,” although still much closer to progressivism than anything else, is nonetheless distinct from the hyper-meliorist New England Transcendentalist strain of progressivism as illustrated by, say, the communism and apple pie lunatics at the Roosevelt Institute (<http://rooseveltinstitute.org/>). Above all, by being a liberalism that doesn’t shy from being to some extent *particularistic*, it will be that much more receptive to policies that are traditionalist, insofar as they can be translated to some civic nationalist vernacular.

All successful liberalisms require illiberal means to secure their ends. Treitschke was thoroughly conscious and enthusiastic of this, whereas our modern liberals are deathly afraid of these implications. To the extent that the liberal state offers certain civil liberties, it does so by smashing the authority of intermediary corporate bodies and making the citizen an immediate dependency. Hence, Max Stirner could comment:

The monarchy of estates (so I will call absolute royalty, the time of the kings before the revolution) kept the individual in dependence on a lot of little monarchies. These were fellowships [Genossenschaften] (societies [Gesellschaften]) like the guilds, the nobility, the priesthood, the burgher class, cities, communes. Everywhere the individual must regard himself first as a member of this little society, and yield unconditional obedience to its spirit, the esprit de corps, as his monarch. More than the individual nobleman himself must his family, the honour of his race, be to him. Only by means of his corporation, his estate, did the individual have relation to the greater corporation, the state – as in Catholicism the individual deals with God only through the priest. To this the third estate now, showing courage to negate itself as an estate, made an end. It decided no longer to be and be called an estate beside other estates, but to glorify and generalize itself into the “nation.” Hereby it created a much more complete and absolute monarchy, and the entire previously ruling principle of estates [Stände], the principle of little monarchies inside the great, went down. Therefore it cannot be said that the Revolution was a revolution against the first two privileged estates. It was against the little monarchies of estates in general. But, if the estates and their despotism were broken (the king too, we know, was only a king of estates, not a citizen-king), the individuals freed from the inequality of estate were left. Were they now really to be without estate and “out of gear,” no longer bound by any estate, without a general bond of union? No, for the third estate had declared itself the nation only in order not to remain an estate beside other estates, but to become the sole estate. This sole estate is the nation, the “state.” What had the individual now become? A political Protestant, for he had come into immediate connection with his God, the state. He was no longer, as an aristocrat, in the monarchy of the nobility; as a mechanic, in the monarchy of the guild; but he, like all, recognized and acknowledged only – one lord, the state, as whose servants they all received the equal title of honour, “citizen.”

The old noble privileges are hereby rebranded as “civil rights” and rather than having a formal hierarchy of who the state entrusts with what, there is only a continuous struggle of which factions can concentrate the most benefits for their niche while making the costs as dispersed as possible. The lord-tenant distinction is erased, or perverted by being represented as some sort of an equal contractual relationship. The political freedom under liberalism means, again per Stirner, that the *polity* is free, having become the one and universal Estate that knows no subsidiary affairs.

However, a more prescient and cognizant liberal will accept these things as fine and dandy. He wants an order free of nobles, petty lords, clergy, industrial elites, and all other displays of lordship and inequality. He knows that he must become the sole and absolute Bodinian power for this to be doable, and moreover that anything which alters the demographic composition in a direction by which the one and universal Third Estate is again shattered into fragments of enclaves and principalities, must be rooted out, if the liberal dream is to be even remotely plausible.

Or, in other words, the prescient liberal intuitively knows these illiberal de Maistrean insights (<http://maistre.uni.cx/sovereignty.html>):

Man cannot bestow rights on himself; he can only defend those which have been granted to him by a superior power; and these rights are good customs, good because they are not written and because no beginning or author can be assigned to them.

The mass of men play no part in political events. They even respect government only because it is not their work. This feeling is written indelibly on their hearts. They submit to sovereignty because they feel that it is something sacred that they can neither create nor destroy. If, through corruption and treacherous suggestions, they reach the point of effacing in themselves this preserving sentiment, if they have the misfortune to think that they are called as a body to reform the state, everything is lost. This is why, even in free states, it is extremely important for rulers to be separated from the mass of the people by that personal respect which stems from birth and wealth; for if opinion does not put a barrier between itself and authority, if power is not outside its scope, if the governed many can think themselves the equals of the governing few, government will collapse.

If this national-liberal realism, which Treitschke internalized the most thoroughly of all, can be transplanted even partially into the ruling castes, then it is likely a significant portion of right-wing populism would be made obsolete. Had this shift happened much earlier, a populist revolt might never have occurred at all. This arrangement would absolutely not be optimal, nor anything close to a restoration, but it would cool down both proletarian passions and multicultural managerialism.

With that noted, we shall take a look at Heinrich von Treitschke's lectures, the *Politik*, published in two volumes (1897; translated into English 1916).

