

Chapter 2

Singin' in the Shade: An Introduction to Post-Post-War Thought

Keynote Address for “Crisis and Reconfigurations” Conference

William H.F. Altman

When they sailed us off to the war in 1917—and naturally I am speaking here not only as a philosopher but as a citizen of the United States—they equipped us with a smart new marching song, not at all like “Waltzing Matilda,” which the young men of Australia already knew before they were sailed off to Gallipoli. It was called: “Over There!” and since I am charged with the honorific task of sounding a keynote, I will take that charge literally by singing a bit of it:

So prepare, say a prayer: Send the word, send the word to beware,
We'll be over, we're coming over,
And we won't come back till it's over, over there.

In the darkling light of Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria—and too many other places around the world, including Darwin, Australia—it's pretty obvious that “we're” not back, and “Over There!” provides a very good explanation for that fact: *it's not over*. The war continued, and in important ways, it's still not over a hundred years after it began. When some latter day Thucydides gets around to writing up the twentieth century, 1919 will be introduced with the words: “in the sixth” and 1939 with: “in the twenty-sixth year of the war.” And with ISIS in the news a hundred years after 1914, every time the names “Sykes-Picot” are spoken, it will validate what Thomas Mann wrote about the war in 1924 in *Der Zauberberg*: “when so much began that has hardly now left off beginning.”¹

In introducing what I call “post-post-war thought,” I will speak first of the Great War between the British Empire and her allies and the Russian Empire, explaining briefly—in the mode of Thucydides—why they *didn't* fight against each other, but rather why Germany came out of the war divided. Guiding the fortunes of the

¹ Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (1924), Vorwort (translation H. Lowe-Porter).

W.H.F. Altman (✉)
Independent Scholar, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brasil
e-mail: whfaltman@gmail.com

world's preeminent superpower, the makers of British Foreign Policy entered the twentieth century fearing one imperial rival above all, and that rival—threatening their interests all along the line from Korea to the Dardanelles—was not the Kaiser's Germany, but the Russian Bear, allied with France since 1894.² Contrary to the conventional view, the Reich was not a threat in itself and its High Seas Fleet was begun in 1898 in order to increase Germany's alliance value, and thus to show both Russia and Britain that each of them needed her help.³ Originating in the nineteenth century and extending well beyond it, the real geopolitical battle had always been between the British Whale and the Bear, and that is why this conflict—having temporarily assumed the façade of a crusade against Communism—became the dominant fact of life on the planet as soon as Germany was divided between them. In fact, the war that ended in 1945 was really only the end of Phase I—embracing both world wars—in a long conflict that had begun under the Tsars. Korea, China, Afghanistan, Iran, and the huge Ottoman Empire were all flashpoints of Anglo-Russian rivalry long before the beginning of the twentieth century,⁴ and that is the reason they remain so today, although Phase II is currently being played out most conspicuously in the Ukraine. Post-Soviet Russia, the modern state of Israel, and the U.S. as super-power, all originate in 1917. So Mann was right.

If any of you find the politics of my own beloved country a bit confusing, allow me to shed some light on what's going on “over there” in the context of 1917. We have two political parties, neither of which is able to affirm openly its own basic principle; the source of the world's confusion about us is rooted in our own terminal confusion about ourselves. Organized during the eighteenth century Enlightenment and originating in a militant seventeenth century Protestantism, the United States of America have lost their way; please note the use of the plural here, indicating that we repealed grammar after the Civil War, making “states” into a singular. On the one hand, we have a Darwinian laissez-faire liberal party that has succeeded in making the word “liberal” a term of abuse and which pretends to be Christian while preaching against health care for our poorest citizens, and on the other we have a party that pretends to be on the side of the weak, poor, and powerless that nevertheless is doing its level best to cut itself off from the Bible, the best source of its active concern for the well-being of others. A godless benevolence does dubious battle with Mammon-loving Christians, and the avatars of Ayn Rand prepare to eject the liberals from the temple of liberty for the sake of the moneychangers. But here's a curious fact: if you look at an electoral map of 1896, you will notice that there has been a near perfect switch in U.S. politics because the Republicans now carry all the states that once voted for William Jennings Bryan.⁵ Bryan was perhaps the last

² See Kennan (1984); also Robinson (1965).

³ Especially important among recent studies are Rose (2011) and Clark (2012).

⁴ See Fromkin (1989: 27) for this telling quotation from G. N. (Lord) Curzon: “‘Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia—to many these names breathe only a sense of utter remoteness. . . . To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world.’”

⁵ See Williams (2010), and more topically Rove (2015).

consistent Democrat: he attacked Darwinism on the basis of the Bible, he was deeply suspicious of Great Britain, and he opposed U.S. entry into the world war,⁶ resigning as Secretary of State after Woodrow Wilson showed his Anglophile intentions with the Lusitania notes.⁷ Wilson would not be the last Democrat to run on some variation of the slogan “He keeps us out of war” who then takes us into a new one,⁸ which is not to deny that where U.S. bellicosity is concerned, our Republicans are infinitely worse.

