

SOCIAL DARWINISM & THE CALL OF THE WILD:

The Anti-Semitism of Nazi Political Ecology

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Introduction

Some 100 years before the Nazis rose to power, German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) ominously wrote that “we owe the animals not mercy but justice, and the debt often remains unpaid in Europe, the continent that is permeated with *Foeter Judaicus* ... it is obviously high time in Europe that Jewish views on nature were brought to an end ... the unconscionable treatment of the animal world must, on account of its immorality, be expelled from Europe.”¹ That such words became prophetic under the umbrella of a secular religion of nature that was Nazi Germany colored by an environmental totalitarian views during the 1930's and 40's, is a historical truth that has been underappreciated for too long a time. Borrowing from Tacitus, *Foeter Judaicus* means “the odor of the Jews.” For Schopenhauer, this bad odor was Jewish animal cruelty. Furthermore, that Adolf Hitler could quote Schopenhauer verbatim² from the top of his head is no coincidence, and neither is the fact that the Jews would find themselves shoved into cattle cars and sent to concentration camps set up like stockyards where they would often be treated like experimental animals. Hitler made sure that the Jews would pay for their animal cruelty by subjecting them to the same punishment that he assumed they were guilty of.

Unbeknownst to many, Adolf Hitler was especially green with regard to animal rights and vegetarianism. He was however less green, but not disinterested, when it came to other environmental issues like sustainable development, anti-industrialization, conservationism and the dreaded SS “blood and soil” get back to nature romantic agrarianism, things which many Nazis were deeply involved in well ahead of its time. Hitler's racism lauded German cultural and technocratic progress, but because his Aryanism was rooted in the Social Darwinian ecology of the 1800's, he always held a certain respect for romantic and environmental thinking, in spite of some of his inconsistencies on the issue. His environmentalism was of the chauvinistic kind rather than a feminine Mother Nature brand. It was R. Trevor-Roper, the editor of “Hitler's Table Talk: 1941-44,” who strongly pointed out that Hitler's naturism was a “devouring whose cruelty justified his own: not a sociable pagan Nature of nymph-haunted woods and populates streams, but a romantic Wagnerian Nature of horrid Alps in whose intoxicating solitude he could best hatch his own equally violent and implacable interventions.”³ Nonetheless, because of Hitler's penchant for Nature, many Nazi leaders were in fact very attracted to green ideas and practices, and many German environmentalists heartily volunteered to “work for the *Fuhrer*.”

How Green Were the Nazis Debate

Not surprisingly, there is thus a highly controversial debate among a limited group of scholars over how green were the Nazis that goes all the way back to Dr. Daniel Gasman's book written in 1971 called “The Scientific Origins of the National Socialism.” Gasman, an expert on fascist ideology, specifically wrote his book to save Charles Darwin from being smeared with Nazi blood. Whether or not Gasman was ultimately successful in this particular matter is of course open to great debate,⁴ but the the upshot of his excellent work is that he implicates instead the father of German ecology, Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). Gasman strongly argues that Haeckel was indeed the father of German Social Darwinism which inevitably led to the slippery slope of the holocaust. Worse is that his biological and ecological views were holistic, fascist, and Anti-Semitic all at the same time.

Since the book was written, the Nazi environmental debate has been slow to develop because Gasman deals primarily with the nature religion of Haeckel and National Socialism, not their environmental views or practices. However, the Nazi ecological debate became much more heated during the 1980's when British author Anna Bramwell' wrote “Blood and Soil: Walther Darre and Hitler's Green Party.” Since Gasman mentions that the SS leaders Heinrich Himmler and his teacher, Richard Walther Darre, were heavily involved in naturist youth groups that can be traced back to Haeckel and his ecological followers, Bramwell explores this connection in much more detail. Suprisingly, Bramwell shows herself somewhat sympathetic to Darre's romantic green agrarianism, which in those days was

¹ Schopenhauer, *On Religion*, pp. 370-77.

² *Hitler's Table Talk*, p. xxxvii.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. xl-xli,

⁴ See Richard Wiekart's *From Darwin to Hitler*.

trumped under the slogan “blood and soil.” Along the way, she characterizes Darre as a misguided radical, but demonizes Himmler. She also contrasts Darre’s more reasonable environmentalism with the more radical greens that made up a sizable portion of the Nazi Party.

Such suggestions of course sparked a firestorm of controversy. Bramwell’s book was thus countered by Raymond Dominick’s “The Environmental Movement in Germany: 1871-1971 Prophets and Pioneers” that strongly downplayed the Nazi connections to the early German green movement. Bramwell came back in 1989 with her “Ecology in the 20th Century: A History.” In this book, she also manages to take a few swipes at Gasman along the way as she tries to place distance between Haeckel and Hitler. Luc Ferry, Simon Schama, Peter Staudenmaier, Janet Biehl and Michael Zimmermann kept the ecological fascist debate simmering throughout the 90’s and early 2000’s with their respective works, which was finally answered by a small collection of books written by environmental historians like “Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust,” and “How Green Were the Nazis: Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich?” and “The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany,” not to mention David Blackbourn’s “The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany.”