The state idea

Firstly, on the social identity of men (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/8/mode/2up>):

In classical antiquity every people held itself to be the chosen race. Only isolated thinkers had grasped the idea of humanity as a whole ; Christianity alone made it universal, and even to-day it has to be assimilated through doctrine and education. Undoubtedly even at present a man feels himself primarily a German or a Frenchman, and only in the second place as a man in the wider sense. This is stamped upon every page of history. It is then both historically and physiologically untrue that human beings enter upon existence first as men, and afterwards as compatriots. It was the teaching of Christ which first brought home to them that all men are brothers. They are dissimilar in their concrete peculiarities, alike only in being created in God's image. In the actual circumstances of their lives they are thoroughly unlike. This is clearly perceived when we reflect that a man does not even remain identical with himself during his own life ; the adult thinks differently from the youth, and takes a different standpoint. If we pursue this thought further it works like a deadly poison upon the theory of Radicals who speak of the natural equality of men. Rather must all political thinking postulate their natural inequality, for only thus is the subordination of some groups to others to be explained.

If, then, political capacity is innate in man, and is to be further developed, it is quite inaccurate to call the State a necessary evil. We have to deal with it as a lofty necessity of Nature. Even as the possibility of building up a civilization is dependent upon the limitation of our powers combined with the gift of reason, so also the State depends upon our inability to live alone. This Aristotle has already demonstrated. The State, says he, arose in order to make life possible; it endured to make good life possible.

The interesting thing is that Treitschke takes the old liberal postulate that man is defined by his capacity for reason, but rather than saying that therefore a man of reason in a society permitting free debate will have harmonious interests with his fellow men, he instead flips it to imply a natural hierarchy.

Showing both his staunch devotion to Protestantism and his Hegelianism, he speaks of national character thusly (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstreit01trei#page/12/mode/2up>):

Nothing can be more inverted than the opinion that constitutional laws were artificially evolved in opposition to the conception of a Natural Law. Ultramontanes and Jacobins both start with the assumption that the legislation of a modern State is the work of sinful man. They thus display their total lack of reverence for the objectively revealed Will of God, as unfolded in the life of the State. When we assert the evolution of the State to be something inherently necessary, we do not thereby deny the power of genius or of creative Will in history. For it is of the essence of political genius to be national. There has never been an example of the contrary. The summit of historical fame was never attained by Wallenstein because he was never a national hero, but a Czech who played the German for the sake of expediency. He was, like Napoleon, a splendid Adventurer of history. The truly great maker of history always stands upon a national basis. This applies equally to men of letters. He only is a great writer who so writes that all his countrymen respond, " Thus it must be. Thus we all feel," — who is in fact a microcosm of his nation.

To quench his thirst for a Greater Germany, Treitschke is driven to make the modern nation the essence of man as a political animal. But at the same time, he espouses a view similar to the counterrevolutionary insight that constitutions are grown, not written.

It is worth noting the argument that Treitschke made in favor of a unitary German state. Although undoubtedly driven by an essentialist nationalism, it also had another aspect (<https://archive.org/stream/polthoutreits00daviuoft#page/38/mode/2up>): that inequality of states within a confederacy makes them unworthy and a liability:

The self-contradictoriness of this system [a Confederacy] is obvious, and lies in the fact that unequals are considered as equals. Save for certain honorific privileges, all the partners in the Confederacy are made equal. Hence the weak States have an unjust advantage over the strong. It was a citizen of the State of Holland — Spinoza — who declared that to insist on equality among unequals is to insist on an absurdity. In the Diet of the German Confederation, Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Wurtemberg, and Hanover might all be out-voted by the small States. That was an utter absurdity, and could not possibly be continued in practice. The large States were compelled to bring to bear privately the weapon of their power, in order to secure for themselves a party.

Out with petty dukes, in with the Monad-State!

The state is power. The state is an organism. The state is the archetype of a nation. But more, the state is a man in his own right (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/18/mode/2up>):

Treat the State as a person, and the necessary and rational multiplicity of States follows. Just as in individual life the ego implies the existence of the non-ego, so it does in the State. The State is power, precisely in order to assert itself as against other equally independent powers. War and the administration of justice are the chief tasks of even the most barbaric States. But these tasks are only conceivable where a plurality of States are found existing side by side. Thus the idea of one universal empire is odious — the ideal of a State co-extensive with humanity is no ideal at all. In a single State the whole range of culture could never be fully spanned ; no single people could unite the virtues of aristocracy and democracy. All nations, like all individuals, have their limitations, but it is exactly in the abundance of these limited qualities that the genius of humanity is exhibited. The rays of the Divine light are manifested, broken by countless facets among the separate peoples, each one exhibiting another picture and another idea of the whole. Every people has a right to believe that certain attributes of the Divine reason are exhibited in it to their fullest perfection. No people ever attains to national consciousness without overrating itself. The Germans are always in danger of enervating their nationality through possessing too little of this rugged pride. The average German has very little political pride ; but even our Philistines generally revel in the intellectual boast of the freedom and universality of the German spirit, and this is well, for such a sentiment is necessary if a people is to maintain and assert itself.

And here we have Treitschke, the liberal pluralist. But what a dark pluralism it is. The State is man in the state of nature, ever waging war and foraging for his survival. But each man is unique, and is entitled to preserve his uniqueness. Moreover, he must be boastful and jealous of his uniqueness if he is to last in the great struggle for power — the doctrine of anarchy in international relations given an ethnopluralist twist. Particularism and universalism meet and diffuse.