We are still living in the shade of the war that began in 1914: such is my thesis. And I make this claim in an openly elegiac mood, mourning unashamedly for what was lost in the Great War. De-colonialisation, no matter how cynically partial, the redemptive power of women, no matter how treacherously embattled it remains, and the growing tolerance for homosexuality are all arguably benign effects of that terrible war, and it would delight me no end to hear my call for a post-post-war thought challenged and repudiated by a vigorous assertion of the social, economic, political, technological, and sexual progress we have made since 1914. But I doubt that anyone can make such a case. Let me clarify: I do not doubt that such a case *could* be made, just that any of us are still pre-war enough to make it. Along with God and the Enlightenment, the Idea of Progress died in the Great War, or rather: enough people who believed in progress, God, and enlightenment values were killed in the war—or lost their faith in those things as a result of the deaths of others—that a defense of our post-war world on the basis of Progress has become impossible for shadows like ourselves to make. The first step, then, is to recognize that we *are* shadows, and that we are *living in the shade of a poisonous tree*: we need to grasp how much was lost in the war, and how much we are still affected by it. And the next step, after owning ourselves as not so much post-modern as simply post-war, is to recover the ability to think in a pre-war way, or better yet, to gain access to a way of thinking that is “post-post-war.” More specifically, I propose that we prepare ourselves to finally move beyond the war by immersing ourselves in it, applying some variant of Critical Theory to the corrosive spiritual aftershocks of Ypres, Verdun, and Gallipoli, in an attempt to recover the possibility of progress, based on a prior and sober assessment of how it died in the first place. And 2014 is a good time to begin this work.

A hundred years ago today, the Germans were preparing to surrender Tsing-tao, their part of China, to the Japanese; they did so on November 7, 1914.⁹ Given how great a boon it was to Great Britain that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, there is at least some basis for thinking that the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 never really lapsed in a pragmatic sense, but even the period of its open operation tends to be forgotten:¹⁰ after all, my countrymen are taught that the United States brought democracy to Japan after the mushroom cloud, and very few of us, at least,

⁶ See Kazin (2006) and Leinwand (2007).

⁷ See Floyd (2013).

⁸ See Lovell (1980).

⁹ See Gleichen, ed. (1918–1920), 1.37.

¹⁰ For recent studies with bibliography, see O'Brien, ed. (2004).

know that Japan was our ally the first time round. Like the small strip of Afghanistan that now divides Tajikistan from Pakistan—but which was designed to separate British India from the Russian Empire—the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 leaves behind a trace of the truth I mentioned at the start: the reality of Anglo-Russian conflict as the primary cause of the First World War. Whether hot or cold, my ongoing claim is that Anglo-Russian rivalry is the real story of the twentieth century and that the U.S. participates in it as a mere epigone and dupe, despite the trappings of our present hegemony: it originates in the nineteenth, and it both continues and will continue in the twenty-first. Christened “the Great Game” by Rudyard Kipling¹¹ it explains not only why Winston Churchill’s first posting was to the Northwestern Frontier Province,¹² but also why the United States invaded Afghanistan more than a hundred years later, long after the British had fought three wars there. Edward Gibbon had prognosticated this rivalry in the eighteenth century,¹³ and Napoleon described it to Tsar Alexander on a raft in 1807;¹⁴ indeed it required only imagination and a map to see it. Leaving aside what happened in 1941, there is no question but that it was in the interests of Great Britain that the Japanese Pearl Harbored Port Arthur—Russia’s version of Germany’s Tsing-tao—in 1904.¹⁵ As for the United States, our Pacific fleet was in British Hong Kong when Teddy Roosevelt wired them that the Spanish-American War had—as we still like to say in the States—“broken out” in 1898.¹⁶ Between the United States and Japan, Britain found two reliable partners to combat Russian expansion in the Pacific between 1898 and 1902, and surprisingly enough, neither of them was Germany.

As we celebrate its centennial, it is worth keeping in mind that the origins of the world war will not be found in the summer of 1914, but in the dark days of the Boer War, fought between 1899 and 1902:¹⁷ like Belgium, the Balkans were merely a pretext. The reason that Great Britain did not fight against Russia is that neither Japan nor the U.S. were Britain’s first choice to share the burden of containing the late nineteenth century version of Napoleon’s Franco-Russian Alliance: Germany was. Behind this new German Reich, of course, stood the Kingdom of Prussia, and Great Britain’s connection to Prussia is deep, going back to the first Diplomatic

¹¹ See Meyer & Brysac (1999) and Sergeev (2013).

¹² See Churchill (1901).

