

INTRODUCTION



*H*ow did the German Right adapt to modern society? How did it manage to rally ever increasing numbers to its cause, so that in 1932 the right-wing Nazis became the most popular political party, gaining well over a third of the vote in free elections? How was it possible that an ideology praising inequality and authoritarian rule, service to the community, and sacrifice for the glory of the nation, could outdo its progressive opponents in the age of mass participation? How did an oppressive totalitarian regime remain highly popular for large parts of its existence, and mobilize the population for its criminal policies? These questions point to what is arguably the most disturbing aspect of the German past. In studying Nazism we are faced not just with individuals or small minorities carrying out inhuman policies, but with the involvement of the nation at large. The Third Reich not only acted in the 'name of the German people', as the former Chancellor Helmut Kohl liked to put it, but also found cooperation, often even enthusiastic backing, from the vast majority of the population. Of course, Nazism's popularity did not depend on its ideological appeal alone. Its success in elections was possible only in a situation of deep crisis, and Nazi rule relied on the use of terror against any serious dissent. However, the popularity of the party's promises and policies was undoubtedly an essential aspect in its 'seizure of power', its largely unchallenged rule for twelve years, and its mobilization of the German people for the implementation of racism and the unleashing of war. After all, voters had a wide choice of political options in the early 1930s, ranging from pragmatic democratic crisis management to Socialism and Communism, and from a presidential dictatorship to National Socialism (see for example Turner 1997). And even after having secured control, the Nazis continued their untiring attempts to win the people's hearts, as they knew that a popular regime was much more effective than one that relied entirely on the whip.

This book wants to make a contribution to answering the questions raised above by showing the growing desire for a single communal faith in Germany reaching back to the Romantic period. In a deeply divided society, nationalists came to wish for a strong basis of shared cultural ideals and political goals to integrate the masses, unite the nation and mobilize it for grand heroic achievements.

Despite all their efforts, the nation became increasingly polarized, particularly as a result of the First World War. In 1933, however, many people were gripped by the enthusiastic feeling of a 'national awakening', because, for a time, the Nazis seemed to make the dream of a closely knit community in pursuit of a grand endeavour come true. In the history of the Right and the rise of Nazism, the utopian vision of a nation united in a single communal faith thus played, I shall argue, a crucial role.

The support which the political Right and National Socialism found in Germany has motivated a wide range of historical studies. In recent years, it is the perpetrators' motivations that has attracted most attention. Were Germans in the grip of a culture of exterminist hatred, as Daniel Goldhagen (1997) claims; or were they, as in Christopher Browning's opinion (1998), 'ordinary' but deeply misguided, lacking the courage to reject orders and group pressure? Was the evil based on the banal workings of an impersonal bureaucracy, as Hannah Arendt (1963) and Zygmunt Bauman (1992) have argued so persuasively? Or were the Nazi elites part of a generation radicalized – by war and defeat, revolution and paramilitary struggles, political turmoil and friend-foe thinking – to such an extent that they believed utterly in the need for a ruthless war against Germany's alleged internal and external enemies (Herbert 1991, 1996; Wildt 2002)?

This book focuses more on the wider appeal of the German Right and National Socialism on the population at large – but in that field there are many studies too. No general book on the Third Reich avoids the issue,¹ and works ranging from Fritz Stern's *National Socialism as Temptation* to Robert Gellately's *Backing Hitler*, Claudia Koonz's *The Nazi Conscience* and, most recently, Götz Aly's controversial *Hitlers Volksstaat* are specifically devoted to it. Moreover, in showing the importance of the Hitler myth for integrating a polycratic movement and attracting popular support, Ian Kershaw (1989) has highlighted a central aspect in the fatal attraction of National Socialism, while Michael Burleigh (2000 and 2006) has done the same by applying the important explanatory model of political religions to the history of the Third Reich.²

Such studies indicate a shift towards the history of political culture in trying to explain the rise of National Socialism (Gregor 2005: 16). The heated debate about an allegedly special path, and the comparative studies that this encouraged, have made it highly doubtful that Germany had been steering a clearly distinct *Sonderweg* since the middle of the nineteenth century. While every nation's history obviously has its distinctive features, the large majority of historians today reject the idea that one grand unifying theory can explain why Germany, in contrast to other Western nations, ended up with a fascist system.³ A mix of modern and premodern elements in society, a piece-meal, often disrupted, process of democratization, a long continuation of authoritarian structures, and a traditional elite stubbornly trying to defend its privileges seem to have been the norm rather than the exception in the modernization process throughout the Western world. Also, the smooth democratization of West Germany after 1945 – which appears especially astonishing today when we witness the difficulties of democ-

ratization in post-totalitarian and non-Western countries – confirms that there must have been a strong democratic potential within German history. But, if the socio-economic and political structure of Germany was not particularly exceptional in comparison to other modernizing nations, then the issue of political will and all the many cultural factors that determined it must gain in significance, if we do not want to regard Nazism as merely an accident in German history.