These later books do indeed admit a convergence between early German environmentalism and Nazism that is stunning with regard to how the Nazis promoted nationalistic ecological ideas. On the other hand, the environmental historians also strongly point out that the Nazis were unable to match in practice the green rhetoric they were espousing for a variety of reasons. Thus, while it may be true that from the perspective of modern environmental historians, the Nazis were not nearly as green as they said they were, it must also be kept in mind that there was one aspect of their nationalistic environmental campaign that was accomplished with brutal efficiency – the elimination of the Jews – which in the eyes of the Nazi leadership was the first necessary step, if not the most important. Only the turning tide of the war prevented the Nazis from finishing the job that Schopenhauer prophetically announced 100 years earlier. Here begins the lesson of a nationalistic racism and environmentalism that got hotwired together into an explosive political ecology that eventually dug a biological-ecological hole as deep as Auschwitz.

German Anti-Semitic Romanticism Rebels Against Genesis 1

While Henry David Thoreau, the first environmental hippy of America going back to the 1840 and 50’s was blaming the immigrant Protestants and Puritans for despoiling the New England landscape, German romantics were blaming the invasive Jewish people for the same environmental degradation taking place all around their countryside as the Industrial Revolution, supposedly fueled by Jewish capital and banks, inexorably despoiled the forested landscape and sullied wildlife habitat with dirty cities and international commercial markets. Schopenhauer, an early proponent of what is today called animal rights, alleged that this was primarily a Jewish problem, “the fault lies with the Jewish view that regards the animal as something manufactured for man’s use.”⁵ Schopenhauer even knew precisely which primary text was to blame, “these are the effects of Genesis 1 and generally of the whole Jewish way of looking at nature.”⁶ Such was the conclusion of one of Germany’s most important genius’s of the 1800’s. Schopenhauer’s disciple, the great musician Richard Wagner, parroted the same environmental complaints against both Jews and Christians. Wagner of course provided the musical background for the Nazis, and was highly esteemed by Hitler as well.

While Schopenhauer and Wagner of course did not anticipate the green sacrificial offering of the Jews in the gas chambers of places like Dachau where organic farms were planted nearby to feed Himmler’s SS troops, the Nazis never asked them ‘how’ to expel the Jews from Europe. Schopenhauer and Wagner would have undoubtedly been aghast at how literally the Nazis fulfilled such anti-Semitic ambitions, but Hitler called Schopenhauer a genius. And no wonder, for he was one who saw through the alleged nature hating tendencies of the Jews whose religious views and political economic practices were informed by the Genesis 1 mandate to subdue and fill the earth, with marriage being designated as the very vehicle which would carry out this great divine purpose in the world. The Nazis, because of their Social Darwinian evolutionary views on nature, thus derogatively characterized this as the great problem

⁵ Schopenhauer, *On Religion*, pp. 370-77.

⁶ Ibid.

of “the Eternal Jew.”⁷ The Jews were ‘eternal’ vagabonds, uprooted from Nature and destructive to local national populations with alien economic practices and politics.

The Nazi master race was considered to be the best precisely because they eschewed this Mosaic conquest of nature, something which Hitler called “Jewish nonsense.”⁸ According to Nazi ideology, the so-called ‘eternal Jew’ is the transcendent Jew who tries to live above Nature through economics and capitalism in the west, or through politics and communism in the east. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler specifically called this process the pacification of Nature.⁹ According to Hitler, the Jews try to pacify or tame Nature through international commerce and capitalism on the one hand, or by stressing universal political values like communistic equality on the other hand, both of which rebel against the stern rigid laws of Nature which cannot be overcome. Hitler strongly asserted that instead of overcoming nature, man must instead abide by her stern rigid laws.

However, in the creation story of Genesis, Adam and Eve were crowned as the king and queen of creation, and while it is true that nature was made for the glory of God, it was also made for man since he was made in the image of God as God’s reflector in human form. This view on man and nature also strongly implies an autonomous utilitarian ecology. This of course has been the most hated ideological concept by environmental thinkers for some 200 years now, and it was especially the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment that emphasized this utilitarian view of nature that opened the door for the Industrial Revolution and free market capitalism, the two greatest forces of the modern world which has supposedly left the earth in ecological shambles. Here Nazi environmentalist Wilhelm Linnenkamper mockingly declared that the “First Commandment” of nature protection was the “merciless extermination of the utilitarian perspective.”¹⁰ Thus Linnenkamper ratchets up Schopenhauer’s beastly recommendation that the Jewish views on nature should be expelled from Europe.

Earlier German romantics like Alexander Humboldt, Ernst Moritz Arndt, Heinrich Riehl, Ernst Haeckel, and others, slowly stoked the fires of this green environmental racist campaign throughout the 1800’s. It was Humboldt who stressed a form of environmental determinism where the character of man is shaped by his own particular local environment. Here is seen one of the primary foundation stones upon which the idea of the German *volk* (people’s collective community), romantically and holistically embedded into their own German landscape, was born. From this point on, the German folk peasants began to be idealized as the hearty indigenous natives of Germany. While Humboldt himself was no racist, Arndt and Riehl took such environmental ideas and fused it with German nationalism and Anti-Semitism. Arndt complained bitterly about the loss of the German forestland. Riehl intensified this nationalistic ecologism into a *volkish* environmentalism that would not be undone until the smoke cleared from the battlefields and gas chambers of World War II. Riehl loved German forests and wetlands, but hated tourists. He loathed international cosmopolitanism, urbanism, and the city life based on alienating market values where nature was reduced to a commodity. Worse of course is that he blamed the invasive Jews for all this.