¹³ Cf. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 43: “The philosophy of Bayle dispelled a prejudice which Milton’s muse had so recently adorned, that the comet, ‘from its horrid hair shakes pestilence and war.’ Its road in the heavens was observed with exquisite skill by Flamstead and Cassini: and the mathematical science of Bernoulli, Newton, and Halley, investigated the laws of its revolutions. At the eighth period, in the year two thousand three hundred and fifty-five, their calculations may perhaps be verified by the astronomers of some future capital in the Siberian or American wilderness.”

¹⁴ In particular, see the work of the late Thomas Munch-Petersen (d. February 1, 2016); note that the original term for what happened at Pearl Harbor and Port Arthur is “to Copenhagen.”

¹⁵ See especially *The Russo-Japanese War*, five volumes; compiled by the General Staff, War Office (1906–1910). For a guide to current trends, see Kowner, ed. (2007).

¹⁶ See Trask (1981), 70–81.

¹⁷ Langer (1935).

Revolution of 1756,¹⁸ when the English treacherously broke off their traditional connection to the Austrian Hapsburgs and embraced the warlike Frederick. Everyone knows who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, but in further pursuit of a literal keynote, consider the opening lines of the Prussian National Anthem:

Heil dir im Siegerkranz,
Herrscher des Vaterlands!
Heil, Kaiser, dir!¹⁹

As long as Germany helped Great Britain to contain Russia, as she did at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Prussia's Bismarck was "the Honest Broker."²⁰ But the truth was just as clear to the Germans as it had been to others: a conflict between the Whale and the Bear for control of the world was inevitable, and both sides would need Germany's help in order to win. A long history had taught the makers of British Foreign Policy the importance of holding the Balance of Power:²¹ the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance of 1894 began to make it manifest—and Englishmen did not relish this realisation one tiny bit—that Germany now held it. Could Germany be induced to fight both France and Russia in order to pull Great Britain's chestnuts from the fire, or would she join with them in some new version of Napoleon's Continental League? The makers of German foreign policy decided to keep this question an open one, and formulated the doctrine of "the Free Hand":²² by remaining neutral between Russia and Britain, the new Reich could extract colonial concessions from both. And Tsing-tao, which they would surrender 100 years ago tomorrow, was one of their rewards.

What German strategists could not imagine in 1901—and did not fully understand until it became a *fait accompli* on August 4, 1914—was that Great Britain would make a temporary entente of expediency with Russia through France against the *Kaiserreich* in a second and equally treacherous Diplomatic Revolution. This revolution was the real cause of the Great War, and once Queen Victoria finally died, it began to unfold: the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 led quickly enough to the Russo-Japanese War, the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the Great Loan of April 1906,²³ and the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. Although the winners have written most of the history books to date, there are winds of change, as indicated by Australia's own Christopher Clark, and a young German scholar named Andreas Rose. The smoking gun proves to be an anonymous article entitled "British Foreign Policy" that appeared in the *National Review* in November 1901.²⁴ The authors

¹⁸A good place to start is still Horn (1957).

¹⁹Sung to the tune of "God Save the King" (or "My Country, 'tis of Thee").

²⁰For recent attention, see Yavuz and Sluglett eds. (2011). See also A. J. P. Taylor's classic (1971).

²¹See Lowe (1994).

²²See especially Rich (1965).

²³See Tomaszewski (2002): 110–14 and Soroka: 2011): 114–16. Most recently, see Siegel (2014).

²⁴See A.B.C., etc. "British Foreign Policy," *National Review* 38 (November 1901): 343–358, available online at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_ABC_Proposal_for_British_Foreign_Policy (accessed February 16, 2016). See also Andriessen (2007): 323–325.

called for a rapprochement between Russia and Britain—the Tsar would receive Kuwait—that would target Germany as their common enemy, and thus pay back the upstart Reich for playing the two off against each other. Rose has shown that Sir Edward Grey—famous for his remark about the lamps going out all over Europe—contributed to this article, and this casts his subsequent actions in a new light, especially as architect of the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, as the orator whose speech of August 4, 1914 persuaded Parliament to declare war on Germany over Belgium, and later as ambassador to the United States. Until soundly beaten by the Japanese in 1905, the Tsar was not ready to listen to such overtures,²⁵ but after Victoria's death in 1902, there would be no more overtures to Germany. After the war, it appeared to some Germans that the policy-makers of the Second Reich had blundered, and should have allied with Britain against Russia when she had the chance:

