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## CHAPTER TWO

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# BARBAROUS UTOPIAS: RACIAL IDEOLOGIES IN GERMANY

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RACIAL ideologies and theories were not an exclusively German discovery. The word *Rasse* (race) is thought to derive from the Arabic *ras* (meaning 'beginning', 'origin', 'head'). It entered the German language in the seventeenth century, as a loan word from English and French, and until the mid-nineteenth century was spelled with a 'c' as *Race*.<sup>1</sup> However, in Germany racial ideologies enjoyed the widest currency and the greatest political salience: the Third Reich became the first state in world history whose dogma and practice was racism. Was this predictable? Was there a form of German *Sonderweg* in the development and diffusion of racial ideologies? If so, when did this begin? What does one mean by 'race' and 'racism'?<sup>2</sup>

### RACIAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORIES

'Blacks and Whites are not distinct types of people, for they belong to one tribe, and yet to two different races.'<sup>3</sup> With these words, written in 1775, Immanuel Kant both defined, and at the same time delimited, the concept of race. There were obviously different human races, however these belonged to a single 'genus', because they 'constantly produce fruitful children with one another, regardless of the great varieties which can otherwise be found in their form'. It followed that the differences between the various human races were no guide to their 'value'. Most subsequent racial ideologues ignored this last crucial qualification. They assumed that physical and psychological differences between individuals and races were an indication of their relative worth, and went on to construct racial hierarchies reflecting this assertion. In the late eighteenth century these claims

were largely based upon external physical criteria. For example, the German theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) attempted to deduce spiritual and psychological characteristics from physiognomy.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper (1722–89) measured the ‘facial angles’ of members of different races, in order to categorise them according to corporal stature and beauty.<sup>5</sup> The German physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) employed cranial measurement, in order, with the aid of this so-called phrenological method, to categorise the races in terms of intelligence, morality, and beauty.<sup>6</sup> In a book published in 1798, entitled *Outline of the History of Humanity*, the Göttingen philosopher Christoph Meiners (1745–1810) categorised the peoples of the world according to their ‘beauty’ or ‘ugliness’.<sup>7</sup> The ‘fair’ peoples were superior to all others, in terms of both beauty and intellectual achievements. By contrast, the ‘darker coloured peoples’ were ‘ugly’ and ‘semi-civilised’. A similar line of argument can be found in a book published in 1848 by the philosopher Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869).<sup>8</sup> According to him, the universe was endowed with a soul which gradually took on material form: first, interstellar ether, then the solar system, and finally the planet Earth. In turn, the latter underwent a series of metamorphoses leading to the creation of Man. The complexions of the various human races reflected their degree of ‘inner illumination’. The four great races were those of the dawn (yellow), day (white), sunset (red), and night (black). These races were also ‘related’ to bodily organs; the Whites to the brain and the Blacks to the genitals. Following on from this, Carus attributed ‘the capacity for the highest spiritual development’ to the ‘peoples of the day’. The latter were therefore entitled to extend their ‘power over all inhabited parts of the world’, and to hold sway over the uncivilised, and ugly, ‘peoples of the night’. These few examples suffice to demonstrate that the transparent objective of these representatives of anthropological racism was to legitimise European colonialism. The claim that Blacks are less beautiful, and less intelligent, than Whites is still axiomatic to racist discourse in Europe and North America. In this respect Germany was hardly unique. However it is worth noting that German racial ideologists propounded the view that Africans and Asians were of ‘lesser racial value’ at a time when the German states possessed no colonies, nor had any desire to do so.

Racial-anthropological theories also served to legitimise claims to hegemony among the European races themselves. This resulted in a very specific form of racist discourse, which developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It had three distinct points of origin, which in the beginning were only loosely connected with one another. The first

was a by-product of the value attached to ethno-cultural diversity by Herder, in his case as an attempt to redress the effects of French cultural and political hegemony.<sup>9</sup> Herder was anything but a racist. He explicitly rejected the concept of race, subscribed to a form of cultural relativism, detested everything that involved coercion and conquest, and believed that the various peoples of the world would one day come together like the branches of a tree. However his claim that each 'nation' disposed of a specific 'national character' and 'national spirit' gradually acquired exclusive overtones. Specifically, it became interlinked with a much older tradition of 'Teutomania'.<sup>10</sup> Teutomania, and its attendant ideology, had a long prehistory, commencing with the rediscovery of Tacitus' Germania. Humanists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries regarded Tacitus' descriptions of the ancient Germans as accurate rather than metaphoric. They failed to recognise that Tacitus' principal objective was to hold up a mirror in which his Roman fellow citizens would be able to reflect on their own moral shortcomings. In the literal, Renaissance, reading, the ancient German tribesmen were assumed to have been brave, simple, pure, and self-disciplined, as well as tall, blond, and blue-eyed in appearance. Although there were adherents of this ideology of the ancient Germans in Sweden too, its principal proponents were the Germans themselves. Herder also celebrated the 'tall, strong, and beautiful bodies' of the Germans, their 'enormous blue eyes filled with the spirit of restraint and loyalty', and their 'heroic cast of mind and great physical strength'. Moreover, the Germans had laid the foundations of European freedom, civilisation, and well-being, while defending it from the barbarians. It is important to bear in mind that these sentiments did not close his mind to the virtues of other peoples, most notably the Slavs, among whom his writings were highly esteemed. Put slightly differently, one could describe Herder's proto-nationalism as essentially cosmopolitan and emancipatory in character and intention.