With such pro nature anti-Semitic sentiments seething in the German background in the 1800’s, it was Ernst Haeckel, a zoologist of all things, who opened the door wide open to path of Nazism when he propounded a holistic, racist Social Darwinism based on ‘science’ called Monism in those days. Haeckel was in fact the very man who coined the term ‘ecology’ in 1866. Thus Haeckel will help provide the Nazis the missing link between nationalism, socialism, ecology, race and nature protection. Haeckel took the Darwinian evolutionary theory about the origin of the species, and mutated it into a Romantic pseudo-scientific religious quest to recover and preserve that origin by trying to keep the races pure. In short, the Darwinian theory of the natural selection of the species mutated into eugenics where race became fused with species, so much so that the major concern was over preserving and protecting the original or indigenous German species from the disorderly mixing of the races. In other words, Haeckel took biological Darwinism, which stressed random change and variations through natural selection and mutation, and converted it into holistic Social Darwinism where the Germans of Europe were placed on the top of the indigenous Aryan totem pole. At this juncture, Darwinian evolutionary scientific theory gets inextricably tied up with German nationalism and racism where the myth of the German *volk* now becomes defended by science, rather than seen for what it really was – largely a movement of the occult

⁷ See especially the Nazi propaganda film called “The Eternal Jew.”

⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 287.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ HStAD NW 60 no. I603, p. 300 quoted by Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown*, p. 21

with the lower peasant classes. Haeckel was thus advocating a crackpot *volkish* romantic nationalism and nature worship, all presented in contemporary scientific garb for modern intellectual consumption.

While Haeckel was certainly anti-Christian in his nature worship, even worse is that he was anti-Semitic as well. In fact, Haeckel bears the primary responsibility of bringing up the whole Jewish question as a biological problem. Unsurprisingly he discovered that the racial characteristics of the Jews were harmfully reactionary to the evolutionary laws of the natural world. Their transcendent view of man over nature made them resistant to evolutionary biological change, and hence had become a lesser race.¹¹ While Hitler may have eschewed some of Haeckel's political views, he was certainly in hearty agreement with this particular belief. Like Riehl, Haeckel also decried the unnatural cosmopolitan Jews. The Jews were not properly related to nature from an ecological-biological Social Darwinian point of view. Their blood was not properly related to the evolutionary laws of nature, nor properly embedded in the German soil. Over time this Social Darwinist emphasis on returning back to the evolutionary laws of nature further mutated into an occultic *volkish* belief in 'blood and soil,' where the German *volk* assumed that they had a special mystical relationship to the German landscape through their blood. Thus well before the Nazis had even come to power, Haeckel and the Monists essentially argued for an early Nazi version of eugenics and the environment, which later became known as "blood and soil" under the SS leadership of Himmler and Darre.

Blood & Soil Totalitarian Environmentalism

By the time of the Nazi period, 'blood and soil' had become hardened into a romantic nationalistic green ideology where the German or Nordic master race would purify itself by returning back to the simplicity of the German landscape away from the alienating asphalt culture of the big cities and free market capitalism. Nazi ideologues used the slogan for many practical purposes, everything from getting Germans back to the farm, to calls for environmental sustainability and nature preservation, to emphasizing a buy local self-sufficient agricultural economics scheme, and including the upholding of traditional German values. Thus the slogan 'blood and soil' was a popular racial environmental slogan that the Nazis used throughout the 30's representing a whole cadre of various racial green ideas and practices. Borrowing from ancient Germanic mysticism that posited that German racial identity was essentially tied literally and metaphorically to the German landscape and then cleansed by Monist scientism, the slogan 'blood and soil' had thus become a rallying cry for a nationalistic racially charged ecologism, a dangerous politicized ecology that would spell disaster for the Jewish people in particular, and would have spelled disaster for the Christians had the Nazis won the war.

Even as early as 1927, the National Socialists Physician League declared "the primacy of national biology over national economy."¹² Thus the environmental department of keeping the German landscape healthy fit in perfectly with the racial hygiene emphasis of the medical community. The Jews were thus a source of both medical and environmental pollution. In his memoirs, Albert Speer recalls the first time he heard Adolf Hitler speak in 1931. One of issues that Hitler talked about was how the modern industrialized civilized world was destroying the biological substance of the German people.¹³ Though Hitler was careful at that early time to conceal his virulent anti-Semitism before such a crowd, this certainly meant for him that the Jews were polluting German neighborhoods, both culturally and environmentally. By 1938 Hitler declared that Germany must be cleansed of the parasitic Jewish enemy and that the "eternal values of blood and soil" must be raised to "the ruling laws of life."¹⁴ In Hitler's speech, this meant above all the removal of Jewish international commercialism which had corrupted Germany.