No sacrifice should have been too great to win England's friendship. We should have given up all thought of colonies and sea power and avoided competition with British industry if that is what was needed. Only absolute clear-sightedness could bring success along with abandoning world trade, colonies, and a German navy. The State's power must be totally concentrated on the army. The result would have been a temporary setback, but a great and mighty future. There was a time when we could have discussed this plan with England. England understood very well that Germany had a growing population with growing needs. Those needs would be filled either with England as an ally in Europe or by another ally in the world. At the turn of the century, London itself tried to establish a relationship with Germany. For the first time, people were upset thinking we might have to pull England's chestnuts out of the fire. This attitude was unfortunate and caused them to act as if an alliance did not require mutual give-and-take! Such a deal could easily have been made with England. British diplomacy was at least smart enough to know that nothing can be expected without something in return. If a wise German foreign policy had taken over Japan's role in 1904, we can hardly grasp the impact it would have had for Germany. Things would never have reached the point of "The World War". The bloodshed in 1904 would have saved bloodshed in 1914 to 1918 by ten times. And what a position Germany would hold in the world today!²⁶

That was how the world looked to Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. As for the vaunted glories to be reaped from "a wise German foreign policy" willing to take over Japan's role of fighting the Russians in 1904—glories that were hard to find in the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—Churchill's words about December 7, 1941 suffice:

No American will think it wrong of me if I proclaim that to have the United States at our side was to me the greatest joy. I could not foretell the course of events. I do not pretend to have measured accurately the martial might of Japan, but now at this very moment I knew the United States was in the war, up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all! Yes, after Dunkirk; after the fall of France; after the horrible episode of Oran; after the threat of invasion, when, apart from the Air and the Navy, we were an almost unarmed people; after the deadly struggle of the U-boat war - the first Battle of the Atlantic, gained by a hand's-breath; after seventeen months of lonely fighting and nineteen months of my responsibility in dire stress. We had won the war. England would live; Britain would live;

²⁵ See Altman (2013), §123 and notes (219–220).

²⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, chapter 4: <http://www.mondopolitico.com/library/meinkampf/v1c4.htm> (accessed November 1, 2014).

the Commonwealth of Nations and the Empire would live. How long the war would last or in what fashion it would end no man could tell, nor did I at this moment care. Once again in our long Island history we should emerge, however mauled or mutilated, safe and victorious. We should not be wiped out. Our history would not come to an end. We might not even have to die as individuals. Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder.²⁷

And ground to powder they surely were.

Now everyone knows that the National Socialist Revolution of 1933 came out of Germany's defeat in the Great War, and that there would have been no Adolf Hitler without the disastrous Treaty of Versailles. Since Churchill was right and Hitler was wrong, we all know that this Revolution was a spectacular and murderous failure, and an Anglo-American hegemony has dominated the world scene since 1945, and continues to dominate it today. If we can free ourselves from the myth of Anglo-German rivalry for a moment, it is interesting to compare the geopolitical balance between the Whale and her allies the United States and Japan on the one hand, and Russia—indifferent to the difference between Tsars and Commissars—between 1914 and 1945. Aside from the fact that Germany was divided between them and Austria-Hungary was likewise partitioned, the only net territorial changes were in the Far East, and most importantly in Korea, where the West slipped a bit and lost its northern half. My favorite example of territorial exchange, however, is the Mariana Islands,²⁸ from which the B-29s carrying the two A-bombs took off in 1945: these islands tell an interesting story about the fate of Britain's friends. Having been denied the Philippines, the Germans were allowed to acquire them from Spain in 1899; the Japanese then received them for fighting the Germans in the First World War, and they finally passed to the U.S. as a result of the Second; we retain them for the present. As for the Ottoman Empire, its disappearance has not been without its attendant difficulties, but despite all of them, we are presently winning "the Great Game" despite the new lease on life the Soviet Union temporarily gave to the Russian Empire.

Although Russia recovered substantial ground in the second half of Phase I, Germany was beaten a second time, and regardless of the nearly perfect geopolitical balance that this second defeat restored between the Whale and the Bear, we have failed to grasp how tenacious Weimar patterns of thought have continued to be in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the First World War. This then marks the transition between the origins of the Great War and a topic more pertinent to this conference: its intellectual aftershocks. But my claim is that the two are really inseparable: only by rethinking those origins independently of the version promulgated by the winners can we understand why German intellectuals began to think as they did, and why National Socialism rose up to avenge the humiliation of Versailles. Without exculpating the architects of the Third, sanity requires a sober reassessment of the forces that combined to destroy the Second Reich.

²⁷ Churchill (1950): 539.

²⁸ See, for example, "Tinian" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinian> (accessed February 22, 2016).

As a citizen of the United States, I am particularly troubled by my country's entry into the war in 1917. By aiding and abetting Great Britain's audacious and murderous plan to limit and even dismember Russia while simultaneously dealing a death blow to Germany's "Free Hand" at Versailles, the United States betrayed their Revolution of 1776 and made a radical critique of Enlightenment and Progress emanating from Germany inevitable, just as the Balfour Declaration began to seal the fate of Germany's Jews. Going "over there" in 1917 when the Russians finally came to their senses and exited the war—because fighting on the side of Great Britain against Germany was just about as opposite to Russia's national interests as any policy could possibly be—was a disaster for which Woodrow Wilson and all his countrymen shall be justly judged in accordance with what the Puritan John Winthrop really said in 1630, after the part Ronald Reagan loved to quote:

For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.²⁹

Every tragedy requires a warning and we were given one early on. But it is never too late for Minerva's owl to take wing.