What about the flourishing of culture? It flourishes best in the large state, he tells us, but also warns us not to value the arts and sciences too highly – a warning that no doubt sounds strange to the man who sees the ultimate standard of value of a given nation as being its contribution to knowledge. So the British have many Nobel Prize winners, but the Slovenes barely any? What foolish decadence to make this the measure of value. Power and self-preservation reign supreme (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/36/mode/2up>):

Examining closely, we find that culture in general, and in the widest sense of the word, matures more happily in the broader conditions of powerful countries than within the narrow limits of a little State. When Holland was the predominant naval Power, Sir William Temple, in his book upon the United Provinces, asserted that in a small State there must be some hidden quality favourable to maritime commerce. A no less meaningless generalization is apparent in the favourite German theory that the peculiarities of our culture arise from our system of petty States. It must be obvious that the material resources favourable to Art and Science are more abundant in a large State ; and if we inquire of history whether at any time the fairest fruit of human culture has ripened in a genuine petty State, the answer must be that in the normal course of a people's development the zenith of its political power coincides with that of its literary excellence. In this England affords us an enviable example. Chaucer, the poet of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, is contemporaneous with the Black Prince and the other heroic conquerors of France. Then follows another era of political power under Elizabeth, and of literary splendour culminating in Shakespeare. Later, side by side with Cromwell, we find the no less unique figure of the poet Milton. The contemporaries of the War of the Spanish Succession are Addison and the prose writers, who gave to modern English literature its peculiar characteristics, and directed it towards the novel of manners and the study of realism in fiction. During the struggle with the French Revolution, England produced Walter Scott and Byron as well as Nelson. It is apparent from all this that the development has been a remarkably happy one. Such good fortune, however, falls to the lot of few nations. The incalculable individual forces in the history of Art and Science have a very robust life of their own, and so long as they have something to say they express it boldly, recking little of the State's attitude towards them. The State may build universities and academies, but it must leave the cultivation of Arts and Sciences to the spirit which presides over these foundations. In periods of political decay, Italy has produced masterpieces in all the realms of Art, so we must not argue from, but rather guard ourselves against, the great delusion that United Germany must henceforward enter upon a period of literary greatness. Some national conflicts absorb so much of a people's nervous energy that an intellectual exhaustion is almost unavoidable. It was with the Italians as with us ; their unity was achieved with the same suddenness, and where shall we find great champions of Art and Literature in the epoch of Cavour ? So much of our national strength was expended in the throes of our struggle for unity that the nation needs time to recoup.

Alright.

What of the aim of the state, then? The telos? Here again, Treitschke combines a Kantian liberal pluralism with a shocking realism of power:

In one of his greatest books, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Ethics*, Kant logically develops the principle that no human being may be used merely as an instrument, thereby recognizing the divinely appointed dignity of man. Conversely, to regard the State as nothing but a means for the citizens' ends is to place the subjective aspect too high. The greatness of the State lies precisely in its power of uniting the past with the present and the future ; and consequently no individual has the right to regard the State as the servant of his own aims but is bound by moral duty and physical necessity to subordinate himself to it, while the State lies under the obligation to concern itself with the life of its citizens by extending to them its help and protection.

When we conceive the State as a personality, we see clearly that it must seek its own goal within itself. This truth was first pointed out at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Adam Müller and the Romantic School of political thinkers. It is impossible to discover what the ultimate aim of any living personality should be, without putting the further question. What is the moral task of that personality ? Let us in the same way ask the State what is its appointed work in the civilized world, — and, firstly, what are the natural boundaries of its activity ?

It then becomes evident that we cannot and must not attempt to lay down any theoretic maximum of such activity, nor define the boundaries within which the State may display it. Since the State is power, it can obviously draw all human action within its scope, so long as that action arises from the will which regulates the outer lives of men, and belongs to their visible common existence. Historical experience — examined fairly and without prejudice — teaches us that the State can overshadow practically the whole of a people's life. It will dominate it to the precise extent in which it is in a position to do so. There have been States which have embraced and directed it entirely. Communistic forms of society do this. Moreover, the degree of independence desired by different nations varies very much. Some only feel themselves at ease when all the circumstances of their lives are guided by a compelling power above them. A theocracy, of all forms of government the most immature, is also the most interfering. We know of no State in history which has mingled more with the life of its members than the remarkable Jesuit State in Paraguay. It existed for centuries among the Indians, and they thrived under its sway. In this case Church and State were one. These savages, converted to the Church of Christ, were ruled by a practical Communism such as no other people have ever consistently experienced. The clang of the Church bell summoned them to their work, their food, and their slumbers. Such a theocratic omnipotence may shock us, but we cannot deny to this State its claim to the title.

And again with reason the guiding principle, Treitschke derives the necessity of war as the backbone of the state. Perhaps the progressives might want to reconsider the maxim that the sleep of reason produces nightmares — their nightmares, anyway:

Without war no State could be. All those we know of arose through war, and the protection of their members by armed force remains their primary and essential task. War, therefore, will endure to the end of history, as long as there is multiplicity of States. The laws of human thought and of human nature forbid any alternative, neither is one to be wished for. The blind worshipper of an eternal peace falls into the error of isolating the State, or dreams of one which is universal, which we have already seen to be at variance with reason.