The force of this historiographical reorientation becomes particularly clear in more recent attempts at restating peculiarities of German history. Heinrich August Winkler argues that the decisive difference between the history of Germany and that of other Western European nations lay in the myth of the Reich, which nurtured the belief that the Germans had some sort of special mission to save the world (Winkler 2000, 2002). Particularly astonishing is the shift in focus by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the strongest advocate of a distinctive German development. While his original *Sonderweg* argument stressed the importance of economic and socio-political factors, in the most recent volume of his German history, individuals and ideas have become far more prominent. World-views are now seen as important factors in the way interests translate into actions. Also, Wehler now identifies the main reasons for a special path towards National Socialism as a radical nationalism combined with anti-Semitism, rampant expansionism and the role of charismatic leaders. In particular, the desperate desire for a political saviour, which allegedly became part of German culture with Bismarck and found its fulfilment in Hitler, has emerged as the core of his explanation for the rise of Nazism (Wehler 2003: 933–937).

My study, too, goes back to the nineteenth century in trying to demonstrate one central aspect of the attraction of the extreme Right (including Nazism) in German history. Although I do not suggest a revival of a German *Sonderweg* theory, I will focus on the importance of longer-term cultural trends and convictions for understanding the fatal attraction of National Socialism. Hitler and the Nazis could appeal to the German population because they played on deeply engrained anxieties, desires, prejudices and utopian dreams. And while the First World War certainly marked a crucial turning point in the right-wing radicalization of Germany, many of the ideas propagated under the Weimar Republic actually had older roots. The *Sonderweg* theory has been rightly criticized for reducing the multi-facetedness and openness of history too much, but there is the danger of making the pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction. Admittedly, the rise of National Socialism is unimaginable without the First World War and the crisis-ridden development of Weimar Germany; yet many important aspects of the Nazi appeal can be understood adequately only within the context of a longer-term national culture. In this loose sense Nazism did indeed draw on older German traditions.

The Nazis were obviously excellent technicians of mass propaganda, but their success also depended on the fact that many Germans already tended towards their ideas; to a large extent, Hitler and his followers were preaching to the semi-converted (Welch 1995). If the success of a Nazi movement is not imaginable in

simply any country and any epoch, that raises the crucial question of what aspects of Germany's political culture made Nazi propaganda fall on such fruitful ground. My answer to this will take us back to the nineteenth century, to discover the roots of a forward-looking extreme Right, to the First World War and the 'ideas of 1914' as a decisive turning point, and to the Weimar Republic, where the Conservative Revolution and Nazism eventually triumphed in destroying Germany's first democracy and establishing a populist authoritarian regime.

Histories that deal with the intellectual roots of the Nazis are often greeted with deep suspicion, because early examples contained little more than a collection of quotations showing the existence of similar ideas in Germany's previous past. 'The exaltation of the heroic leader', as one such argument stated, 'goes back through Moeller van den Bruck, Spengler, Lamprecht, Chamberlain, Nietzsche, Lassalle, Rodbertus, and Hegel, back to Fichte's *Zwingherr zur Deutschheit* ... The Nazis said that might is right; Spengler said it; Bernhardt said it; Nietzsche said it; Treitschke had said as much; so had Haller before him; so had Novalis.'⁴ Studies of Germany's political culture have, however, long since moved much beyond such simplistic statements, and now situate the expressions of convictions within their historical context.⁵ They have also become much more careful about claiming causality and responsibility; just because one thing happened after the other does not mean there was a causal connection. Without denying the importance of other factors, however, thought processes clearly played an important role on the way to political actions. As Max Weber rightly argued, 'Interests (material and spiritual), not ideas dominate human action in the first instance. But the world-views, which are created through "ideas", have very often determined, like switch men of the tracks, the direction in which the dynamics of interests have steered the actions' (1988: 252). Humans live in a symbolic universe of meanings and representations, which shapes any experience of 'reality' and plays an important role in the motivation of actions.

This book does not argue for any deterministic causality between the ideas that it discusses and the rise of a radical Right. After all, intellectual and cultural history is better suited to discuss the meaning of events, not their causality. I am less concerned about direct political influences – this would require emphasis on political parties and right-wing politicians (see for example Schildt 1998) – than in ideas expressing desires for a right-wing turn. While they were most frequently expressed by an educated, predominantly Protestant middle class, whose mentality is thus most directly represented, its claim to express a more general mood of the age was not wholly unfounded, as is demonstrated by the role played by these ideas, often in vulgarized form, within the political visions of right-wing movements and parties (Stackelberg 1981: XI).