National Socialists actually believed that they were most in tune with Nature precisely because they had adopted her holistic Social Darwinian laws, and environmentalism played an important role under this Nazi racist biology. Nazi biologist Walther Schoenichen went so far to say that National Socialism and environmental protection stand "in a tight connection because the *Fuhrer* wills a new

¹¹ Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism*, p. 157.

¹² *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, 2, (1931): 38, quoted by Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis*, p. 64.

¹³ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Hitler is here quoted in Domarus Zweiter Halbband 1934-38, p. 890 by Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, p. 49.

German *volksgemeinschaft* (people's racial community) whose foundation is drawn from blood and soil, i.e., from the primordial forces of life and soul that are proper to our race, and from the nature-willed bond that subsists between us and the sod of the homeland."¹⁵ Not to be outdone, but Schoenichen went on to say that "Adolf Hitler demands that man must understand the basic necessity of the rule of nature and must also grasp how much his existence is subjugated from above to these laws of eternal struggle and contest."¹⁶ As such Schoenichen reminded his readers that "no technology, no rationalism can protect us, together with our civilization from going under, if we detach ourselves from the natural foundation of life." In 1930, Schoenichen bemoaned "the unscrupulous thirst for profit that holds nothing as holy or worthy of reverence except the welfare of the cash register."¹⁷ In October 1933, he wrote that the German landscape must be cleansed of the "un-German spirit of commerce."¹⁸ Such talk would of course ultimately target the Jews. Schoenichen even decided to carry out a study to investigate the evil roots of outdoor advertising," it would be a worthwhile cause for inquiry in how far this social-psychic disease is the result of an infection with Jewish poison."¹⁹

Thus by the time of the Nazi accession to power, the Nazi Party was widely represented by a whole host of differing aspects of the early German conservationist movement. The most powerful of them was Hermann Goering, the Nazi Reich Forest Minister, a mountain climber, hunter, hiker, animal and forest lover. Goering was followed by the much more mystic homeopath Rudolf Hess, Hitler's secretary and Deputy Fuhrer who had several ecologists on his staff who emphasized the need for careful holistic environmental planning.²⁰ Dr. Alwin Seifert was perhaps the most thoroughgoing ecologically minded Nazi environmentalist, followed by Nazi biologist Walther Schoenichen. The highly praised Nazi civil engineer, Dr. Fritz Todt, appointed Inspector General for the German Roadways by Hitler, was not only a friend of Seifert's but also was sympathetic to ecological ideas and early environmental engineering experiments.

Hans Schwenkel was a conservationist professor, and Wiepking-Jurgensmann was a Nazi landscape planner who had the best laid plans designed for the occupied East during the height of the war. For the newly reclaimed land in the Eastern territories, he and Konrad Meyer essentially proposed all kinds of environmental schemes where a shaping of nature was respectfully pursued so that man, wildlife and plants could all live harmoniously together. Wilhelm Linenkamper represented the preservationist camp in helping to set aside nature preserves. Heinrich Himmler, the infamous SS leader, was obsessed with the Nazi 'blood and soil' agrarian peasant romanticism. He also was an animal lover and a strong nature mystic. He often involved himself in conservationism and became increasingly attracted to organic farming through the influence of Hess, Seifert and Darre. Darre was the very man who was instrumental in providing Hitler with a solid green front based on romantic agrarian ideals in the early 30's – the so-called green peasant farmer – who were not very happy with Jewish capitalists and banks. The 'boy scouts' of the Nazi Party, the Hitler Youth, cannot be ignored either, which grew out of the romantic naturist youth movement of the early 1900's based largely on Ludwig Klages Anti-Semitic *volkish* environmental diatribes.

Even the Nazi Party itself had a highly proportional slice of environmental conservationists within its own ranks. Whereas only 10% of the German population belonged to the Nazi Party, between 60 and 70% of the environmentalists in various conservationists groups were Nazi Party members. This is not to say that every German conservationist was a Nazi Party member or a Nazi sympathizer, or that every conservationist joined the Nazi party because of ideological convictions, but it is to say that generally speaking, there was a convergence between Nazis and environmental conservationists that cannot and should not be ignored no matter how disturbing this may be. This was largely accomplished by the fact that Rudolf Hess and Walther Schoenichen managed to get the various conservation groups placed under the auspices of the German Labor Front in 1934. The greens were thus adopted into the Nazi Party via the German Labor Front. Thus it seems that the present cozy relationship that exists between

¹⁵ Schoenichen, Walther. *Nature Protection in the Third Reich* (Berlin, 1934) quoted by Zimmermann in "Ecofascism: An Enduring Temptation," p. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Schoenichen, Walther. Quoted in Dominick, "Nazis and Nature Conservationists," 514.

¹⁸ Schoenichen, Walther, "Das deutsche Volk muB gereinigt werden – Und die deutsche Landschaft?" *Naturshutz* 14, no. 11 (1933): 207, quoted by Charles Cloosmann, *How Green Were the Nazis?* p. 28.

¹⁹ Schoenichen, Walther, "Biologie," 76, quoted by Frank Uekoetter in *The Green and the Brown*, p. 38.