Even as it is impossible to conceive of a tribunal above the State, which we have recognized as sovereign in its very essence, so it is likewise impossible to banish the idea of war from the world. It is a favourite fashion of our time to instance England as particularly ready for peace. But England is perpetually at war ; there is hardly an instant in her recent history in which she has not been obliged to be fighting somewhere. The great strides which civilization makes against barbarism and unreason are only made actual by the sword. Between civilized nations also war is the form of litigation by which States make their claims valid. The arguments brought forward in these terrible law suits of the nations compel as no argument in civil suits can ever do. Often as we have tried by theory to convince the small States that Prussia alone can be the leader in Germany, we had to produce the final proof upon the battlefields of Bohemia and the Main.

Moreover, some Carlylean hero worship:

It is war which fosters the political idealism which the materialist rejects. What a disaster for civilization it would be if mankind blotted its heroes from memory. The heroes of a nation are the figures which rejoice and inspire the spirit of its youth, and the writers whose words ring like trumpet blasts become the idols of our boyhood and our early manhood. He who feels no answering thrill is unworthy to bear arms for his country. To appeal from this judgment to Christianity would be sheer perversity, for does not the Bible distinctly say that the ruler shall rule by the sword, and again that greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend ? To Aryan races, who are before all things courageous, the foolish preaching of everlasting peace has always been vain. They have always been men enough to maintain with the sword what they have attained through the spirit.

Oh, and guess what? Treitschke is all on board with educating the children, and scoffs at those Anglo-Saxon burghers who see the protection of property as the primary aim of the state. Nothing your average Clinton Democrat would object to here (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/72/mode/2up>):

If the State is to make the law secure, it must be able to prevent, and must therefore take steps to kill the brute in man. Consequently it must to some extent care for the people's education. In 1847 the English were childish enough to scoff at the servile intelligence of the German nation, which welcomed the idea of universal compulsory education. Yet Macaulay, being a man of independent judgment, was convinced that the savagery of the masses must be checked, and he spoke out for the enforcement of school attendance, but he could not quite throw off the old English habit of mind, and he declared that the State must take charge of the upbringing of its citizens if it wished to guard itself against thieves and robbers. The education of the people has a higher, nobler task than the securing of the possessions of individuals.

And before we move to the next subject, here's Treitschke as a columnist for VDARE:

It is madness to say that the exodus of Germans to America is an advantage for us. What good has it done to Germany that thousands of her best sons have turned their backs upon their fatherland because they could not earn their living at home ? They are lost to us for ever, for although certain natural ties may still bind the emigrant himself to his native soil, it is probable that his children, and certain that his grandchildren, will have ceased to be German, for the Teuton learns all too easily to abjure the land of his birth. Neither are they in a position in America to maintain their nationality. It is with them as it was with the Huguenots who wandered into Brandenburg and were generally more cultivated than the dwellers in the Mark, and yet were swamped by numbers, and lost their own national stamp. Nearly one-third of the North American population is of German origin. That is priceless material we have lost, and are still losing, in them, without the smallest compensating advantages. We forfeit their labour as well as their capital, and their financial value to us as colonists would be inestimable.

Relations between governor/subject and society/state

Although clearly subscribing to a view of sovereignty as absolute and indivisible, Treitschke desires political participation by the Mittelstand to foster feelings of civic duty. (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/138/mode/2up>):

We pass from this naive self-absorption on the part of the governed to the totally different political outlook essential to the rulers who consider the State from the standpoint of the whole community, not as members of an interested group. Their first care must be for the power and unity of the whole, and since they carry the heavy responsibility of the fate of millions they look upon strict obedience as the first necessity. It follows that every healthy Government feels the need of continuity. It is well known that when members of an opposition take part in government they have to endure from their former associates the reproach of a change of opinions and lost freedom of thought. This is quite unjust ; the fact is that these very men, who once criticized from their own standpoint only, now see for the first time how many other interests have to be safeguarded. This is the reason why local self-government is of such high political importance. It fills the middle classes with the ideas of those who govern them. The greater the number of citizens who can be induced to share in political activity and help to bear its responsibilities, the greater will be the number of persons imbued with practical knowledge of matters political, and also with something of the feeling of responsibility.

Moreover, Treitschke knows full well that public opinion is not sacred, to be followed by other aristocratic liberals like Lippmann later on. On the other hand, he also manages to convey to the reader that though public opinion is not always right, it can always be made right with such swiftness that “Vox populi, vox Dei” is actually a decent approximation. You get your democratic self-government *and your non-partisan politics, too* (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/142/mode/2up>):

The saying of Napoleon III., "Public opinion is the sixth great Power," has become a favourite weapon of the demagogue, but in reality the public opinion of whole generations has been completely in error about the most important political questions ; take the Prussian Zollverein once more as a single instance. Our political unity was brought about in defiance of public opinion, which only began to veer round after the whole thing was done. Therefore we have to choose among the thousands of desires and imaginations which sway the masses from day to day and which may so often be mistaken. Great crises do arise in a nation's history when the inward conviction of the people breaks through with so much moral force behind it that no Government can resist it. No German Government could have withstood the national cry for war in 1870 ; it was the voice of the German conscience making itself heard. But how hard these matters are to gauge is proved by the fact that the French felt the same. They were all guilty of the sin which they afterwards fastened upon their Emperor.