Nonetheless, stereotypical representations of the ancient Germans multiplied in the form of vulgarised clichés like 'Germanic loyalty' or 'Germanic fortitude', which had unmistakably racist overtones. This Germanic cult fulfilled a twofold ideological function. Firstly, it represented a rejection of French claims to cultural and political hegemony. According to Arndt, Fichte, Jahn, and other national ideologists, the Germanic peoples were superior to the Latin French in corporal stature, beauty, bravery, and love of freedom. Secondly, the alleged cultural superiority of the Germans was also used to legitimise German rule over former West Slav and Polish territories. In this case, a number of ethnic

stereotypes, some of which originated in the Middle Ages, were imbued with racist aspects. An example of this is the conceptual journey undergone by the slogan 'polnische Wirtschaft', or 'Polish mismanagement'. This was first used by the German Jacobin Johann Georg Forster (1754–94), as a means of encapsulating his distaste for the anarchic and oppressive character of the Polish noble Commonwealth.<sup>11</sup> However, his strictures upon a particular class soon slid into criticism of the Polish people as a whole. For in addition to his strictures upon the Polish *szlachta*, Forster condemned the 'Sarmatian brutality' of the Poles in general, including the peasant victims of noble arbitrariness. National stereotypes like these proliferated in the following period, chiefly as a means of legitimising Prussian rule over part of partitioned Poland. For example, in 1801 the Prussian historian Johann Georg Friedrich Reitemeier claimed that the 'uncleanliness' of the Slavs 'was notorious from the earliest times'.<sup>12</sup> Therefore the Slavs, and in particular the Poles, should consider themselves fortunate that the Germans had brought them 'civilisation and the comforts of luxury'. Conquest by the Germans was 'a revolution of the most beneficent sort'. This cultural-political form of imperialism was given an historical-messianic quality through the claim that the Germans had a 'mission' to resettle territories once inhabited by ancient Germanic tribes. Looked at in this way, the Slavs were history's squatters. Thus, in 1818, the historian Karl Adolf Menzel argued that the Germans had legitimate claims to those territories which 'were already inhabited by the Germans in primeval times', by which he meant those territories once inhabited by eastern German tribes.<sup>13</sup>

The notion that the Germans were 'bearers of civilisation' to areas once settled by the 'ancient Germans' became interconnected with Hegel's assertion that the Slavs, with the exception of the Russians, were 'peoples without a history'. The germanisation of former Slav territory was seen as an inevitable consequence of a presumptive 'cultural gradient', declining from west to east, and of a 'German drive to the east' which gradually assumed quasi-biological aspects. According to Moritz Wilhelm Heffter's *World Struggle of the Germans and Slavs* (1847), this last process was 'the necessary consequence of the cultural-historical, intellectual and moral superiority which the cultivated always enjoy over the uncultivated'.<sup>14</sup> Similar claims figured in a series of articles, by Heinrich Wuttke, published in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* during 1846.<sup>15</sup> In a piece entitled 'Germany's Neighbours on the Slavic Frontier', Wuttke argued that 'a Germandom more mighty in force of arms, more dominant politically, and superior intellectually than the Slavs' would always push against, and

prevail over, the latter. Similar arguments were employed by German liberals, who in the 1830s had lionised Polish *émigrés*, in the course of debates during the Frankfurt Parliament which disavowed the claims of resurgent Polish nationalism.<sup>16</sup> A putatively 'timeless' German 'drive' to the east was gradually imbued with the character of a gradual, but unstoppable process, akin to the regular migration of birds. An unreflective Social Darwinism also began to influence the terms of historical argument. This was clear in the case of Heinrich von Treitschke, who in an essay published in 1862 celebrated the 'pitiless racial struggle' which the 'Germans' had once waged against the heathen Prussians, Lithuanians, and Poles.<sup>17</sup> A form of 'magic' emanated from 'eastern German soil', for the latter had been 'fertilised' by 'the most noble German blood'. Although Treitschke's object was to give historical legitimisation to the process of 'germanising' Prussia's Polish minority, rather than to license further imperialist conquests, his racist celebration of a (mythical) 'genocide' allegedly once practised against the Prussians and Slavs would soon become a means of legitimising claims to further territories in the east.

In addition to legitimising, and, in the Social Darwinian strain, 'proving' the necessity of European imperialism and intra-European nationality conflicts, racial-anthropological theories also served to legitimise claims to hegemony by particular classes within societies. This was notably the case in France. In his *Essai sur la noblesse de France*, published in 1735, the Count Henri de Boulainvilliers argued that the French nobility was descended from Frankish-Germanic conquerors, while the townsmen and peasantry were the descendants of the ancient Gauls.<sup>18</sup> This 'Frankish legend' was adopted by reactionary ideologists of the Restoration, notably Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre, as well as by historians like Augustin Thierry, to underwrite the position of an insecure aristocracy. Among those who subscribed to this Frankish legend was the Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82). Gobineau claimed that his own family was descended from this ancient Frankish aristocracy. Despite the fact that this claim was false, Gobineau clung to it with considerable tenacity, probably in order to divert attention from the present painful realities of the Gobineau family. He had had an unsuccessful career as a middle-ranking diplomat, in the service of the parvenu Louis Bonaparte and, in his eyes, the equally detestable Third Republic. Gobineau regarded the latter as being symptomatic of a general decline. The question of why this decline had occurred was the main preoccupation of his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, which was published between 1853 and 1855.<sup>19</sup>

In line with received racial-anthropological discourse, Gobineau claimed that the White, Yellow, and Black races were of 'unequal' value. However, he then proceeded to argue that the rise and fall of civilisations was racially determined. All high cultures in world history were the work of 'Aryans', and were based upon an aristocratic mode of rule. Cultures declined when this 'Aryan' ruling caste interbred with members of the 'racially less valuable' lower orders. This resulted, ineluctably, in rebellion by the 'racially less valuable' against the 'Aryan ruling race'. Rebellions of this sort had occurred in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Likewise, the French Ancien Régime had been destroyed by a revolt of the Gallic plebs against a ruling elite descended from the Frankish nobility. A similar fate awaited every civilisation in the world, as a consequence of general racial interbreeding, although the effects of the latter, it should be stressed, were construed in socio-cultural rather than biological terms. A society which acknowledged no racial or social differences would make no progress in the field of culture. Gobineau described the terminal state of decline in the following bleak terms: 'The peoples, no, the herds of people, would then be overcome by a dark desire to sleep, living insensitively in their nothingness, like the buffaloes ruminating in the stagnant puddles of the Pontine marshes.'<sup>20</sup> Initially, Gobineau's essay was virtually ignored. This was hardly surprising. His pessimistic outlook on the world, and the associative, unscientific, and ahistorical methods he used to rationalise his own social anxieties, were out of joint with the liberal, empirical, scientific spirit of the times.