This book ends with the Nazi regime gaining and consolidating power. Such a fatal development – ending in war and genocide – raises difficult questions about responsibility and guilt. The answer is obvious with examples of direct political influence and temporal closeness; but with respect to other cases – especially con-

cerning those who did not see themselves as part of a radical political Right, but whose ideas came to influence the shape of right-wing visions of the future – it is much less clear-cut. The philosopher Karl Löwith, for example, rejects the issue of guilt about the historical consequences of ideas by stressing ‘the historical insight that “forerunners” have always prepared roads for others which they themselves did not travel’ (1986: 200). In contrast, the intellectual historian Martin Jay rightly points out that only some texts are open to specific kinds of reading. ‘The potential’, he argues, ‘for the specific distortions that do occur can be understood as latent in the original text’ (1988: 33). After all, for an intellectual history, what is more important than the intentions of the individuals is the historical potential of their expressions, even if they are far removed from a literal interpretation.

Historians like Hans Mommsen, who advocate a strictly functionalist interpretation of National Socialism, have tended to minimize the role of ideology by stressing its lack of originality. All its ideas, they argue, have long been current in many different political formations, and so cannot be used to explain the stunning rise of Nazism, in contrast to other right-wing organizations, at one particular point in history. Such an argument confuses, however, the difference between a necessary and a sufficient cause. Emphasizing the importance of ideology does not imply a claim to mono-causality. Mental dispositions and cultural formations had to combine with other factors to make the ‘seizure of power’ possible. Furthermore, the historical influence of an ideology has nothing to do with its originality. What needs to be explained is exactly how Nazism could ‘bring together and articulate a diverse ... ensemble of ideological appeals’, enabling it to reach out to a broader base of popular support than any other previous party in Germany (Eley 1996: 30).

An emphasis on ideas and cultural formations can provide important impulses for an understanding of Germany’s political development in the first half of the twentieth century, but the concepts put forward in the, in many ways, impressive general histories mentioned above do not tell the whole story. While the myth of a superior Reich was certainly important, the singular focus on it is too narrow. After all, the belief in the special mission of ‘our own country’ is part of all extreme nationalism, and a whole variety of myths of national superiority abound in German culture and the culture of other countries (Smith 2003, 2001: 144). The desire for a strong leader or a charismatic saviour is a very common reaction to a crisis situation, and does not answer the more far-reaching question, that of why an ‘unperson’ (Fest 1977: 697–741; Kershaw 1998: XXV) like Hitler (and not somebody else) became the object of such a desire. Only a more general comprehension of the political culture allows a historically specific understanding of the call for a particular leader or, for that matter, for a specific nationalist worldview or religion.

Above all, we need to understand not only the content and function of the right-wing mind set, but also its appeal. The cultural roots of National Socialism had such devastating consequences that the large majority of historians have nat-

urally concentrated on its political consequences rather than on its popular attractiveness, especially as many aspects of its ideology seem, from today's perspective, to be simplistic, far-fetched and blatantly self-serving. In contrast to such a functionalist outside perspective, the subjectivist dimension takes centre stage in my attempt at providing an explanation of why so many Germans tended towards the Right and Nazism. While they accepted dangerous ideas and repulsive actions, I argue that they often did so for reasons which appeared to them to be right and proper. Most damage was 'done in the name of high-sounding ideals and moral values'.⁶ This is not an attempt to play down or excuse the dark side of German history and its actors. Rather, it is the story of how 'normal people' were lured into following a highly dangerous political course for understandable, at times even seemingly harmless and idealistic, reasons. Such an endeavour means that we cannot keep these mentalities and ideologies at arm's length, but have to try to get into the minds of the people we study. 'What one wants to destroy', Walter Benjamin has claimed, 'one must not only know, one must, to do a thorough job, have felt it' (1966: 449).⁷ Instead of trying to identify a completely distinct tradition of the enemies of enlightened Western thought, as for example Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit have done in their book on 'Occidentalism', I want to show its deep connection with Western culture as a whole, even with ideas many share to this day. However, understanding has nothing to do with accepting, and the dangerous consequences of these mentalities must never be glossed over. This double perspective on the subjectivist attraction and on the political function⁸ promises not only a more differentiated view of the past but also lessons for the present, as it contributes to an understanding, more generally, of the lures offered by intolerant and violent fundamentalist political movements.