What I call "post-post-war thought" is based on a kind of internal *quid pro quo* on the part of intellectuals like ourselves. The first step is for Britain's English-speaking partners in the First World War—and for starters, that means *us*, because I don't imagine a majority in Scotland, let alone in England, will ever be ready for it—to recognize that we were bamboozled into fighting Germany, and that the Second Reich was not responsible for the First World War. Only on this honest foundation can we then undertake the second step, and effectively combat the assault on Judeo-Christianity that emerged in beaten Germany after the war, and reclaim the sense of Progress that the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment won for us after the Middle Ages. Until then, we are merely singing in the shadows. There is a moment in Mozart's *Zauberflöte* when the hero Tamino learns that Sarastro—against whom his love for the Queen's daughter has marshaled him to fight a heroic War of Liberation—is the man in charge of wisdom's temple; on learning this terrible truth, he sings in despair: "So then it's all hypocrisy," and I offer this as my attempt to sound the conference keynote:

TAMINO: Sarastro herrscht in diesen Gründen?

PRIESTER: Ja, ja! Sarastro herrschet hier!

TAMINO: Doch in dem Weisheitstempel nicht?

PRIESTER: Er herrscht im Weisheitstempel hier.

TAMINO: So ist denn alles Heuchelei!

To be sure it would require far more ugly, jagged, and atonal music than Mozart could ever have dreamed of writing to adequately express the sense of betrayal, soul-sickness, and wrath that accompanied every single word that Weimar sang and

²⁹Winthrop (2015): 19–22.

spoke in the 1920s. And as the rest of today will perhaps prove, we are still dancing to Weimar's soulless tune today. My claim is that Figaro needs to strum a new song on his guitar to which the Count must learn to dance.

Culminating in Nazi Germany's decision for a Second World War, Weimar's radical critique of the Enlightenment grew out of the utter incomprehensibility of the *Kaiserreich's* doubled defeat on the river Marne. No German believed that Germany had caused the war, and it is high time that we realized they were right about this: only in this light can we begin to understand what caused them to respond in the disastrous and evil way they did. *We need to recapture their dark night in its essence if we are to finally stop dreaming Weimar's dreams.* There are good reasons why it was all or nothing for post-war Germans, and the prostitution of enlightenment slogans at Versailles led inexorably to Tamino's *cri de coeur*: "So ist denn alles Heuchelei!" But as Hitler's words prove, Weimar intellectuals did not discover the real culprit, and we're not going to think ourselves out of the mess the makers of British Foreign Policy made for us during the dark days of the Boer War by imagining that Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Theodor Adorno, Carl Schmitt, Hans Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, or any other Weimar intellectual can possibly offer us soul-satisfying drafts from the pure Castalian spring: their fountain was polluted with rage, betrayal, and despair, and we need new Muses and sources of inspiration. Indeed we need them badly.

It was not, of course, only in Germany that post-war thought lost its faith in Progress: it was a worldwide pandemic, and it lasted far longer than the deadly influenza outbreak that began in 1918 and killed so many noncombatants. The great success that Ludwig Wittgenstein—whose world had literally been erased from the map as a result of the war—would subsequently enjoy among the philosophers of the English-speaking peoples speaks volumes about our own post-war *Zeitgeist*,³⁰ and when the History of Philosophy is written eight hundred years from now, it is hard to imagine that any proponent of post-war Anglophone philosophy is going to be occupy a more exalted place in it than Duns Scotus does today. The great questions have temporarily vanished, and even the redoubtable Tommy Atkins learned the futility of asking them while sunk in the Flanders mud:

We're here, because we're here,
Because we're here, because we're here!³¹

But sheer meaningless wasn't nearly enough for post-war Germans, and it was Heidegger who found a way to make the immanence of this illusion-less *Dasein* transcend any of the West's so-called higher values; by preaching a *Wiederholung* of *vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*,³² he captured the true Nazi spirit even before joining the party. Consider the words: "the transcendence of immanence."³³ For Heidegger, this "of" is the sign of a subjective genitive: the question of Being must

³⁰ See especially Klagge (2011) and Braver (2012): 40–52.

³¹ See Sillars (2007): 37.

³² See Altman (2012).

³³ See Verhoef (2013): 173–194.

begin with the only kind of Being for whom Being is a question. An alternative question is: can we convert Heidegger's "transcendence of *Dasein*" into an objective genitive where it is immanence that is being transcended? In other words, and to put it bluntly: how deeply rooted is our post-war allergy to God? The thought-atom at the core of post-war thought is found in the phrase: "the immanence of transcendence," and we need to think our way out of atheistic theology and other related self-contradictions. With Beethoven's Schiller then, let us rather sing:

O Freunde! Nicht diese Töne!