²⁰ Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*, p. 197.

modern environmentalism and labor may in fact have been born in Nazi Germany. As such, when the Nazis seized power, environmentalism was surprisingly given a premier role between 1933-35. Between these years, right at the outset of the Nazi accession to power, the Nazis passed several pioneering pieces of ecologically minded legislation which were in fact the most progressive environmental laws found anywhere in the world at the time. In 1935, Nazi Germany was by far the greenest regime on the planet.

Nazi Environmental Laws & Practices

In November 1933, the Nazis passed a law for the protection of animals called the *Tierschutzrecht*. Previously, Hitler declared, "in the new Reich cruelty to animals should no longer exist."²¹ Even before the passing of this particular law at the federal level, Herman Goering threatened to send violators of a similar law at a local level to concentration camps. As part of this 300 page law, the Nazis also forbid cruel experiments on animals, something which they had no reservations about with regard to live experimentation on Jews later on. Closely related to this is that the Nazis even devoted an entire chapter over to the Jewish barbarity of ritual slaughter, which of course had great repercussions with regard to celebrating the Passover. Thus even as early as 1933, the realization that love for animals does not mean a love for fellow man becomes strikingly apparent, especially if you were a Jew who believed in a false unnatural religion. Goering also used 'criminals' from concentration camps for weaponry testing instead of animals.²² No doubt, most of those 'criminals' were Jews. That Hess, Himmler and Hitler were all vegetarians is also part of the historical record and fits in perfectly with their animal loving tendencies.

With such views about animals, in July 1934, following on the heels of the *Tierschutzrecht*, Goering helped draft the Nazi law for limiting hunting called the *Das Reichsjagdgesetz*. As part of the provisions of the law, hunting with painful traps was outlawed. With further interest is that the law was expressly passed to protect wild animals and to educate the people to develop a love and understanding for nature and its creatures as important "cultural" assets. Here once again is seen the Nazi fusion between German culture, nature and animals in a very holistic understanding. That Hermann Goering was also an avid hunter is something which modern environmental historians try to use to demonstrate that he was not really serious about animal rights protection. They are quick to glibly post pictures of Goering standing over trophies that he had shot. What they fail to appreciate is that Hitler also chided Goering for the same alleged inconsistency, "first you protect the animals, then you shoot them dead."²³ Even in 1942 at the height of the war, Hitler remarked that, "I have never fired at a hare in my life. I am neither poacher nor sportsman."²⁴ Regardless of such quibbling, Goering was in fact well known to be an animal lover even years after his death.

Beyond this is that Goering also became Germany's self appointed Reich Forestry Meister. In fact, under Goering's leadership, the Nazis also made a sharp break from forestry practices of the Weimar Republic by emphasizing a new environmentally sensitive model called *Dauerwald*. *Dauerwald* means 'eternal forest' and the German conservationists of the 20's had fought hard for this forestry concept during the Weimar Republic, but without success. It was the Nazis who granted the romantic environmentalists their wishes when they came to power in the early 1930's. Not surprisingly, along totalitarian lines, *Dauerwald* was mandated for all German forests, including private forest owners as well. In fact, thanks to the totalitarian nature of the Nazi rule, Germany has never looked at private forests the same. Indeed, during the Nazi rule, a private German forester might find himself in jail for cutting down a conifer tree under 50 years of age.

The main thrust of *Dauerwald* was not the scientific maximization of wood production for unlimited human consumption but the desire to make the forest ecosystem more healthy in the long run so that there would more sustainable yields in the future without destroying the forest. The modern lingo for this would of course be sustainable forestry. They also planned to curtail the ecological shock of clear cutting and to protect the overall forest canopy as much as possible. This was to be done by emphasizing single

²¹ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, p. 91.

²² Irving, *Goering*, p. 180.

²³ Klose, Hans "Wie das Reichnaturschutzgesetz wurde," 9-14, quoted by Dominick in *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, p. 107.

²⁴ *Hitler's Table Talk*, midday September 2, 1942, p. 516.

tree selection rather than clear-cutting and to refrain from cutting the youngest and oldest trees. The Nazi foresters were also very concerned about eradicating diseased trees, not to mention invasive species, both of which they deemed detrimental to the German landscape. Thus the forest ecosystem must be kept consistent with its local Aryan natural healthy environment, “ask the trees, they will teach you how to become National Socialists!”²⁵ Indeed in 1937, Nazi conservationist Hans Stadler complained that the Jewish logger capitalists had purchased and processed the “last of the strong oaks and the last of the beautiful walnut trees.”²⁶

The high water mark for nature conservationism in Nazi Germany came in June-July of 1935 with the passing of the RNG, the Reich Nature Protection Law called the *Reichnaturschutzgesetz*, chock full of social engineering ecological holistic schemes, called organic in those days. The RNG required comprehensive land use environmental planning called ‘environmental effects reports’ before new construction projects could be built. These were essentially early forms of what is today called environmental impact statements. They of course created a huge bureaucratic paper chase scheme. The Nazi environmental slogan on this was all-encompassing, “it shall be the whole landscape!” Here the thrust of environmental totalitarianism cannot be missed, which also demonstrates why the RNG is no footnote in environmental history, the first of its kind at the federal level, precisely because of its landscape planning provisions over already developed areas that went way beyond the typical conservationist and preservationist models of environmental thinking. In fact, so ahead of its time was that even many Nazi conservationists did not really know what to do with it. Nazi biologist Walther Schoenichen pointed this problem out by arguing that “the task of landscape preservation was to influence the human use of landscapes in a certain way.”²⁷ In other words, the RNG legalized environmental social engineering schemes along totalitarian lines.