#### RACIAL-HYGIENIC THEORIES

Unlike Gobineau, whose work initially only appealed to a handful of reactionary aesthetes, Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* enjoyed massive success after its appearance in 1859.<sup>21</sup> Darwin was a reclusive Victorian gentleman scholar of a liberal, progressive cast of mind. He was opposed to slavery, and strongly supported ideas of human equality by avoiding references to 'lower' or 'higher' races. He was concerned about poverty and established Friendly Societies in Kent. *The Origins* did not contain racial theories, and was almost exclusively concerned with plants and animals. Nonetheless, Darwin, rather than Gobineau, was the involuntary progenitor of racist ideology, for he was responsible for the theory of natural selection as the mechanism of evolution. Selection was to become central to all subsequent racist discourse.

It is important to emphasise here that Darwin himself was too intelligent and responsive to criticism to adhere to a fixed set of ideas, and that his theories themselves were composite and not intended for application to human society in a prescriptive sense. This was the 'achievement' of Social Darwinians, who unlike Darwin himself used terms like 'betterment' or 'progress' in a morally-loaded manner. Contrary to popular belief, Social Darwinism was not an exclusively right-wing concern. Social theorists who were politically antagonistic to each other could call themselves Darwinians simply by referring to different tendencies in Darwin's thought. This, and a generalised belief in science and progress, accounts for the existence of Social Darwinians who could be conservative, liberal, socialist, or Fascist.

According to Darwin, there was a constant struggle for existence in the plant and animal kingdoms. It would be won by those species which demonstrated that they were the most capable of adaption. These would be capable of reproduction. This process of natural selection would lead to the further development of the individual species. In order to counter criticism of the application of this theory to man, Darwin wrote *The Descent of Man*, in which he accounted for some human attributes by resorting to a theory of sexual selection. He also noted the counter-selective effects of modern civilisation, and suggested that breeding could make up for the diminishing impact of natural selection. This shift in his thought reflected the increasing influence upon him of his cousin Galton and the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel.

The extension of Darwin's theories to human society lent an air of scientific legitimisation to the various utopias involving selective breeding which had been propounded from antiquity onwards by, *inter alia*, Plato, More, and Campanella. Francis Galton (1822–1911) took the principle of selection further, in the interests of improving the biological health of the *human* race.<sup>22</sup> Healthy parents, by whom he meant members of the middle classes and the learned professions, should be encouraged to marry early and have as many children as possible. These should be issued with certificates of hereditary health. By contrast, those persons who failed this 'Passed in Genetics' test were to be encouraged to emigrate to the land of 'Cantsayanywhere'. Man, in other words, was to take control of his own evolutionary processes. Galton was the founder of hereditary health care, for which in 1883 he coined the term 'Eugenics', a programme for improving the human race by genetic means. The prescriptive measures were not confined to the question of 'judicious mating', but encompassed education, public health, and welfare. Darwin and Galton's ideas were



gradually diffused throughout Europe and North America, where through the mediation of Herbert Spencer the notion of the 'survival of the fittest' was used to legitimise *laissez-faire* capitalism. Although the rampant individualist strain of Social Darwinism was not so successful in Germany, its collectivist and state interventionist variety was. The zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) attempted to propagate Darwin's teachings, while converting them into a comprehensive quasi-humanist philosophy called 'Monism'.<sup>23</sup> This 'new philosophy' was to be 'based upon the real foundations of comparative zoology'. Its 'application to practical human affairs' would 'open up a new path to moral perfection'. Haeckel's 'Monism' encountered considerable criticism from conservatives, and enthusiasm from the Left who saw in him a champion of academic freedom, anti-clericalism, and collectivist solutions to social problems. However, neither his detractors nor supporters appeared concerned with Haeckel's racist presuppositions. These were much in evidence in his *History of Natural Creation*, a book which enjoyed considerable popularity within the German labour movement.<sup>24</sup> According to Haeckel's brand of anthropological racism, the 'central races' were the 'most highly developed and perfect': 'No other types of people can be compared either physically or intellectually with the central peoples. They alone have actually made history. They alone have been responsible for the cultural achievements which appear to raise the human race above the rest of nature.'<sup>25</sup> Within the 'central types of people', the 'indogermanic' race was superior to the 'hamosemitic' peoples. By virtue of their 'more highly developed brains they would triumph over all other races and in the struggle for existence', and 'cast the net of their dominion over the entire world'. However, in order to achieve this hegemony, selective breeding measures would be necessary. The model here was above all ancient Sparta, where the newly born were subjected to physical examination and selection:

All of the weak, sickly, or physically deficient children were slain. Only those children who were completely healthy and strong were allowed to live, and only they were later allowed to reproduce. Therewith the Spartan race was not merely maintained in selected strength and virtues, but rather with each generation their physical perfection was increased. Certainly, in large measure, the Spartan people owed their unique level of masculine strength and tough heroism to this artificial selection or breeding.<sup>26</sup>

This was not merely intended for metaphorical effect. Haeckel sincerely believed in the necessity for, and possibilities of, racial selective breeding.

In a book, entitled *The Riddle of Life*, published in 1904, he explicitly advocated the killing of the sick:

What profit does humanity derive from the thousands of cripples who are born each year, from the deaf and dumb, from cretins, from those with incurable hereditary defects etc. who are kept alive artificially and then raised to adulthood? . . . What an immense aggregate of suffering and pain these depressing figures represent for the unfortunate sick people themselves, what a fathomless sum of worry and grief for their families, what a loss in terms of private resources and costs to the state for the healthy! How much of this loss and suffering could be obviated, if one finally decided to liberate the totally incurable from their indescribable suffering with a dose of morphia.<sup>27</sup>

Haeckel was not merely a harmless and uninfluential ideologist-cum-scientist. His eccentric 'philosophy' was propagated through the 'Monist League', which he founded in 1906; and his ideas concerning racial selective breeding began to filter into rather more respectable scientific circles. The physician Wilhelm Schallmeyer (1857–1919) was particularly significant in this last respect.