Grillparzer once observed that he hardly ever heard any good criticism of the theatre from an individual, whereas a whole audience were capable of giving it. There is some truth in this. The public is the final judge of whether a drama catches hold of the inmost heart ; it gives the collective verdict which is right in the long run. The force of public opinion in the State is the same. It often errs but often the universal voice speaks so unanimously that " Vox populi, vox Dei " may be said without foolishness. We are bound to admit that the war of 1870 was not absolutely light-minded on the part of the French. Napoleon III. had made the country a first-class power. He had given it a position in Europe which neither French diplomacy nor France itself was inwardly capable of sustaining. It was natural that they should wish to check the rising Empire of Germany, and it is impossible to talk of the absolute error of public opinion.

On the rise of the lower nobility:

It is exactly the old families among the minor nobility who have the blood of serfs in their veins, for the original German nobility either died out or rose to princely rank. The lesser families have almost always civil servants for their fore-fathers. These were unemancipated, but by reason of their political activity they were raised above the mass of the ordinary freemen, so that they gradually became superior to them. Many good noble names, such as "Buttler," "Truchsess," "Schenk," still betray this origin. A similar process is still going on. The ranks of the nobility are swelled by the accretions from middle-class families, who have come to the front in the State's service. It is quite natural that this should be so, nor is there any objection to it, provided always that it is not accompanied by arrogance and folly. From out of the aristocracy there is evolved in process of time what are vaguely called the ruling classes. "Optimates" rise to eminence who generally have a share in the civil or military government of the State. We are a monarchically constituted people, as our system of orders and titles clearly shows. We set store by having a position, real or apparent, in the framework of the State. If a man cannot be a Regierungsrath he desires at least to be a Commerzienrath. In England we find the purely aristocratic ambition, with us it takes monarchic-bureaucratic form. Whatever it be, some kind of tradition is necessary in the guidance of the State. Our ruling class comes of good families, who bring up their children with definite notions of what is honourable and what is not. A stock of inherited conceptions of integrity and morality is a necessity for Government, which does not depend primarily upon knowledge but upon capability to rule ; a capability inseparable from self-control, which training must have made into a second nature.

The proles are both the best and the worst:

When we come down to the lowest stratum of society, in modern parlance the Fourth Estate, we find ourselves confronted with a remarkable phenomenon. These broad masses of the population contain on the one hand the worst elements in society — and this cannot be otherwise, for in every well-ordered community there must be an undermost layer which contains everything that cannot maintain itself on a higher level — and yet from this same class springs the rejuvenating and revivifying force of every nation. Every people renews itself from beneath ; the worn-out elements sink back, the new young ones rise upwards ; hence comes the tangled interaction of class upon class. No one knew this better than that great man Goethe, whom the narrow-minded Liberals persist in calling an aristocrat. If true democracy consists in love of humanity, Goethe was a democratic poet indeed. How true is his saying that “those whom we call the lower classes are surely the highest in the sight of God.” In simple conditions of life good men attain to a naive strength and purity of sentiment which so often eludes the culture of the educated.

The spirit of the commoner, the hero archetype and the futility of public education as a tool of building cultured men from the lower class:

The common man possesses also a sturdy, honourable, warrior spirit ; the joy in heroic deeds runs in his blood. When we seek for the real popular heroes in history we find that the very highest meed of fame of which tradition loves to tell has fallen to the share of the heroes of war and of religion. Compared with them the statesman proper will never be popular. There is only one exception to this rule, and that one is more apparent than real. It is Prince Bismarck. But he lives in the imagination of the people as a soldier hero, as the iron man in the yellow collar of the Magdeburg Cuirassiers ; the fancy of the populace pictures Moltke and Bismarck together as the leaders in the wars against Austria and France. Otherwise it is universal that the leaders of war and religion are the only really popular heroes, and that knowledge carries with it the key to the treatment of a discontented populace. The first step must be to appease economic anxieties, the second to work upon the oppressed spirits by inspiring them with all the strength of hope which religion alone can offer. The manly courage and religious sentiment which are powerful among the common people must be fostered and inculcated in every possible way. For this end a national army is a true blessing. Religion is to no one more indispensable than to the low-born man. The educated agnostic is aware that he must not transgress the moral law, but the uneducated will lose all sense of morality along with his faith. Our middle classes to-day are labouring under a widespread and absurd delusion that the masses can be helped by a so-called education, offered to them in the shape of public lectures. The man of the people does not as a rule possess either the leisure or the freedom of mind to assimilate intellectually the totally unsystematic and disconnected series of discourses which are put before him. They merely teach the masses certain phrases and catchwords, which they repeat blindly and without reflection, only half understanding them, becoming more and more discontented the more they take on the semblance of education.