My main argument is that the desire for a *single communal nationalist faith* played a decisive role in the fatal attraction that Germans felt for the extreme Right. This covers the early attempts at creating a new collective faith out of art since the early nineteenth century, the gradual emergence of ideological political movements promoting the idea of a single communal faith, the radicalization in the First World War, the uncompromising break with existing conditions with the Conservative Revolutionaries of the Weimar Republic and the eventual success at winning the masses with National Socialism. During the whole period covered, Germany was deeply divided. The conservatives, rejecting a pluralistic society, were particularly aware of the many antagonistic milieus of regions, classes and religions. In the age of nationalism, Jews and other minorities were increasingly seen as un-German. Conservatives contrasted a divided society with their ideal of a harmonious ethnic community or *Volk*, in which a single communal faith would integrate the people within the nation and mobilize their support for national goals. Without such a communal world-view, they believed, Germany would be torn apart by clashes of socio-economic interest, ideological conflicts, class war and revolution. Such a nationalist faith had the chance to gain wider appeal because people were searching for a sense of identity and belonging,

a mental map for the modern world and metaphysical security. In a time of confusing ideological battles, the belief in the nation could appear as natural and beyond party differences.

In this book, the traditional conservatives, who attempted to maintain the status quo in a world of change, and the main conservative parties, whose policies were largely shaped by the material interests of their supporters, remain in the background; this struggle by conservative agricultural, and later also industrial, interests was largely defensive, and, as it did not help conservatism adapt to modern society, it was bound to fail in the long run. Instead, I examine those individuals, groups and movements which tried to preserve conservative values under new conditions. They realized the weaknesses of a static position. Could there be any realistic hope that the conservatism of the noble and agricultural classes would gain a wider appeal in a rapidly modernizing society, especially in competition with the different promises of progress? If traditional convictions had not been able to hinder the development towards a deeply divided society, why should they now become the cure? The ideological innovators I deal with were still conservative, because they held on to the belief of a hierarchically structured society with many social layers working together harmoniously, but they gradually came to be radical in rejecting current conditions and aiming for a different or alternative future.

My understanding of conservatism differs from the ‘purist’ definition of conservatism put forward most forcefully by Panajotis Kondylis.⁹ For him, conservatism is the ideology of the nobility in their fight first against the modern state – which does away with traditional law (including noble privileges) to gain direct access to all its citizens – and then against all the other parties of change. While I am persuaded by Kondylis’s argument that conservatism *emerged* as the ideology of the nobility, reducing this political ideology to its origins creates more problems than it solves. Not only does he break with the common understanding of the term, thereby over-estimating academics’ power to redefine language, but he also ignores the point that an ideology can widen its appeal. In the early nineteenth century, non-noble political Romantics joined the nobility in their praise of traditional law and feudalism. Many Germans – in particular civil servants and members of the middle class – came to accept the primacy of the community over the individual, patriarchal relationships between employers and employees, and the need for a hierarchically structured, authoritarian society. Instead of describing all this as liberalism, just because conservatism is supposed to have disappeared with the nobility (and thus ending up with a wholly diffuse definition of liberalism covering a whole range of antagonistic parties), it makes more sense to allow for conservatism to change and adapt to new circumstances.

In my terminology, ‘the Right’ is an umbrella term for all forms of conservatism and National Socialism. Traditional conservatism is an ideology closely related to the nobility (though also expressed by middle class intellectuals), which tries to defend traditional political and legal privileges against the rise of capitalism, constitutionalism and democratic participation. While traditional conserv-

atives thus fight a very specific battle, conservatism in a more general sense can take many different forms – but they all have in common the call for a hierarchically structured society. Against emancipatory demands for more equality, the term ‘conservatism’ covers all movements which insist on the need for authority and inequality. While traditional conservatives are predominantly backward-oriented, defensive and elitist, more adaptable conservatives can become populist and future-oriented in trying to develop an attractive vision of a hierarchical national community where all citizens would get their due. Their activities can lead to a historically successful conservative modernization, as for example in Prussia in response to the challenge of revolutionary France, but later they largely failed to provide adequate long-term answers to the problems German society faced. They were still part of a conservative Right, because they remained committed to authority and inequality, but at the same time they became revolutionary in trying to overturn existing conditions. The extreme Right is further characterized by an emphasis on populist mass politics (which also includes the promise of social change to win the masses), political violence and a glorification of heroism, war and expansionism. Nazism was thus a movement of the extreme Right.

The term ‘Conservative Revolution’ is a technical term for radical conservatives after the First World War who wanted to replace the Weimar Republic with some sort of authoritarian regime, but conservatives advocating revolutionary change emerged much earlier (to distinguish the specific name and the wider characterization, I shall write the latter in the lower case). Most of them did not have much of an immediate political impact, but they established a reservoir of concepts and ideas that larger movements could draw on in crisis-ridden times.