In 1900 Schallmeyer had won first prize in a competition sponsored by the industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp, in response to the question 'What can we learn from the principles of the theory of evolution for application to domestic political development and the laws of the State?'<sup>28</sup> Schallmeyer's response was published in 1903 as *Heredity and Selection in the Life of Nations: A Study in Political Science on the Basis of the New Biology*. According to Schallmeyer, the state had the duty to secure the biological capacity of its people. This would involve measures designed to increase the birthrate and the racial quality of its people. In this connection, Schallmeyer specified encouraging early marriage, the introduction of earnings-related child allowances, special payments to mothers, and licensed polygamy for especially racially 'valuable' men. However, all of these measures were only to be available to those who had been examined by physicians expert in 'socio-biological sciences'. By contrast, those who failed the examination, and who were hence not to be issued with a certificate of fitness to marry, were to be prevented from reproducing. Schallmeyer thought that those of 'lesser hereditary value' should be isolated and compulsorily sterilised. It should be noted, however, that Schallmeyer made no attempt to relate his 'social biology' to racial-anthropological teachings. According to him, there were no pure races in Europe, and attempts to produce racial 'thoroughbreds' were as meaningless as the preferential treatment of the 'Nordic race'.

This last matter preoccupied Alfred Ploetz (1860–1940). His central concern was reflected in a book entitled *The Efficiency of our Race and the Protection of the Weak*, which was published in 1895.<sup>29</sup> ‘Our’ race was the ‘West Aryan’ or ‘Germanic race’, which was the ‘most outstanding civilised race’, an assertion ‘about which there is nothing more to say’. However, the ‘efficiency’ of this ‘Germanic race’ was threatened by ‘growing protection of the weak’. Various measures would have to be taken to halt this last process. The conception of a child was ‘not to be left to accident, or to an over-excited moment, but rather regulated according to the principles which science has determined for the circumstances and times’. If, despite these ‘principles’, a deformed child should still be produced, then a ‘college of physicians, which decides concerning issues of citizenship, should prepare a gentle death, shall we say through a small dose of morphia’. During wartime, only inferior persons should be sent to the front. Ploetz described these measures as ‘hygienic’. Since they were ostensibly designed to improve the ‘qualities of our race’, he coined the term ‘racial hygiene’. Other scientists continued to use the term ‘eugenics’. Both tendencies ultimately reflected changing scientific conceptions of heredity. The hitherto dominant Lamarckian theory on the heritability of environmentally-acquired characteristics, which influenced Darwin’s theory of evolution, was superseded by others, which stressed genetic factors. The most extreme statement of the independence of heredity from the environment was August Weismann’s theory of an autonomous, immutable ‘germ plasm’.<sup>30</sup> Put simply, these discoveries ruled out the prospect of improving the mental or physical abilities of successive generations through education or sport, while emphasising the pre-determinedness of, for example, criminality or alcoholism. In this view of things, human beings became aggregates of ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ biological materials, their value as individuals being increasingly overshadowed by their contribution to the future of the collective, which could be construed as either the human ‘race’ in general or one ‘race’ in particular. Again, it is important to stress that there is no automatic correlation between these scientific ideas and types of political persuasion. Alfred Grotjahn (1869–1931), a theoretician of social hygiene with links with the right wing of the SPD (to whom he owed his appointment as professor of social hygiene at Berlin University in 1920), advocated a combination of environmental improvement, isolation, and sterilisation as a means of ‘amortising’ those elements who did not fit the socialist’s profile of the ‘respectable’ working classes. This included the insane, the ‘workshy’, people with sexually-transmitted diseases, alcoholics, accident victims and

so on. Where science led, socialism followed. Unfortunately, these tendencies in the German labour movement have not received the attention they deserve from 'labour' historians.<sup>31</sup>

These scientific ideas did not unfold in a social void, and nor, as we shall see, were they the exclusive property of professional scientists. The scientists discussed above, and their adherents in applied health care, came from particular social classes, belonged to increasingly ramified professional structures, and lived within societies undergoing profound social and economic change. Specifically, these members of the educated bourgeoisie saw their urban 'living space' threatened by hordes of fecund proletarians bearing the physical and psychological imprint of deplorable living and working conditions. Eugenics and racial hygiene were one response to the 'social question'.<sup>32</sup> While, socialist or otherwise, these responses also undoubtedly reflected genuine concern for suffering humanity, they also mirrored the frustrated modernising arrogance of the educated bourgeoisie towards people apparently impervious to the verities of human betterment and progress, whether espoused by right-wingers or socialists. The debate about the origins and solution of the problem assumed ever narrower forms, while the areas of professional medical competence broadened into schools, prisons, or welfare services. Social Darwinists contributed the identification of low social position with 'unfitness', or in other words, the idea that the poor must be 'unfit' because they had failed in the 'struggle of life'. In some circles, concern about differential rates of fertility between the upper and lower social classes was related to the 'counter-selective' impact of modern medicine and welfare, a notion which bore the imprint of Darwin as mediated by Galton. Put simply, welfare was obstructing the 'natural' elimination of the 'unfit'. Questions of quality also began to enter the orbit of questions of cost. Long before the health and welfare system faced a financial crisis, some pundits were applying cost:benefit calculations to the 'asocial' and 'handicapped'. For example, in 1911 an essay competition solicited responses to the question: 'What do inferior racial elements cost the state and society?' Although eugenicists differed about the comparable merits of 'negative' and 'positive' measures, the balance of opinion began to tilt towards the former. The North American example, specifically the introduction of a Sterilisation Law in 1907 by the state of Indiana, appeared to lend this questionable practice an air of modern, democratic reasonableness. However, debates in Germany on these questions were overtaken by events. Specifically, the outbreak of the First World War resulted in a renewed emphasis upon population quantity rather than quality. The question of whether or not