The centrality of the marital bond (not exactly Bonald, but nevertheless (<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/236/mode/2up>)):

A regulated form of sexual companionship is necessary to all orderly public life. The old German word for marriage contains a depth of meaning which brings out the two aspects of this relationship. As the word stands both for “law” and “bond” it betokens both a legal and a moral relationship, and describes correctly the double nature of the contract. A law of inheritance is a necessary consequence of private property. Property, then, presupposes the Family, which is thus inseparable from the most primitive legal conceptions. A glance at the psychology of nations is enough to show how this connection is a moral one as well. Only through marriage can man attain complete development, in the perfect and ideal sense of the word. A wonderful happiness is found in lawful companionship between the sexes, when it is really serious and sacred. Certain essential traits of both feminine and masculine natures only unfold themselves to the utmost in married life. The submission and self-sacrificing loyalty of woman can only be seen at its loveliest with her husband and children, and the generosity of the man will likewise be most strongly displayed for the sake of his children and his wife.

Monarchy and republicanism

Such a wise view of monarchy combined with a nod to the American republican project. I’m sure Thomas Hutchinson, Daniel Leonard, Joseph Galloway, Samuel Curwen and many other loyalists would have objected, but nonetheless:

In addition to this consideration it must be remembered that as a matter of fact all the royal houses of Europe form one great complexus of families united by innumerable ties of consanguinity ; and in this way monarchies obtain a great practical advantage recognized by all great republicans. Washington often and sadly declared it to be his experience that a sovereign people requires to suffer before it can be made to understand, and this dictum is confirmed by the War of Independence. Had the American people been guided by a right political judgment, that inevitable war would have broken out a generation earlier ; but in fact it required to be forced into it by dire necessity. A monarchy is better able to foresee the future, and there is many a historical crisis of which it may be truly said that the decisive act could have been performed only by a monarch. Prussian policy up to 1866 could only have been carried out by a great king and a great minister, never by a republic. At that time only a small group, at Freiburg no more than five of us, adhered to Bismarck. Such was the extent of the public approval which is alleged to have supported him. He alone was able to accomplish what was necessary, in spite of the opposition of the people. Fortunately the great statesman possessed the gift of presenting things in such a light that every Prussian must feel in his heart that the honour of his country was at stake, and thus was infused into the struggle the impetus and vigour of a national war.

Political economy

Paul Krugman and Warren Mosler would approve
(<https://archive.org/stream/politicstrei01trei#page/388/mode/2up>):

From the purely private economic standpoint the taxes imposed by the Government are a burden ; the individual producer is fully justified in counting them part of the cost of production, and he will strive to get them made as small as possible. We must remember, however, that the nation pays taxes ultimately to itself, and the question is whether the price we pay is too high for the strong army and the just administration which we get in return.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the most important actions of the State cannot be valued by economic standards. The State does not exist for the purpose of producing money's worth. Its work, like all work which is spiritual and moral, is above price. Such ideas are much too high to be estimated by a money standard. An artist may sell his pictures, but no one can say if the price received represents the value of his aesthetic work. Neither can the value of the State's activity be judged by its concrete results, be they favourable or the reverse.

And of this (<https://archive.org/stream/politics02trei#page/486/mode/2up>):

It is wrong to start with the idea that the citizen shall repay the State, through the taxes, for benefits he has received ; the proper way of looking at it rather is that it is the duty of all citizens to contribute, according to their means, towards the collective costs of administration. Because the State is the people legally united, it becomes both its right and its duty to draw upon the resources of its members for its own maintenance. In the last resort the wealth of the nation is identical with the wealth of the State, and when two States are engaged in a life-and-death struggle the national assets decide practically which of the two can hold out the longest.

There is a contention between Treitschke's Bodinian conception of sovereignty and his attitudes regarding popular government. Being a nationalist liberal, he fuses both to make his liberalism consistent, but at the same time it means he can't hide behind a veneer of liberty and "rights of man," so he does not entertain these concepts much. His is a Lacedaemonian liberalism.

He also realizes the fact that the state is both a corporation (not some public charity formed by social contract), and also not constrained by its income, but rather that its income is the result of expenditures autonomously generated by money creation. "Investment determines saving," as a Keynesian might say:

The modern doctrine of finance is right to this extent when it calls the State an economic tyrant, but the expression is dangerous, because it leads so easily to the conception of the State as concerned only with economics. The State is not what so many of the teachers of political theory would make it appear, the collective profit-sharing association of individual private associations. The State, as such, is not a money-making concern, but it encourages its subjects to make fortunes. It is a corporation, which as a rule resorts to compulsion for the satisfaction of its economic requirements, because it is not in a position to offer a specific return to the individual citizens. The revenue of the State differs from all private finance by reason of the law which obliges it to regulate its income by its expenditure, and not vice versa. The proverb which bids us cut our coats according to our cloth can never apply to the State, and for it the first question must be, How much is required to maintain its established position in the world, with due regard to the claims of its Constitution and its civilization ?

On the other hand, the adage of life, liberty and property did not completely die in him:

The sound foundations for national well-being are not laid upon an equalization of wealth, but rather upon that co-existence of small, medium, and large incomes which develop its material and moral strength in all directions. There must be people of very slender means, lest the supply of labour, upon which we depend for the satisfaction of our physical necessities, should fail. Middle classes we must also have, for they are the real kernel of the nation and the bulwark of the State. Medium wealth does not suffice, however, for the great undertakings upon credit, and the mighty industrial enterprises of our time which require great capital sums under one control. A large amount of capital in the right hands is as requisite for economic production as is a working class to whom employment is a necessity. We know already that the conception of Want, although fortunately it is relative, can never vanish altogether.