Let us rather begin, first of all, to mourn our dead, beginning with theirs, remembering the depth of their pain, and the agony that led to the coming horrors:

Schlaf, Kindchen schlaf!
 Mit dir ist ein Schaf
 Vater liegt im Flandernland
 Flandernland ist abgebrannt
 Schlaf, Kindchen schlaf!

We must begin to understand that the reason post-war Germans would and could not be lulled to sleep by the lullaby of Enlightenment Progress and Judeo-Christian morality was not because of any intrinsic flaw in God, the Enlightenment, or the Idea of Progress, but only in the cynical and duplicitous manner in which the tropes of their truth were deployed to justify the winners at Versailles. The sententious Wilson with his fourteen commandments, the war to end war, a World made safe for Democracy, these were—in the context of 1919—hateful, and Weimar intellectuals, and Germans generally, duly deconstructed them;³⁴ but they were not intrinsically false. They were in fact the truths in which the real winners cloaked their *Wille zur Macht*. In response—with characteristic German acumen and a ruthless instinct for the historical *Ursprung*—National Socialism did its best to destroy Judaism, and while we're mourning, let's remember the terrible truth about the God of our fathers: "over 80 percent of the Jewish scholars, rabbis, full-time students and teachers of Torah alive in 1939"³⁵ were killed in the Holocaust. To stop believing in God because of Auschwitz is insanity:³⁶ the Nazis were intent on murdering God in the form of those whose existence as a people depended entirely on Him,³⁷ and we allow them to win if we abet their thousand-year project. The most important thing I've learned about National Socialism is that thoughtful Nazis regarded Christianity as Jewish,³⁸

³⁴ See Altman (2011): 144.

³⁵ Greenberg, Irving. 1977. "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust" in Eva Fleischner (ed.), *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, 7–55. New York: Ktav Publishing House: 8.

³⁶ See Fackenheim (1970).

³⁷ Cf. Wyschogrod (1996), xxix: "Nazi antisemitism therefore had a theological dimension. It was an assault by evil on God through the body of Israel. This is the only interpretation of the Holocaust that even begins to do justice to that inescapable mystery."

³⁸ Cf. Jonas (1939: 171–72): "This war is in a figurative sense also the first war of religion in modernity. This ideational side exceeds all the aims and calculations of the belligerent government and is itself based in the distribution of the fronts. Necessarily—and independently of how much

but were too farsighted and politic to attack it as such openly. In short: we need to re-defeat the Nazi assault on God and the Enlightenment without validating the hypocrisy of Anglo-American hegemony in the process. And I think Australia is the right place to begin doing just that. But do we still have what it takes to fight?

This western-front business couldn't be done again, not for a long time. The young men think they could do it but they couldn't. They could fight the first Marne again but not this. This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation that existed between the classes. The Russians and Italians weren't any good on this front. You had to have a whole-souled sentimental equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember Christmas, and postcards of the Crown Prince and his fiancée, and little cafés in Valence and beer gardens in *Unter den Linden* and weddings at the *mairie*, and going to the Derby, and your grandfather's whiskers.³⁹

My countryman F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote this, and I quote it in order to raise the question: how much of that "whole-souled sentimental equipment" is still worth reviving? Consider what the war required from those who had the misfortune to fight it: the tenacious heroism that allowed them to carry on in Hell. The long nineteenth-century had done nothing to prepare their imaginations for the horrors of the trenches but their spiritual and intellectual education made them remarkably well prepared to endure them. Could we demonstrate the same tenacity and courage today in a better cause? Could we carry on as they did in the muck and the wire? This is the challenge posed to us by the boys who died in the First World War, and by their lovers, children, wives, sisters, brothers, and mothers as well. *The virtues that were required to endure the trenches were substantial, and they are by no means vitiated or rendered out-of-date by the cause for which they were squandered.* In particular, a belief in God, a commitment to human Progress, and a firm grounding in the Greek and Latin classics are, any of them, a good place to start preparing the coming generations for the life-and-death struggles that lie ahead.

Since Plato is my primary field of study, let me use an example from the dialogues: when Socrates compared himself to Achilles during his trial, drowned out the self-preserving counsel of his best friend with the speech of the Athenian laws in *Crito*, and explained immortality in relation to other-worldly Ideas in *Phaedo*,⁴⁰ he offered a comprehensive vision that made modern war more bearable for those who actually endured its horrors between 1914 and 1918. But in the aftermath of this otherwise senseless waste of human excellence, the high ideals that had made such virtues possible came under attack for a second time, almost as if *they* had been responsible for Gallipoli, Ypres, and Verdun, and not the machinations of far-sighted masters of geopolitical realities. While the causes of the First World War still remain

this is conscious—it is a war of two principles of which the one holds in trust, in the form of Christian-occidental humanity, Israel's legacy to the world—[while] the other, the cult of power and contempt for humanity (*Kult der menschenverachtenden Macht*), signifies the absolute negation of this legacy. National Socialism first conceived of this when it judged Christianity as the Judaizing (*Verjudung*) of European humanity and included it in its metaphysical antisemitism."