As a necessary part of this environmental scheming, the RNG allowed the expropriation of land without compensation. Here is seen why the Weimar Republic was not so keen about passing environmental laws to satisfy the romantics of the 1920’s. How will they compensate private property owners for loss of using their property because of environmental restrictions? For Hitler and the Nazis, this was not a problem. Thus with regard to the RNG here, one is talking about a lot more than just preserving national parks and the like, ala Teddy Roosevelt and the early conservationist movement in America with the likes of Gifford Pinchot and company. Nazi environmental laws were holistic, organic, and thus totalitarian as well. They struck at the heart of freedom and private property. Once entire landscapes and ecosystems become the hallmark of nature preservation, private property of course falls by the wayside under the stress of social engineering environmental totalitarian schemes. Thus in Nazi Germany, nature protection, socialism, collectivism and emergency powers were all used to trump private property rights. More telling is that with concerns over private property rights waning, and with the ministries of the interior, education and justice fighting over the right to control the RNG, Hermann Goering seized it for himself, “Listen Herr Rust, what’s happening with *Naturschutz*? I am the only one who pursues proper *Naturschutz*. Are you agreed that it goes over to my jurisdiction? (pause) Oh but I have the forests and the animals, so *Naturschutz* fits much better in my jurisdiction than yours ... OK, you are agreed ... Thanks.”²⁸

Nonetheless, with the passage of the RNG the gap between the conservationists and the Nazis was bridged. The law was universally praised. German environmentalist Hans Klose, even though he was not a Nazi party member, still called the RNG the ‘Magna Carta’ of German nature protection and declared that previous regimes were unable to pass such a measure because “those essential political and worldview assumptions were lacking.”²⁹ What they lacked of course was a holistic totalitarian view of the natural world at the political level which was succinctly summarized by Hitler himself, “from now on,

²⁵ Modersohn, A.W., “Weltauschaung und beruflicher Einsatz,” *Deutsche Forst-Zeitung* 8, no. 15 (1939) 602-03, quoted by Imort in “Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk: The Rhetoric and Reality of National Socialist Forest Policy,” in *How Green Were the Nazis?*, p. 54.

²⁶ StAW Landratsamt Ebern no. 1336, Der Regierungsbeauftragte für Naturschutz in Unterfranken to the Bezirksbeauftragten für Naturschutz in Mainfranken, March 12, 1937, quoted by Uekoetter p. 38.

²⁷ Uekoetter, p. 141.

²⁸ Dominick, p. 107.

²⁹ Klose, Hans, “Der Schutz der Landschaft nach 5 des Reichnaturschutzgesetzes,” 5, 7, quoted by Closmann, “Legalizing a Volksgemeinschaft,” in *How Green Were the Nazis?*, p. 32.

one may consider that there is no gap between the organic and the inorganic world.”³⁰ Thus trying to sever the gap between man and nature was the hallmark of the Nazi regime. Hitler and the Nazis wanted to cut man down to size and plunge him back in the natural world where he rightfully belongs, and the RNG was part of this naturist campaign against the Judeo-Christian worldview. Here, Nazi environmentalist Hans Schwenkel even went so far as to point out that the Mosaic Law contained no provisions for nature protection, “since the first book of Moses, the Jews do not know nature protection, since God has given to the children of Israel all plants and animals for their enjoyment.”³¹ In other words, the Jews do not protect nature but exploit it as a divine right of personal selfish enjoyment.

At this juncture, environmental historians quickly point out that the Nazi leadership later betrayed their initial interest in environmentalism. In fact, the environmental blitzkrieg of 1933-35 seemed to have petered out by the later 30's in a great disappointment as the Nazi hierarchy began to sacrifice their own environmental laws to get ready for an all out war effort. The animal rights and anti-vivisection laws had to be redrafted several times and thus relaxed (thanks largely to the fact that Hitler's personal doctor warned him about the scientific fallout of such a draconian measure). The great eco-theorist philosopher Martin Heidegger, who emphasized an anti-humanistic 'let it be' authentic approach to nature, lost his enthusiasm for the Nazi Party by the mid to late 30's. *Dauerwald* forestry practices were given up and replaced with a 'close to nature' approach to logging because of a rebounding economy and the upcoming war.

The enforcement of the RNG turned out to be very lax as it was massively underfunded. However, that the Nazi socialist public works machine ran roughshod over the RNG rather than the capitalists is of course nothing short of ultimate poetic justice. In the later 30's, Martin Boorman and many others like him strongly opposed the more radical green Nazis like Hess and Seifert. Thus while it is certainly true that Nazi environmentalism was not nearly as far reaching as its own laws trumpeted, this should not be surprising since the Nazis were undoubtedly far more interested in using environmental laws to restrict Jews, capitalism and private property, not their own national socialist agenda. Even so, Nazi environmentalism continued as a strong rationale for what Germany was doing throughout the 30's and early 40's. The fact of the matter is that Nazi conservationists pioneered their way up into the higher echelons of federal authority, and as such, they accomplished much with little made available to them, all in a veritable wartime atmosphere from 1936 on. Like all pioneers, they did suffer deprivation, but that is precisely what one would expect. Nazi environmentalists did more with less than most modern greens give them credit for.