How can we characterize these conservative or right-wing revolutionaries? Above all, they tended to be extreme nationalists.¹⁰ The nation was glorified, it became the highest value on earth, it could demand unconditional loyalty. Service to the nation became the highest imperative, feeling part of the nation the highest value. Germans or the Germanic race were allegedly superior to other people; they were frequently seen as having been selected for a historical mission such as spreading their culture or acquiring a hegemony. When nationalism emerged in Germany in response to the Napoleonic invasion, it was a revolutionary idea wanting to replace the existing states and dynasties by a Germany which existed only in the nationalist imagination. Despite mostly wanting to limit political rights to propertied German men, it aimed, in principle, at giving every citizen a stake in the new nation through the rule of an egalitarian law, ownership of property, and some form of political participation. While traditional conservatism opposed these demands and the whole nationalist movement as a threat to the existing order, some ‘white revolutionaries’ gradually came to appreciate the usefulness of nationalism as an ideology of integration and mobilization. As such, a central aspect of the nineteenth century’s search for a single communal faith was the emergence of a conservative nationalism which tried to promote identification with the nation in order to maintain social order and

provide increased power in international conflicts through the conscription of soldiers prepared to fight for their country and a home front unquestioningly backing the war effort. As national identity built on the construction of a communal ethnic past and eternal national values, conservatism could easily find topics with which to connect. Both nationalism and conservatism stressed the need for an authentic link with the past and for a sense of community beyond political disputes. Although nationalism could obviously be defined politically in many different ways, it was easier for Monarchists to draw on historical traditions than for Democrats or Socialists to do so.

While Bismarck and others regarded nationalism as a means to maintain the monarchy and the social status quo, its critical dimension could not be erased. Elites used it to control the masses, but it could also be turned into an attack on the existing order. If nationalism aimed at promoting solidarity among its citizens and towards the nation as a whole, it needed to advocate a sense of identity and community. Such ideals, however, involved the possibility that they could be used as yardsticks for passing critical judgement on existing conditions. Thus an ethnic nationalism became, as we shall see, a key ideology for conservative revolutionaries to challenge the status quo. From Romanticism onwards, nationalists drew the picture of a communal past, of eternal ethnic traits and of a common destiny for the German people or *Volk*. Such an idealized image of the *Volk*, constructed, of course, according to different ideological preferences, was then used to criticize the alleged shortcomings of existing conditions. While nationalism demanded close emotional ties of communal solidarity, the reality was marked by divisions and conflict or, at best, by a pragmatic balancing of divergent socio-political forces. Such a *modus vivendi* or power balance came to be seen as deficient, and gave rise to the call for a community based on a glorified common past, a present national solidarity and a communal future destiny. The social scientist Ferdinand Tönnies, who pinpointed these notions and the sentiments connected with them with formidable precision in his work *Community and Civil Society* (first published in German 1887, engl. 2001), distinguished an allegedly natural community based on common heritage, warm solidarity and shared beliefs from a society held together by impersonal structures, in which members act solely according to their personal interest. While Tönnies merely hinted at his wish for the regeneration of a community spirit, others were more outspoken: the call for the creation of a true community became a central rallying cry for a radical Right in their challenge to the existing order. From the beginning, conservative nationalism thus had the potential to become revolutionary in its attempt to realize their ideal of a nation.

As nationalism preceded nation building, Germany's national identity focused less on a political entity (although territorial structures such as the former Holy Roman Empire continued to play a role), but on a communal past, a communal culture and a communal race. Before German unification in 1871, it was hotly debated whether Germany should include Austria and other territories, and many ethnic nationalists such as the Pan-Germans regarded the newly founded

Reich as deficient because it did not include everyone they regarded as Germans. The difference between long-established political states like England and France, which gradually acquired a national identity within the existent state, and nationalist movements which mobilized a feeling of ethnic identity to form a nation-state, has motivated the distinction of types of nationalism. As early as 1907, the eminent German historian Friedrich Meinecke, in his book *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, contrasted the German *Kulturnation*, where Germanness is dependent on sharing the same cultural past and speaking the same language, with the older *Staatsnationen*, where the nation is defined by its territory and citizenship by place of birth and residence. The former stresses a shared cultural background, the latter, active participation in the same political entity. Influenced by Nazism, the historian Hans Kohn (1967) used a similar distinction to explain the difference between a more democratic development in Western and Eastern Europe, with Germany being classified as part of the East. He distinguished between a voluntaristic nationalism, where the rational calculation to belong together constitutes the basis of the nation, and an organicist nationalism based on a common origin of culture or race. While the former sees the nation as a voluntary association of individuals, the latter regards it as a seamless, organic whole where the collective is more fundamental than the individual. The former is based on the idea of a rational contract between individuals to work together; for the latter, belonging is an individual's historical fate.