chronic alcoholics or habitual criminals should be sterilised was hardly the burning issue of 1914–18, when numbers counted. The issue of quality resurfaced in the early 1920s. This was partly because of concern about the perceived ‘qualitative imbalance’ resulting from the war’s ‘mass annihilation of our genetically most valuable elements’, partly a reflection of paranoia over the fecundity of neighbouring races. Renewed debate also occurred because interested parties deliberately forced ‘negative’ eugenics on to the political agenda. Specifically, in 1923 the Zwickau District Health Officer, Gerhard Boeters, went public with the information that surgeons in his district were already sterilising the mentally handicapped without legal sanction. Boeters tried to prompt the legislature into retrospective legitimisation through the draft *Lex Zwickau*. Although his draft was rejected by the Reichstag in 1925, the onset of the Depression further reduced the gap between scientific and demographic advocates of ‘negative’ eugenics and those engaged in the making of policy in an austere financial climate. Mass unemployment and a corresponding fall in tax receipts at all levels of government raised questions concerning the allocation of resources. Questions of cost served to lower the ethical threshold of politicians, who were also confronted by the ‘weight’ of professional scientific opinion and the irrefutably gloomy prognostications of their own statisticians and demographic planners. By July 1932, the Prussian government had formulated a draft Reich Sterilisation Law, which it forwarded to the Reich government that winter. By the time it arrived, the Reich government was in the hands of Adolf Hitler.

With Hitler very much in mind, it must be stressed that discussion of these questions was not confined to scientists, politicians, or government experts. Alongside, and often drawing from, the ideas we have been considering, were a host of scientifically illiterate pundits who subscribed to selective breeding in the interests of various types of utopia. Bereft of ‘objective’ scientific legitimisation, the ideological and inhuman nature of their work is immediately transparent. This is clear in the case of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Prescriptively, in 1880, Nietzsche wrote that ‘the tendency must be towards the rendering extinct of the wretched, the deformed, the degenerate’.<sup>33</sup> He ventured the following ‘activist’ recommendations:

Satisfaction of desire should not be practised so that the race as a whole suffers, i.e. that choice no longer occurs, and that anyone can pair off and produce children. The extinction of many types of people is just as desirable as any form of reproduction . . . Much more so: marriage only 1) with the aim of higher development; 2) in order

to leave behind the fruit of such persons. Concubinage is enough for all the rest, with measures to prevent conception. – We must do away with this crass lightheartedness.. These geese must not marry! Marriage must become much less frequent! Go through the towns and ask yourselves whether these people should reproduce! Let them go to their whores!<sup>34</sup>

Eight years later he outlined a series of measures for racial selective breeding.

Notwithstanding Nietzsche's interest in hyper-aristocratic quality, he accompanied the eugenicists along a dirigiste, technocratic, and inhuman route, albeit to a different destination. Beyond him and the scientists were a host of outright cranks, two of whom warrant some attention. Willibald Hentschel recommended the creation of 'stud villages', in which men selected according to racial criteria should be encouraged to produce as many 'highly valuable' little Germans as possible, through the good offices of up to ten women.<sup>35</sup> Naturally this sounds misogynistic and ridiculous. However, there was sufficient overlap with 'serious' racial-hygienic and eugenic science for this lunacy to gain a certain purchase. Hentschel became the leading ideological light of the Artamanen League, whose members included, *inter alia*, Heinrich Himmler, Walther Darré, and Rudolf Hoess, the later commandant of Auschwitz, all of whom were indebted to the racial utopia propagated by their erstwhile mentor. Jorg Lanz, who preferred to style himself Lanz von Liebenfels, was somewhat further out in a paranoid, occultist darkness.<sup>36</sup> Lanz recommended the selective breeding of blonde, Aryan supermen. To this end, all suitable candidates were to be subjected to a stringent racial test. These fantasies were propagated through a journal called 'Ostara: Newspaper for Blond People'. Although these ideas were abstruse and their advocates crazed, they nonetheless had a certain political effect. For example, many members of the Thule Society, who later supported the NSDAP, knew and respected Lanz's ideas. This may also have been the case with Adolf Hitler.

Were there direct connections between this scientific, philosophical, and pseudo-scientific preoccupation with racial selective breeding and the racial policies of the Third Reich? This question is bound to arise from an *ex post facto* perspective, given the undeniable efforts of the Nazi regime to implement selective breeding while eliminating those who failed to correspond with their criteria of racial 'value'. However the question is wrongly posed, or rather artificially abstracted from a further important development, namely racially-motivated anti-Semitism.

## RACIAL ANTI-SEMITIC THEORIES

By no means all of the racial hygienicists and eugenicists were either politically conservative or anti-Semites.<sup>37</sup> This last qualification applies to many of the scientists, pseudo-scientists, and for that matter Nietzsche too. Responsibility for fusing racial-hygienic and Social Darwinist ideas with anti-Semitism may be attributed to the (elective German) Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927).<sup>38</sup> According to Chamberlain, the Germanic peoples, but especially the Germans in the narrow sense, were superior to all other peoples in every respect. This superiority, which was based upon intellectual abilities rather than physical characteristics, was being threatened by another race, namely the Jews. For Chamberlain, the Jews were the Devil incarnate. They represented a demonic threat to the chosen German race. The reason for this was that, in contrast to the Jews, the Germans had no religion identical with their race. Christianity was essentially Jewish.