White Fang & Eco-Imperialism in the East

In fact, as the war in the East blazed through Poland, the Baltics, western Russia, and the Ukraine, wide open eco-imperial opportunities often replaced German environmental efforts at home. With no small interest is that Hitler's personal attorney, Dr. Hans Frick, was made the governor-general of conquered Poland. This is the very man who publicly attacked the Jews for their Passover ritual slaughter practices in 1930 before a group of animal lovers in Munich. After he finished his tirade, the assembly adopted a resolution which stated that “the time will come for the salvation of animals from the perverse persecution of retarded subhumans.”³² The prophetic insight of that animal lover's conference about the fate of the subhuman literally became a self-fulfilling prophecy once the Nazis seized power, especially in Poland, the very place where 'blood and soil' racial environmentalism and concentration camps would come together on a barbarous scale unimaginable at the time the resolution was made. In fact, environmental landscape planners were given what they called total 'planning freedom' in the East. Salivating at the opportunities, Landscape Planner Heinrich Frierich Wiepking Jurgensmann, who was the Chair of the Institute for Landscape Design at the University of Berlin, proclaimed “a golden age for the German landscape and garden designer that will surpass everything that even the most enthusiastic

³⁰ *Hitler's Table Talk: 1941-44*, evening of October 24, 1941, p.66.

³¹ Schwenkel, Hans, “Im Zeichen des Reichsnaturschutzgesetzes,” *Natur und Heimat*, 3, no.1 (January-March 1936):1, quoted by Charles Closmann in “Legalizing a Volksgemeinschaft,” in *How Green Were the Nazis?*, p. 32.

³² *Volkischer Beobachter*, April 9, 1930 quoted by Dominick, p. 92.

among us had previously known.”³³ The Nazis thus had all kinds of cockamamie eco-imperial sustainable development plans for the newly acquired territories in the East.

Cleaning out Jews and Slavs for the Aryan preservation of nature shows that the great campaign in Poland and Russia was also fought for ecological reasons as well, where a depopulated East could help rebuild the natural rural health of the German people. Thus by cleansing the land from both Jews and Slavs in the East, *Lebensraum* (ecological living & breathing space) could be enlarged greatly in order to get the Germans back to more natural romantic surroundings. To accomplish all this the Nazis had plans to Germanize the landscape by creating nature preservation areas, national parks, garden cities, and pioneer farms to return Germans back to more natural healthy living conditions to help relieve their own overpopulated country. In 1941, Seifert sermonized that “if the East is to become home for Germans from all over the Germany, and if it is to flourish and become as beautiful as the rest of the Reich, then it is not enough just to cleanse the towns of past Polish mismanagement and construct clean and pleasant villages. The entire landscape must be Germanized.”³⁴ Here is seen the complete fusion between their ecological views and their nationalistic racial pride. They were one in the same.

In other words, in the eyes of the Nazis, to Germanize the landscape was to properly take care of it by creating nature reserves, national parks and green landscape development plans for its inhabitants, all with the help of a depopulation program of Jews and Slavs to help really bring it along. Hence Nazi biologist Walther Schoenichen had dreams of getting rid of both Jews and Poles out of the Bialowieza Forest in order to turn into a giant national park in the East, much bigger than what the Poles had already designated for the area. Herman Goering wanted to use much of the same area for a giant hunting reserve for German elk and bison. Hans Klose wanted to set aside nature reserves as far east as the Caucasus Mountains looming above the vast Russian steppe. Even Polish cities would be redone with beautiful gardens. Beautiful pastoral farms would replace the huts that were scattered across the eastern landscape. Small Polish farms with many families were even converted into much larger farms for just one German family. Nature reserves, green landscape plans, organic farms and concentration camps – it’s all here in the most grisly set of circumstances imaginable.

Worse is that this was a big job suitable only for the fittest planners the Reich could muster. As a part of this huge construction plan German oak trees were planted in many Polish towns as symbols of the Germanization of the landscape where little tiny acorns were to grow into huge trees with deep roots in the soil. Pagan nature mystic Heinrich Himmler was the very man placed in charge of this huge utopian construction operation, one which both he and Hitler assumed would take more than a century to complete. Himmler had even planned to use industry in the conquered territories to fund his green program of turning Poland, Ukraine and western Russia into a beautiful environmentally sustainable countryside where animals and man could live harmoniously together. On October 17, 1941, when the *Wehrmacht* was within 20 miles of the gates of Moscow, Hitler proclaimed that the East “will be one day be one of the loveliest gardens in the world.”³⁵ However, within a matter of weeks, this green plan came to a screeching halt when the *Wehrmacht* got bogged down in the mud of primitive Russian roads, and then later virtually froze to death in one of the most brutal winters in living memory.