The hammer is nothing but an iron fist, the spoon is copied from the hollow hand, in fact the most primitive articles of property are only auxiliaries to the bodily limbs. Hence property is no arbitrary idea, but is founded in man's natural impulse to extend his own personality. A human being literally without property abandons his individuality, as does the monk when he renounces himself ; no genuine human existence is thinkable if divorced from every form of property. When Lassalle maintained that property is only a historical, not a logical category, he uttered a sophistry, for it is both. It is a logical necessity, but set up in the process of time, and consequently liable to change. It has no absolutely invariable form ; in the last resort the State must be the judge of the conditions under which it will best express the legal instinct and satisfy the economic requirements of the nation.

The unraveling

In the end, Treitschke and the liberals got their wish. Germany was unified under Prussia, and specifically as Treitschke commented (<https://archive.org/stream/politics02trei#page/374/mode/2up>):

The historical and political foundations of the whole Empire rest upon the actual and formal preponderance of Prussia, or upon " Prussia extended," as the Emperor William once remarked to Bismarck. What is the German army but the army of Prussia, constituted in 1814 as the nation in arms, and then expanded over the Empire. The Imperial Posts and Telegraphs and the Imperial Bank (Reichsbank) are all old Prussian institutions. This is all as it should be. Every Prussian will rejoice that the best political institutions should be spread over the rest of Germany, and every reasonable non-Prussian must be glad that Prussia should bring honour to the German name once more. Matters are so arranged that the will of the Empire, in the last resort, cannot be anything but the will of Prussia.

Let us contrast this to the words of one of the losers of history (http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1823), Friedrich Ferdinand, Count von Beust – Austrian statesman and chief opponent of Bismarck:

Was the German Confederation in reality so objectionable? It is a fact that during the fifty years of its existence, external peace was undisturbed, and Germany was not involved in a single war. It is said – and I myself said so in my last speech at the Delegation of 1871 – that this happy result was owing to the long understanding between Austria and Prussia. Undoubtedly. But this understanding was created and facilitated by the Confederation as the connecting link. So long as that understanding lasted, no German Government had any other programme than complete union with those united Powers. Only when Prussia began after 1848 to pursue the policy of gradually expelling Austria from Germany, did it become inevitable that some Governments should side with Prussia, others with Austria. But we must not forget that not one of the German Governments of that time ever took a single step that might have warranted foreign countries in interfering in German affairs. If there were times when excessive deference was shown to Russia, and later on perhaps to France, we must look for the reason elsewhere than in Frankfurt. For years the German Courts were trained by Vienna and Berlin in the fear of God and of the Czar Nicholas, and they did not give the first example of subservience to Napoleon III. But when the moment came for the German Confederate Princes to defend themselves and their country, as in 1840 and 1859, they rose nobly and patriotically as one man. And I must add this consideration, which is often overlooked in the present day: It is highly satisfactory and desirable to be always hearing of the German Empire and its Allies for the preservation of peace. But the more welcome the result of these efforts, the more essential is their necessity. This is a logical and irrefragable conclusion. In the days of the German Confederation we heard little of such efforts, because peace was regarded as a matter of course – which it has ceased to be since 1866 and 1870.

[...]

Very different was the state of affairs in the various States of the German Confederation. Was there one of them that Gladstone could have held up to public abhorrence as he did the kingdom of Naples? **I was on a short visit to Saxony after 1870, at the time when Prince Bismarck was first attempting to make the railways of the various States an Imperial monopoly. This measure excited bitter opposition, which a National Liberal paper deplored with the words: 'This narrow, local spirit reminds us of the worst times of Beust.' 'Nay, it explains the worst times of Beust,' said I to a friend. In those times the Saxon had not yet the gratification of having conquered Alsace, but the Alsatian manufactories were not competing with the Saxon; nor had the Saxon the gratification of possessing a navy ready equipped for war; but the products of his industry were being sent across the sea far more frequently than now. He had not the satisfaction of being a member of the greatest military power in Europe; but he enjoyed the harmless pleasure of hearing Saxony raise her voice in the Confederation, and seeing her Minister become a member of a European Conference. he paid for this less dearly than now, when he is obliged to contribute sixty thousand men to the Imperial army – three times the number that was then considered sufficient to preserve the peace and security of the country. And finally, he did not possess the satisfaction of knowing that if he were ill-treated at Buenos-Ayres, a man-of-war would be sent to punish his tormentors. Such a disaster, however, rarely happened, while he was often in a position to want help and support in Paris, London, and St Petersburg, in which case he used to receive from the Saxon Ministers at those places every possible assistance, as they had both time and means to devote to him. Now, on the other hand, the German embassy throws him into the common pot, where little remains for each individual, considering the multitude of applicants.**

Germany became one. What followed were machine politics among liberals, Junkers reduced to becoming agrarian lobbyists, Lutheran and Catholic national socialist chicanery among various Social Parties, a bitter war against Catholicism and the last vestiges of the counterrevolution during the Kulturkampf, a world war, internal Bolshevik revolution, social-democratic

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichsbanner_Schwarz-Rot-Gold), and communist paramilitaries in the street amidst a general Weimar decadence, the NSDAP turning Germany into a theme park, the mass rape of German women after another world war, massive expulsions and population transfers of German immigrants throughout Europe, denazification, the Bolshevization of the East and finally a re-unification now being headed by EU loyalists who are running some demographic experiments. Truly, what a success German unification has been. Was it worth it, Professor von Treitschke?