This rather unoriginal, racially-motivated attack upon Christianity had consequences for both the Churches and the Jews. Instead of energetically refuting this nonsense, many Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians appeared to accept Chamberlain's views, for they themselves held the Jews responsible for liberalism, socialism, and Communism, not to speak of anti-Semitism itself. All of these evils were the product of secularisation and modernisation promoted by the Jews. The latter were once again made the whipping-boys for all adverse secular developments. This in itself was hardly new. However, the way in which racial anti-Semitism closed the only alternative option, namely that of conversion to Christianity, was an entirely novel development. Baptism no longer 'liberated' the Jews from a racially, rather than confessionally, defined 'Jewishness'. The Jews were thus defined, and hence excluded, as the embodiments of general evils. Old legends and prejudices, notoriously that concerning ritual murder, were revived, and combined with more up-to-date conspiracy theories like the falsified 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. As the embodiment of evil, the Jews were literally capable of anything and everything. This included responsibility for the alleged racial deterioration of the German people, and the deliberate sabotaging of racial-hygienic solutions to the 'social question' made available by modern science.

Racial anti-Semitic theories were not an exclusively German phenomenon. However in Germany they appear to have enjoyed especially wide currency and a high degree of political instrumentalisation.<sup>39</sup> Although in contrast to eastern Europe Germany's Jews were highly assimilated, their

Emancipation, i.e. the achievement of formal legal equality, occurred relatively late, in 1869–71. Emancipation coincided with an equally belated, and comparatively rapid, industrialisation of the German economy, and hence (partial) modernisation of German society. The first great crisis of the German capitalist economy, the *Gründerkrise* of the early 1870s, coincided and was connected with the first wave of political anti-Semitism. The allegedly powerful and wealthy Jews were held responsible for the negative accompaniments of rapid industrialisation and modernisation. This convenient fiction found silent assent among Germany's ruling elites, for this modern strain of anti-Semitism had a negative, integrative utility in so far as fear of enemies, within and without, would bind the majority population more closely to the existing social order. This particularly affected the Jews after the First World War. Germany's Jews were held responsible for the 'stab in the back' and the Revolution which had allegedly resulted in Germany's defeat, despite the fact that cemeteries were lined with the graves of young Jews who had fallen for their Fatherland. The Jews were also held responsible for the deployment by the French of colonial occupation troops on the Rhine, who then proceeded to seduce German women, thus undermining the 'purity' of the 'German race'. German and foreign Jews were also allegedly involved in prostitution and the white slave trade, through which they hoped to encourage the spread of syphilis and other sexually-transmitted diseases which would damage the 'hereditary properties' of the 'Aryan-Germanic race'. Finally, 'Berlin Jews' were even attempting to prevent the racial-hygienic improvement of the German people. The writer Artur Dinter plumbed further depths in racial conspiracy theory.<sup>40</sup> In a novel, published in 1918, entitled *Sin Against the Blood*, he told the story of a 'racially pure', blonde, blue-eyed German woman who was seduced by a Jew. Although she later managed to get away from him, and subsequently married an 'Aryan', she and her husband nonetheless produced 'typically Jewish-looking' children. Her 'hereditary properties' had been permanently corrupted by a casual encounter with a Jew. This salacious and quasi-pornographic nonsense was sold in hundreds of thousands of copies. Writers like Dinter, Lanz, and scores of others found a sympathetic readership in Germany after the First World War. One of them was probably Adolf Hitler.

#### HITLER'S RACISM

It is not certain which racialist works Hitler actually read.<sup>41</sup> There is no 'man who gave Hitler his ideas' in a simplistic teleological sense. However,



it is certain that Hitler knew the most important racial-anthropological, racial-hygienic, and racial anti-Semitic theories, and in *Mein Kampf* turned them into a comprehensive, self-contained, if totally insane, racial-political programme. His racial discourse began with the following 'truths':

Even the most superficial observation shows that Nature's restricted form of propagation and increase is an almost rigid basic law of all the innumerable forms of expression of her vital urge. Every animal mates only with a member of the same species. The titmouse seeks the titmouse, the finch the finch, the stork the stork, the field mouse the field mouse, the dormouse the dormouse, the wolf the she-wolf, etc.<sup>42</sup>

On a first reading, these observations seem involuntarily comic. In reality, both this passage and the paragraphs which follow contain three axioms fundamental to racist thought. The first is the claim that only those living things which produce healthy offspring with one another constitute a race – a definition of race which can already be found in the works of Kant. Secondly, Hitler presupposed the existence of 'higher' and 'lesser' races, a notion common to virtually every racial ideologist since the late eighteenth century. Following Gobineau and others, Hitler claimed that the 'Aryans' alone were the 'culture-creating race'. The Chinese and Japanese were merely 'culture-bearing'; the other races, i.e. Blacks and Slavs, of lesser value, while the 'Jewish race' was the embodiment of evil. The third axiom was that among humans as well as animals there was, and should be, an 'urge towards racial purity'. Interbreeding between the races would result in 'bastardisation' and a deterioration of racial 'value'. This idea can also be found in the work of reactionary aestheticians from Gobineau onwards, and it is expressed in a 'scientific' guise in the research of men like Eugen Fischer. In 1913 Fischer published a study of the Rehoboter Bastards, or the children of Boers and Hottentots in South-West Africa.<sup>43</sup> Without the slightest evidence, Fischer claimed that the children of so-called mixed marriages were of 'lesser racial quality'. Their intellectual achievements increased or decreased according to the proportion of European blood. However, they would never create 'their own culture, for they required constant European leadership.