These dichotomies are too crude and polarized to describe any nationalism fully, as all nationalism tends to contain both elements. Apart from states constructed as bureaucratic units by colonial rulers, nations tend to build on some ethnic core; this ethnic core, however, does not automatically lead to the emergence of a nation, but needs to be mobilized, shaped and constructed.¹¹ A liberal or progressive nationalism in Western Europe also tended to believe in a communal ethnic past and national traits, while the allegedly 'organicist' nationalism of Central and Eastern Europe frequently combined with calls for more liberal or democratic rights. In territorial discussions, ethnic and non-ethnic arguments were also used by the same nationalists. The dream of a future Germany, for example, was deeply connected with the call for a fundamental change to the political system of rule, ethnic arguments were largely rejected when minorities within the German lands like Poles or Danes wanted to go their own ways, and notions of a hegemonic medieval Reich were used as early as the revolution of 1848 to legitimate territorial demands: 'the Netherlands, the Flemish part of Belgium, Alsace and Lorraine, the Balkans, Bohemia, Moravia, the Polish-speaking Prussian province of Posen, Trieste and southern Tyrol – all were now declared part and parcel of the German nation, even if only a minority of their population was German-speaking. Germany was to stretch as far as possible from the North and Baltic seas in the north to the Adriatic and Black seas in the south' (Berger 2004: 57. See also Baycroft and Hewitson 2006). More generally, every nationalism, is, as John Breuilly reminds us, 'a form of politics' (1993: 1), and

cultural or ethnic arguments are obviously never free of political bias and purpose.

The fact that it is impossible to draw a clear line between a civic nationalism on the one hand and an ethnic or cultural one on the other, has led historians like Stefan Berger and Mark Hewitson to reject the distinction completely. While I accept that, for example, Hans Kohn's value-charged distinction is too crude to do justice to the many variants of nationalism present in any given country, I still think that it is useful to distinguish between nationalisms emerging within an existing state and nationalisms calling for the creation of a new nation-state. While in both situations a whole variety of national convictions can emerge, it stands to reason that the latter type tends to use more ethnic and cultural arguments. Such a distinction thus remains, I believe, useful if the forms are understood as ideal types, which do not match reality, but help towards a more systematic understanding. German nationalists, who had to find reasons to justify the call for a unified Germany, which would overcome existing political boundaries, particularly stressed the importance of an ethnic heritage, eternal national characteristics, and the need for a single communal faith in order to unite all true Germans. While it was for a long time connected with a liberal agenda, this did not stop nationalist enthusiasm over a conservative unification in 1871. A tendency towards ethnic and cultural arguments was even more pronounced, when conservatives started to argue in nationalist terms, as they wanted to promote a sense of community and loyalty to the nation without altering the political and social status quo. In such an emphasis of a right-wing German nationalism on cultural, and often racial, homogeneity, it tended towards stressing the community over the individual, ethnicity over the state, communal characteristics over political will. Right-wing German nationalism therefore clearly leant towards what Anthony Smith names 'ethnic nationalism'. In much of the thinking considered here, the nation appears as a community of common descent and a common culture. The ethnic community or *Volks* is not seen to be based on free will and choice, but to determine the members of the community prior to any rational decision. Humans, it is emphasized, are born into a community. Therefore they share collective traits and a collective destiny, whether they like it or not.

In line with the 'classical' interpretation of scholars like Fritz Stern (1961), Kurt Sontheimer (1983) and George Mosse (1981),¹² Claudia Koonz takes the idea of an ethnic nationalism one step further by speaking of 'ethnic fundamentalism'. She interprets Nazism as a fundamentalism because it allegedly 'claims to defend an ancient spiritual heritage against the corrosive values of industrialized, urban society' (2003: 13). While the comparison with fundamentalism is a fruitful suggestion, such a characterization as essentially anti-modern or atavistic ignores the many modern elements within Nazism and the German Right as a whole (and indeed in other fundamentalist movements), which scholars have increasingly recognized over the last two decades.¹³ Of course, many right-wing nationalists praised the Germanic past; yet, in reality, the extremist ones showed