Above all, Treitschke is the perfect example of where the aspirations of liberty and fraternity intersect with a cold Machiavellianism and Hegelianism to produce the mechanistic and desacralized life under modernity. It is a mistake for a reactionary to adopt Treitschkeism (and some form of “Treitschkeism” does indeed appear to be the guiding principle of the modern far-right, the far-right of the post-counterrevolutionary era), but he can learn a lot from it, for it is *liberalism without romance*. It was Hegel who attacked Haller. Today Hegelians are a dime a dozen, and Hallerians non-existent. It was Otto von Bismarck on the Prussian side who outdid Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust on the Austrian side. Today Bismarck is the great statesman and legend, and Count von Beust is a historical footnote.

Such is our condition. But hey, better to be governed by Treitschkeists than progressive-idealists. If we had them.

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8 thoughts on “The counter-enlightened liberalism of Heinrich von Treitschke”

1. [darkreformation101](#) says:

[March 11, 2017 at 6:14 pm](#)

I am impressed by your work. This project looks very interesting. I will return shortly to give it a closer look.

[Reply](#)

2. Chris B says:

[March 12, 2017 at 3:29 pm](#)

By utter coincidence, I was reading about the Jesuit State in Paraguay in MacIntyre’s new essay on Marxism. He praises it for flourishing, then bemoans its collapse once the Jesuits were called away.

[Reply](#)

3. [Howard J. Harrison](#) says:

[March 15, 2017 at 2:30 pm](#)

The powerful, despairing, mid-19th-century German intellectual yearns for something the early-21st-century American cannot quite appreciate, doesn’t he? As you quote Treitschke, “The manly courage and religious sentiment which are powerful among the common people must be fostered and inculcated in every possible way. For this end a national army is a true blessing.”

Of course, those two sentences are insufficient to capture the sense of Treitschke’s writing; rather, your whole post does that. I had never read any of Treitschke before. Thanks.

Reading your whole post, one gets the sense that Treitschke strains toward some ineffable idea, some vision, which presents many true elements but does not quite hold together. Moreover, one gets the sense that Treitschke *knows* that his vision does not quite hold together. Strange to say, but if my sense of Treitschke is right, if he were an early-21st-century American rather than a German of yore, he might be an earnest Paul Ryan Republican. He seems the type.

See, Ryan is an honorable man, but perhaps you take my point: so was Treitschke, for all I know, an honorable man. The flaw in Ryan's and Treitschke's honor is that, at some level, they are both wrong *and they know it*.

One notices that you have quoted from an English-language edition, which spares you and your reader the burden of translating from the German. However, it still looks as though you typed out all those long passages. Did you indeed type them out? Or have you relied upon optical character recognition (OCR) software?

Reply

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

March 15, 2017 at 2:44 pm

I relied on the DjVu OCR text dump, which I then formatted and cleaned some of the garbled characters.

Treitschke is the great modernizer, essentially. But he is not like Mazzini and Kossuth who appeal to some sort of great future ahead. Treitschke knows that the modernity he advocates is desacralizing and dehumanizing to an extent, but he feels it is something that *must* happen, because he has inherited a certain understanding and awe of power, and subscribes to a certain philosophy of history.

I do not see Treitschke in the GOP. The "tyranny of values" (as Schmitt called it) which pervades the GOP approach to conservatism would probably strike him as too much. Neither do I see Treitschke as a fascist (which is the predominant interpretation), since he would probably dismiss the whole "corporate state" shtick as being a bunch of Jesuit casuistry. His economics remain liberal.

Glad I could introduce you to his writing.

Reply

- Michael Rothblatt says:

March 15, 2017 at 7:33 pm

>His economics remain liberal.

Isn't national-liberal economics best described as economically literate mercantilism? It also seems to be the preferred economics of Hestia NRx i.e. being able to produce stuff is supposedly far more important than being wealthy because autarky secures independence and thus supposedly also the sovereignty.

Reply

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

March 15, 2017 at 7:50 pm

This is an old argument that was formalized in the Verdoorn effect: productivity grows in the long run with output. Therefore, stimulating industry is its own payoff.

From the perspective of preserving sovereignty, maintaining a web of grants and subsidies to industrialists can be nothing else other than a fracturing of sovereignty. The princely domain starts incurring liabilities to foster a political clientele.

Even on economic terms, accelerating the output-productivity spiral in such a way will cause the structure of production to shift into a service economy at some point. FIRE economies are not an anomaly, they are the natural evolution of an increasing roundaboutness of capital. Modern computerized manufacturing has a lot more “end user” stages that tend to be brought back home, while the heavy industry is concentrated into fewer and higher-order stages. To bemoan this too much is to start to engage in primitive cost-theory reasoning where physical products are fetishized, when economic actors operate in terms of value calculations.

Reply.

4. Pingback: Sociální rozklad na prvočinitele – Konec nových časů

5. Pingback: Vaublanc's specula principum for the post-Restoration age | Carlsbad 1819

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