In the course of a chapter devoted to 'Nation and Race', Hitler dwelt upon the need to prevent 'miscegenation' while promoting racial selective breeding. Since there were still 'considerable remnants of unmixed Nordic-Germanic people' in the 'body of the German people', one should 'not only gather together and maintain the most valuable remnants of primeval racial elements, but slowly and surely lead them to a commanding position'. Although Hitler mentioned no names, it is clear

that here he was indebted to the ideas of racial-hygienicists. It is not particularly important whether he had actually read the work of scientists such as Haeckel, Schallmayer, and Ploetz, or whether, more probably, he derived his ideas from the sub-scientific undergrowth of tracts produced by Hentschel, Lanz, and Dinter. In a subsequent chapter, entitled 'World View and Party', Hitler summed up his racial-ideological presuppositions. The 'völkisch world view . . . by no means believes in an equality of the races, but along with their difference it recognises their higher or lesser value and feels itself obligated, through this knowledge, to promote the victory of the better and the stronger, and demand the subordination of the inferior and weaker in accordance with the eternal will that dominates this universe'.<sup>44</sup>

How was this 'victory of the better and stronger' to be achieved? In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler outlined a catalogue of measures which can be found in racial-hygienic and eugenicist literature from Galton, Haeckel, and Schallmayer onwards. However, the terminology employed was rather different. Hitler eschewed technical scientific terms like Weissmann's 'germ plasm' or Mendelian 'hereditary properties' in favour of calls for the 'maintenance of the purity of the blood'. Firstly, care should be taken 'to ensure that only those who are healthy produce children'. The 'obstruction of the reproductive capacities of those with syphilis, tuberculosis, the hereditarily burdened, cripples and cretins' was unavoidable. He repeated this last point, which again can be found in the work of Haeckel, Ploetz, and Schallmayer, in countless speeches and writings before 1933. The corollary of these negative eugenic measures, involved 'positive' attempts to increase the birthrate. Again, in both *Mein Kampf* and subsequent speeches and writings, Hitler recommended a number of measures, which some historians have mistakenly regarded as 'modern', or even 'socially revolutionary'. These measures included the introduction of child allowances, public housing projects, the promotion of equal education opportunities for working-class children, and so forth. In reality, all of these projected measures were motivated by racial considerations, firstly, because both 'alien races' and the 'less valuable elements' of the German population were excluded from the benefits of Nazi 'social policy', and secondly, because all of these social improvements were designed to encourage the reproduction of certain types of people.

Again, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler made no secret of this objective. He advocated the acquisition of 'outlying colonies', which were to be settled by 'bearers of the highest racial purity'. The latter were to be selected by especially constituted 'commissions of racial experts'. Only those

applicants deemed to be 'racially valuable' were to receive an 'attestation (of the right) to settle'. Again, Hitler refrained from acknowledging his intellectual debt to those eugenicists and racial-hygienicists who had argued along precisely these lines for several decades. In contrast to racial-hygienicists, Hitler expected no immediate results from these measures. The initial object was 'at least to eliminate the germ of our present physical and intellectual decline'. Only after the 'six-hundred-year obstruction of the reproductive capacities and possibilities to reproduce of the physically degenerate and the mentally ill', and through 'the consciously planned promotion of the fertility of the healthiest bearers of the nation', could a level of recovery be achieved 'which is hardly imaginable today'.<sup>45</sup>

However, recovery would only be possible if victory were achieved in the 'struggle' against the Jews. This struggle was both absolutely necessary and indeed willed by God. As Hitler wrote, 'I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator: by warding off the Jews, I am fighting for the Lord's work.' The alternative outcome was distinctly bleak. For should 'the Jew, with the help of his Marxian creed . . . conquer the nations of this world, his crown will become the funeral wreath of humanity, and once again this planet, empty of mankind, will move through the ether as it did thousands of years ago'. This plangent, pseudo-eschatological vision reflects the second and most important element in Hitler's racism, namely racial anti-Semitism. Virtually everything Hitler thought about the Jews was contained in this passage. Unlike other anti-Semites, Hitler made no distinctions between German and foreign, rich and poor, liberal, conservative, socialist, or Zionist, religious or non-religious, baptised or unbaptised Jews. In his eyes, there was only 'the Jew'. 'The Jew' was striving for mastery of the peoples of the world. His most pernicious weapon was 'Marxism', whereby Hitler made no distinction between its Communist and socialist variants. If 'the Jew' should manage to win this ongoing 'struggle', then the result would be the downfall not only of the Germans, but of all peoples, and indeed of the world as a whole. 'The Jew' represented evil incarnate, performing for Hitler much the same function as the Devil does for many Christians. It was not fortuitous that in this connection Hitler used religious terms like 'creed', or that he employed apocalyptic language to describe the threat represented by 'the Jew'. The latter was the embodiment of absolute evil: the 'struggle' against 'him' was both righteous and good.

According to Hitler, the Jews in Germany and elsewhere were the champions of 'Marxism', the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', 'democracy'

and the 'majority principle'. Jews were responsible for the outbreak of the First World War, and for the war's catastrophic outcome, namely Germany's collapse in 1918. They were the 'wire-pullers' behind the German Revolution, and the 'fathers' of the Weimar Constitution. Following the Revolution, they exercised their baleful influence in every political party – excepting the NSDAP – within the bureaucracy, the economy, cultural life, and the mass media. Other countries were either ruled by 'the Jew', like 'Jewish-Bolshevik Russia', or controlled by Jews, through their alleged dominance of 'world finance'. Both of these apparently polar opposites – namely Communism and 'finance' capitalism – were merely instruments designed to further plans for Jewish 'world domination', as essayed in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Even the propagation of the 'Jewish universal language' of Esperanto was a device designed to achieve this same end.

There was little in this Jewish conspiracy theory that was new, or which could not be found in the ravings of anti-Semites in other countries. Again, there was little originality in Hitler's coupling of the Jews with the question of prostitution, although in this case one would have to go back to the semi-pornographic tracts of Lanz and Dinter to find the same degree of obsessional and prurient concern with this issue. Hitler devoted twenty pages to this problem in *Mein Kampf*. He regarded prostitution as the 'pace-setter' of syphilis. Indeed, for him, in 1925–6 (!), 'the struggle against syphilis . . . was the task facing the nation', and indeed, humanity as a whole. This 'struggle' was one of the 'touchstones of the racial value' of a nation. The race which failed this 'test' would 'die out, or forfeit its position to healthier or hardier races capable of greater resistance'. In order to prevent this unhappy outcome, Hitler proposed a series of measures, ranging from 'the pitiless isolation' and 'sterilisation of the incurably ill', through the 'iron hardening' of youth in order to eradicate their sexual desires, to the facilitation of early marriage, and philogenerative welfare measures. However, these measures would be otiose unless the struggle against 'the Jew' was radicalised. 'The Jew' was responsible for prostitution, the spread of syphilis, and the 'spiritual prostitution' of the German people. Directly and indirectly 'he' sought to achieve the 'racial decomposition', 'bastardisation', and 'poisoning of the blood' of the 'body of the German nation', either through surrogates, notably French colonial troops 'planted' upon the Rhineland, or directly through 'his' own marital or extra-marital relations with 'Aryan' women. Assuming the sexual passivity of the latter, Hitler emulated Dinter's quasi-pornographic and prurient interest in this subject: 'With satanic joy in his face, the black-haired

Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her people. With every means he tries to destroy the racial foundations of the people he has set out to subjugate.<sup>46</sup> In this oft-cited but sometimes underrated passage, Hitler both fused and developed the ideologies of anti-Semitism and racism. The Jews were accused not only of trying to subjugate the German nation politically, but now of systematically undermining its 'racial foundations'. Racial-hygienic measures would therefore only be meaningful once the 'Jewish Question' had been solved. What was the point of improving the racial health of the German population, if it was continually liable to subversion by the racial arch-enemy? In other words, Hitler had succeeded in combining and radicalising all previous strains of religious, social, and racial anti-Semitism: 'the Jew' was evil personified, therefore all means were appropriate and necessary in the fight against 'him'. The language used to describe 'the Jew' suggests one of the means he had in mind. They were 'spongers', 'parasites', 'poisonous mushrooms', 'rats', 'leeches', 'bacilli', 'tuberculosis bacilli' and so forth. Although some historians like to imagine that these metaphors were merely used for rhetorical effect, unaccountably ignoring the palpable inner violence of the man using them, the terms employed suggested one possible fate for the Jews, namely extermination.

Hitler's racism therefore consisted of the following elements. Firstly, there were differences in the value of individual races. Secondly, the 'Aryans' were the most 'valuable' race. Thirdly, if the 'Aryan' race interbred with 'less valuable races', it would inevitably decline into extinction, a development which would have to be prevented. Fourthly, not only the purity but also the health of the 'Aryan' race, had to be maintained and improved. This would entail measures designed to increase the numbers of children born to healthy members of the 'Aryan' race, while preventing the reproduction of sickly or criminal 'elements'. Lastly, this would only be meaningful if, at the same time, the Jews as both the absolute enemy and subverters of the 'Aryan' race were isolated and eliminated either spatially or physically. Hitler's racism was neither original nor without inner contradictions, either in its parts or as a whole. However, there can be no doubt that Hitler believed in what he said and wrote, and that, notwithstanding any shifts in emphasis due to the exigencies of elections, his racism had a programmatic character, namely the realisation of a particularly barbarous utopia. It must also be stressed, however, that this racial programme was in no sense implemented by Hitler alone, and that his initial responsibility may well have consisted in lending the authority of a

charismatic and popular dictator to pre-existing scientific, political, and publicistic forays into an ethical void. Which persons and institutions were responsible for designing and implementing policy in a climate which was at once amoral and authoritarian?

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## 2 BARBAROUS UTOPIAS; RACIAL IDEOLOGIES IN GERMANY

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- 37 From the vast literature on anti-Semitism see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1951); Alex Bein, *Die Judenfrage. Biographie eines Weltproblems* (Stuttgart, 1980), Vols. 1 and 2; Peter G. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria 1867–1914* (New York, 1964); Reinhard Rürup, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus, Studien zur 'Judenfrage' der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen, 1975); Norman Cohn, *Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion. Der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung* (Cologne, 1969); Herbert A. Strauss, Norbert Kampe (eds.), *Antisemitismus. Von der Judenfeindschaft zum Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985). For the by no means uniform views of racial scientists and eugenicists concerning the 'Jewish Question' see Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*.
- 38 Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899).

- 39 For anti-Semitism in Germany see, in addition to the works cited in note 37, Wanda Kampmann, *Deutsche und Juden. Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland vom Mittelalter bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979); Ismar Elbogen, Eleonore Sterling, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966); Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (New York, 1978); Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Paucker (eds.), *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890–1914* (Tübingen, 1976), *Deutschen Judentum in Krieg und Revolution 1916–1923* (Tübingen, 1971), *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen, 1965); Monika Richarz (ed.), *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Stuttgart, 1979), *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1919–1945* (Stuttgart, 1982); Shulamit Volkov, 'Kontinuität und Diskontinuität im deutschen Antisemitismus 1878–1945', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 33 (1985), pp. 221–43; Hermann Graml, *Reichskristallnacht. Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1988). More specialised areas are covered in Fritz Stern's masterly *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder and the Building of the German Empire* (London, 1977); Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923* (Madison, 1982); Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (Oxford, 1987).
- 40 Artur Dinter, *Die Sünde wider das Blut* (Leipzig, 1918).
- 41 For Hitler's racism and anti-Semitism see Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (revised edition, London, 1967); Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (London, 1974); Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Karl Lange, *Hitlers unbeachtete Maximen. 'Mein Kampf' und die Öffentlichkeit* (Stuttgart, 1968); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der konsequente Wahn. Ideologie und Politik Adolf Hitlers* (Munich, 1989).
- 42 *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Mannheim with an introduction by D. C. Watt (London, 1974), p. 258.
- 43 Eugen Fischer, *Die Rebobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Jena, 1913).
- 44 *Hitler's Mein Kampf*, p. 348.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 368.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 295.

### 3 BARBARISM INSTITUTIONALISED: RACISM AS A STATE POLICY

- 1 'Hitlers Testament', *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof*, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945–1 October 1946 (Nuremberg, 1947–9), Vol. 41, p. 552.
- 2 For a collection of anti-Semitic laws and decrees see Joseph Walk, *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat. Eine Sammlung der gesetzlichen Massnahmen und Richtlinien* (Karlsruhe, 1981). There are also editions of the major laws and decrees by Helmut Eschwege, *Kennzeichen 'J'. Bilder, Dokumente, Berichte zur Geschichte der Verbrechen des Hitlerfaschismus an den*