³⁹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, chapter 13; https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/f/fitzgerald/f_scott/tender/chapter13.html (accessed November 1, 2014).

⁴⁰ See Altman (2016a), especially §10 and §17.

shrouded in darkness, obfuscated by historians' generalities like "the alliance system," its spiritual results are everywhere manifest, even in Platonic scholarship, which has a two thousand year history behind it. Before "the war to end war" had created its fraudulent twenty-year armistice, no Plato scholar had ever doubted that Socrates—himself a veteran of foreign wars—was anything less than sincere in *Crito* about his duty to Athens. A new Plato has emerged in the last hundred years because Platonism, also, has paid the price for the disillusionment that followed the Great War.⁴¹ And given Nietzsche's famous observation that Christianity is "Platonism for the masses,"⁴² it is by no means Platonism alone that has done so.

I recall the scene in "Breaker Morant" where the movie's hero sings: who would have thought him capable of such a sweet and sentimental song? As mawkish and sentimental as it may be to say or to sing it, I know that something precious was murdered in the First World War: not just innocence and naiveté with respect to the horrors of modern war, but more importantly the courage and faith to endure them. No matter how bungled the Gallipoli campaign was, no matter how senselessly was squandered the nobility of the young men slaughtered there, their nobility was real, and we have lost it as though it too were an illusion, a deception, and a swindle, but it was and is not. There is still so much that needs to be done, so many fights that need to be fought,⁴³ so ample a field for heroic self-sacrifice in the service of others, that we need to return to those squandered lives, and find a way to make them live again through us, remembering, as many of them did, the immortal lines of Milton:

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.⁴⁴

We don't need to redeem the cause for which they died any more than we need to succumb to the intellectual influenza that emerged from the rage of the defeated: we don't need to abandon the search for meaning, nor reconfigure Australia's sacrifice at Suvla Bay in relation to either Heidegger's *vorlaufende Entschlossenheit* or "God Save the Queen." The boys of 1915 can still speak to us through their letters, their faces, and their actions, and we must not allow their nobility to perish from the earth simply because it was squandered for a bad cause the first time round. We are their survivors and their heirs, and each of us will eventually die as well: "a death so noble" remains a reasonable and eminently human ideal, and they have showed us how to do it, just as Socrates and Jesus Christ showed them. If the boys of Gallipoli did not find one, there are still many causes well worth dying for, especially in a post-war world that is as bewilderingly confused as ours is. There is no doubt that these young men believed they were making the world a better place, and that is the

⁴¹ See Altman (2016b).

⁴² Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*.

⁴³ Cf. Daniel L. Cady, "Vermont Will Do Her Part (April 6th, 1917)": "Each generation Freedom's creed / Must be with harshness taught, / And freemen warned that all they have / And are was dearly bought;/ And oft must Lexington be roused /And Concord's fight be fought."

⁴⁴ Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 1721–24.

best possible reason to descend into more worthy trenches and then to go over the top in some better cause. Whether against the duplicitous self-righteousness of the winners of the First World War and the bankrupt structures of thought that would beguile us into rejecting the very foundation of moral responsibility, or against the bleak post-modernism unleashed like a noxious cloud of poison gas by those who lost it, there are still plenty of battles to be fought, and I suggest that they be fought, even at this eleventh hour, by us, for the sake of mankind's progress, in a war that really will end war.

The young men of Australia,
They answered to Great Britain's call,
They boarded the troopships 1, 2, 3;
And they sang as they sailed
To the slaughter at Gallipoli:

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me
And they sang as they sailed to be slaughtered at Gallipoli:
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

Gallipoli is quiet now,
And the billabong called "Suvla Bay,"
Once red with the blood of Australia's young men
But their ghosts are still singin'
This swagman's song with you and me:

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me
And their souls are still here
They're still resting by the Billabong
Singin' in the shade of a Coolibah Tree

References

- A. B. C., etc. 1901. British Foreign Policy. *National Review* 38 (November 1901): 343–358. Available online at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_ABC_Proposal_for_British_Foreign_Policy. Last accessed 16 Feb 2016.
- Altman, William H.F. 2011. *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Altman, William H.F. 2012. *Martin Heidegger and the First World War: Being and Time as Funeral Oration*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Altman, William H.F. 2013. *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: The Philosopher of the Second Reich*. Lanham: Lexington.
- . 2016a. *The Guardians on Trial: The Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues from Euthyphro to Phaedo*. Lanham: Lexington.
- . 2016b. The Heideggerian Origins of a post-Platonist Plato. Forthcoming in *Brill's Companion to Classical Receptions: International Modernism and the Avant-Garde*.
- Andriessen, J.H.J. 2007. *Keizer Wilhelm II: Mythe en werkelijkheid*. Soestenberg: Uitgeverij Aspect.