little respect for handed-down traditions and institutions.¹⁴ Instead, not unlike the progressive forces, they wanted to realize their own visions of the future, largely using the past as a shopping centre where they could pick whatever they fancied. The politically decisive conservatives were conscious of the fact that the historical clock cannot be turned back, but they wanted to combine their socio-cultural convictions with the modern world of industry and technology. Furthermore, the sheer multitude of right-wing beliefs emerging after the middle of the nineteenth century reveals that these did not grow out of a solid tradition, but instead were subjective, wilful constructions. Conservatives claimed that it was only difficult times which forced them into adopting new views and measures, but this is simply part of the conservative ideology. In presenting themselves as purely reactive, they claimed to be apolitical and non-theoretical at heart, forced only by desperate conditions to enter the political arena. In truth, they not only competed with the left, frequently taking inspiration from the tactics of their political enemy, but they also developed their own hopes and ambitions for a revolutionary change to what they regarded as a better hierarchical and harmonious nation. Conservatism did not only win support from the losers in the modernization process, but also harnessed the aspirations of many who were comfortably placed in modern society. It participated in the glorification of modern means, in the progressive belief that human will can improve the world and in the aesthetic cult of self-realization. Against the idea of an atavistic 'ethnic fundamentalism', I therefore try to show that right-wing nationalism in Germany is not an anti-modern, but a modern political movement.

Similarly, I do not see that Jeffrey Herf's widely used concept of 'reactionary modernism' overcomes the difficulties connected with the multi-faceted nature of the German Right, including Nazism. While his insistence that parts of the Right reconciled themselves with modern technology since the First World War (1984: 1 f.) has been historiographically important, he does not recognize that this trend goes much further back in time. In addition, Herf reduces the highly diverse nature of National Socialism to one fundamental characteristic. But while the Nazis were certainly prepared to use modern means, their success depended on their wide appeal to very different groups. What was new, in comparison to other right-wing movements, was not their openness to technology but their success in presenting a vision of the future broad enough to rally together extremists and moderate conservatives, arrogant functional elites and large parts of the lower middle class, workers, agrarian romantics and engineers. Finally, Herf's conviction that the radical Right was reactionary is problematic (Rohkrämer 1999b). Of course, the Right rejected liberal and democratic ideas, but their more realistic, innovative and historically influential thinkers did not suggest a return to medieval or absolutist political systems or ideologies. Instead, they searched for innovative ways of integrating the masses into a hierarchical society by formulating a new communal faith. Their visions of the future incorporated elements of the past, but also some present ideals, and the arrangement as a whole was new, motivated by current concerns. It could contain the promise of security through

advocating established and familiar conditions, but it could also appeal to the wish for change. The traditional and pragmatic elements are too important in right-wing thought to call the ideology a utopia, but it certainly contained utopian elements – which, I shall argue, were crucial for its popular appeal.

During the last decade, the term ‘political religion’ has experienced a renaissance. The work of Eric Voegelin (1996, 1952) in particular has proved an inspiration, but that of Raymond Aron, Jakob Talmon and others has also been significant (Maier 1996 ff.). George Mosse (1975) was a key figure in applying the term to German nationalism, a large number of German scholars, most convincingly Klaus Vondung (1971) and Sabine Behrenbeck (1996), have put this concept into the centre of their studies, and Michael Burleigh emphasizes it in his history of the Third Reich. As the term ‘faith’ in the title of the present book indicates, I agree that right-wing nationalism took on many characteristics of a religion: it tried to explain the whole individual and collective existence, to prescribe an allegedly right way of life, and to offer an ultimate meaning in the existence of the nation. Some values, objects and people appeared as sacred: the homeland was regarded as holy, every snippet from the Germanic past was valued, historical figures were idolized in public ceremonies, monuments were built to recall the great moments of the past. Awe-inspiring rituals of worship brought together the community of believers in nationalist services. Exemplary figures from the past, such as Hermann the Cheruscan, Luther, Frederick the Great and Bismarck, were seen as saviours, and the potentially eternal existence of the race or nation was offered as a way of overcoming death. While there was no promise of an individual life after death, many religions – ranging from that of ancient Greece to a number of modern Protestant theologies – have not done so either. And many believed in the special value of Germans as superior beings chosen for a historical mission, which, if accomplished, was supposed to lead towards a new paradise on earth. A cult of heroism promised an eternal existence in the memory of the nation for those who died for their fatherland. For the hard core of extreme nationalists, this ideology could undoubtedly gain the quality of a religion, if we define religion in the sense of Emile Durkheim as ‘a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community ... all those who adhere to them’ (1915: 47). They desired to overcome the tension between religious and worldly authority – so fundamental for European history since the Middle Ages – by having a single communal faith with a total scope. It was supposed to fulfil metaphysical needs, inspire cultural production, provide a moral code of conduct and be the fundamental guide to all social and political activities.