In spite of these tragic setbacks Himmler later stated the following in an instructional letter sent to Dachau Concentration Camp and Ester-wegen, “I wish the SS and the police also will be exemplary in the love of nature. Within the course of a few years the property of the SS and the police must become paradises for animals and Nature.”³⁶ Thus while the Poles were being herded around and shot at, and the Jews being crammed into dirty city ghettos, a place befitting of their nature hating tendencies, organic farms were feeding the SS. As such, landscape cleansing reached an explosive climax under National Socialism. Ultimately, the Jews were sacrificed, not on altars of stone as in ancient nature worship practices, but in such vast numbers that the modern scientific engineering of the day was pushed to its limits to keep up with the body count. Thus in Poland and Russia, millions of people were sacrificed by the nature religion of the Nazis because they did not fit in with their Social Darwinian get back to nature scheme, and environmentalism played a significant role in this nationalistic ecocide.

³³ Wiepking-Jurgensmann, Heinrich Friedrich, “Der Deutsche Osten: Eine vordringliche Aufgabe für unsere Studierenden,” *Die Gartenkunst* 52, 1939, 193 quoted in Wolschke-Buhlman, “Violence as a Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning,” pp. 246-47.

³⁴ Wolschke-Buhlman, “Violence as the Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning” in *How Green Were the Nazis?*, p. 245.

³⁵ *Hitler’s Table Talk*, evening of October 17, 1941, p. 54.

³⁶ Degregori, Thomas, “Environmentalism, Animal Rights Activism, and Eco-Nazism,” April 1, 2001.

More telling still is that in 1981, Albert Speer pointed out that Himmler was both backward and helplessly romantic.³⁷ The SS itself hated industry, and often tried to thwart his own efforts to modernize Germany. Moreover, Speer also clearly recognized that that an industrial empire that would be able to fund such a utopian project could not be built on slave labor. Worst of all is that Hitler was ordering Himmler to gas many of the very people who were supposed to build Himmler's industrial empire. Here is seen the ultimate in a contradiction of terms. How on earth can anyone build an industrial empire on the burnt ashes of places like Auschwitz? Slave labor and human sacrifice belong to the pre-industrial world of agriculture and nature worship, not to modern industrial states. Hence, one of the great lessons of Nazi Germany is not that technology and industry are evil in themselves, as many Nazis believed, but that technology and industry are dangerous tools in the hands of people who really do not believe in it. They will invariably use industry for wrongful purposes, like, gas Jews for example, in order to build a green utopia.

That the Nazis brought to its logical conclusion the 19th century environmental complaints of Schopenhauer, Wagner, Arndt, Riehl and Haeckel goes without saying. Jews and Slavs were considered unnatural. They ruined their natural landscape and hence were worthy of what they forced to suffer. Environmental degradation was used to justify the ethnic cleansing of people not properly suited to their natural surroundings. Landscape Planner Heinrich Friedrich Wiepking Jurgensmann handily summarized this Jewish-Slavic conundrum quite well, all with pictures in hand and full of commentary, "the landscape is always a form, an expression, and a characteristic of the *Volk* living within it. It can be gentle countenance of its spirit and soul, just as it can be the grimace of its soullessness and of human and spiritual depravity. In any case, it is the infallible, distinctive mark of what a people feels, thinks, creates, and does. It shows, divine creative power, or part of a destructive force. The German landscape – like the German people – differs in every way from those of the Poles and the Russians. The murders and atrocities of the Eastern peoples are engraved in a razor sharp manner, in the grimaces of their native landscapes."³⁸ In short, the Slavs were not properly related to nature and thus should be liquidated. Even much later in 1944, when the war was all but lost, the Nazis published for the *Wehrmacht* a special edition of Wilhelm Riehl's *Natural History of the German People*. The *Wehrmacht* needed to be reminded why they were there in the first place.

Conclusion

Thus while many modern environmentalists point out the Nazi regime was an ecological catastrophe because of all its wartime destruction, the Nazi leadership viewed things much differently. The war was not an end in itself, but a means to get Germans back to a more naturally healthy rural lifestyle, and depopulating the East was at the heart of the issue. Both Himmler and Hitler even had plans to make Germany vegan after the war, following Wagner's socialist scheme to cleanse Germany from the Jews by emphasizing a vegetarian diet.³⁹ The quest for *Lebensraum*, or 'living space' in the East, was far more than just imperialistic form of colonialism, it was also a mystical-ecological extension of 'blood and soil' outside of Germany's borders. It was in fact an eco-imperial plan that far exceeded the evils of the western powers in their drive for colonial expansionism. Such was the dark shade of green that characterized the holocaust, so dark in fact that the green nature of it all has been camouflaged and overlooked for many years now. Or as one German physicist acutely observed, "if you mix green with red, you will get brown."

³⁷ See *Infiltration* by Albert Speer.

³⁸ Wiepking-Jurgensmann, Heinrich Friedrich, "Die Landshaftsfibel, 1942, 13 quoted by Wolschke-Buhlman in, "Violence as a Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning," in *How Green Were the Nazis?*, p. 251.

³⁹ Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer*, p. 139.