- Braver, Lee. 2012. *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Churchill, Winston. 1901. *The Story of the Malakand Field Force; An Episode of Frontier War*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- . 1950. *The Second World War*, volume 3; *The Grand Alliance*. London: Cassell.
- Clark, Christopher M. 2012. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. London: Allen Lane.
- Fackenheim, Emil L. 1970. *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*. New York: New York University Press.
- Fitzgerald, F. 2014. Scott. *Tender is the Night*. Chapter 13. Available online at [www-site https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/f/fitzgerald/f_scott/tender/chapter13.html](https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/f/fitzgerald/f_scott/tender/chapter13.html). Last accessed 1 Nov 2014.
- Fleischner, Eva (ed.). 1977. *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*. New York: Ktav Publishing House.
- Floyd, M. Ryan.. 2013. *Abandoning American Neutrality: Woodrow Wilson and the Beginning of the Great War, August 1914–December 1915*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fromkin, David. 1989. *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922*. London: A. Deutsch.
- General Staff, War Office. 1906–1910. *The Russo-Japanese War*, five volumes; compiled by the General Staff, War Office. London: Harrison and Sons.
- Gleichen, Edward (ed.). 1918–1920. *Chronology of the Great War*. In three volumes. London: Constable & Co.
- Hitler, Adolf. 2014. *Mein Kampf*. Available online at [www-site http://www.mondopolitico.com/library/meinkampf/v1c4.htm](http://www.mondopolitico.com/library/meinkampf/v1c4.htm). Last accessed 11 Nov 2014.
- Horn, D.B. 1957. The Diplomatic Revolution. In *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 7, 440–464. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jonas, Hans. 1939. Our Part in This War: A Word to Jewish Men. In Wiese, Christian. 2007. *The Life and Thoughts of Hans Jonas; Jewish Dimensions*. Translated by Jeffrey Grossman and Christian Wiese. Waltham: Brandeis University Press: 167–175.
- Kazin, Michael. 2006. *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan*. New York: Knopf.
- Kennan, George F. 1984. *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Klagge, James G. 2011. *Wittgenstein in exile*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kowner, Rotem, eds. 2007. *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*. New York: Routledge.
- Langer, William L. 1935. *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*. New York/London: A. A. Knopf.
- Leinwand, Gerald. 2007. *William Jennings Bryan: An Uncertain Trumpet*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lovell, S.D. 1980. *The Presidential Election of 1916*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Lowe, John. 1994. *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem, 1865–1925*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Meyer, Karl E., and Shareen Blair Brysac. 1999. *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and Race for Empire in Central Asia*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint.
- O'Brien, Phillips Payson, eds. 2004. *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922*. London/New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Rich, Norman. 1965. *Friedrich von Holstein*. In two volumes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, Henry S. 1965 *The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1894-1904: With Special Reference to Great Britain*. Doctoral dissertation, University of London.
- Rose, Andreas. 2011. *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent: Britische Aussenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. München: R. Oldenbourg.
- Rove, Karl. 2015. *The Triumph of William McKinley: Why the Election of 1896 Still Matters*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Sergeev, Evgeny. 2013. *The Great Game, 1857-1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia*. Washington, DC/Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Siegel, Jennifer. 2014. *For Peace and Money: French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sillars, Stuart. 2007. *Fields of Agony: British Poetry of the First World War*. Tirril Hall: Humanities-Ebooks.
- Soroka, Marina. 2011. *Britain, Russia, and the road to the First World War: The Fateful Embassy of Count Aleksandr Benckendorff (1903–16)*. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate.
- Taylor, A.J.P. 1971. *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*. London/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tomaszewski, Fiona K. 2002. *A Great Russia: Russia and the Triple Entente, 1905-1914*. Westport: Praeger.
- Trask, David E. 1981. *The War with Spain in 1898*. New York/London: Macmillan/Macmillan.
- Verhoef, Anné H. 2013. Embodied Religion's Radicalisation of Immanence and the Consequent Question of Transcendence. *Acta Academica* 45(5): 173–194.
- Williams, R. Hal. 2010. *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Winthrop, John. 2015. 1630. A Model of Christian Charity. In John R. Vile, *Founding Documents of America: Documents Decoded*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Wyschogrod, Michael. 1996. *The Body of Faith: God and the People of Israel*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan, and Peter Sluglett, eds. 2011. *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-50360-8>

100 years of European Philosophy Since the Great War
Crisis and Reconfigurations

Sharpe, M.; Jeffs, R.; Reynolds, J. (Eds.)

2017, IX, 276 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-50360-8