However, there are also problems with classifying extreme nationalism as a political religion.¹⁵ While nationalism could reach levels of religious intensity, it could also be much more pragmatic in trying to promote social stability and collective strength. As it could build on very powerful emotions, it was not simply, as the older historiography had it, a manipulative tool to integrate the masses, but

it did also serve that function. The idealistic search for a communal faith was deeply intertwined, as we shall see, with the political will for a single communal world-view as a strategy for stabilizing and strengthening the nation.

Some zealots wanted to turn nationalism into a religion with its own rituals and symbols, but others, especially the politically more successful movements, preferred a more open and multi-faceted set of beliefs. While a minority of extremists wanted to replace Christianity with a Germanic religion, most – including Hitler – envisaged, or at least left space for, a more pragmatic ‘division of labour’: nationalism would determine all worldly values and actions, but Christianity could still provide a metaphysical answer to the question of personal redemption.

The term ‘political religion’ is too narrow, because it does not account for the variations within the drive for a single communal nationalist faith. It belittles the many pragmatic arrangements with the world, the frequent emphasis on scientific foundations in nationalist thought, and the will for political change. Right-wing nationalism proved popular, because it was an ideological field in which followers had to adhere to some key beliefs and taboos, but were also invited to make up their own ideas within the many undefined areas. Although nationalism stated a belief system for worldly matters, it left (apart from a radical fringe) transcendental questions to a vaguely defined Christian faith. Religious symbols and forms were frequently used simply to create a sacred or uplifting atmosphere, in other words for the effect only. The individual will to create and manipulate was often, as we shall see, stronger than the wish to adhere to a sacred truth.

The term ‘political religion’ also conceals the close cooperation between nationalism and German Protestantism, which became, in many ways, a politicized religion in support of German nationalism. Crudely put, Eric Voegelin and others have described the following process. Modernization was accompanied by secularization; such a loss of religion left a dangerous void; people felt disoriented, thus becoming susceptible to the lures of ‘political religions’ offering a clear-cut world-view. Historians of religion, however, have revealed a much more complex story in which religion is not simply a passive victim of modernization (Lehmann 1997; McLeod 2000). Most important for our topic is Protestantism, because Catholicism as the other dominant religion in Germany largely maintained its strength and distance from secular ideologies. Protestant theology, in contrast, was very much part of modern debates. Questions about the status of the Bible were raised less by atheists than by theologians trying to develop an up-to-date faith by squaring Christianity with modern knowledge. They discovered the historicity of the biblical text, noted contradictions between its different parts and had increasing difficulties believing in miracles. Many came to see the Bible as a collection of human contemplations about the godly, thus essentially equating its status with other mythical or historical stories. If the Bible was no longer seen as the one exclusive revelation of God, then God could also be discovered in other ways: ‘in art, literature, or scholarship’ (Williamson 2004: 15), in nature, history and political events. Jesus could appear as an exemplary figure, turning

Christianity into the call for an ethical life. Serious doubts about the Bible as literally the word of God thus opened the path for Protestantism to combine with many other beliefs and political convictions of the time. Church attendance dropped throughout the nineteenth century, first among the educated middle class, then in particular among urban workers, but the more worldly beliefs frequently remained deeply connected with a Protestant orientation. Protestantism was open to right-wing nationalism, as the church had long been close to the state, and many nationalists came to regard Luther and the Reformation as genuine parts of German ethnic identity. While secular ideologies gained religious attributes, we can also see a politicization of Protestantism.

‘Political religion’ is thus not a wholly appropriate concept for the phenomenon studied here, but it is useful to highlight one important aspect: that nationalism could become, for ardent believers, the ultimate source of truth and an unquestioned authority. Some, indeed, adhered to it with unquestioning faith. Like a religion, extreme nationalism claimed to hold the truth and to set the rules for the right way of life. It demanded sacrifice, even the ultimate sacrifice of giving one’s life for the fatherland. Although it tolerated the Christian belief in personal redemption, it claimed ultimate authority in the political sphere. In earthly matters, Christianity was to fall in line with nationalism, not vice versa. The churches were still the prime consoler in questions of personal suffering and death, but politics was increasingly governed by ideologies with religious overtones. While Catholicism at least maintained an extra-national authority with the Pope and a strong political wing with the Centre Party, politically Protestantism largely moved in the wake of nationalism.

The term ‘communal faith’, which I have decided to use in this book, deliberately alludes to the many religious connotations of the search for a shared world-view in Germany between 1800 and 1945 without being as restrictive as terms like ‘political’ or ‘secular’ religion. It encompasses attempts to develop political religions in the strict sense of the word, but also other (for example, pseudo-scientific) beliefs in an absolute truth, the desire for a new communal mythology or the claim to absolute authority of one world-view in the public sphere, while allowing for a variety of different personal religious convictions as long as they are compatible with the public world-view. *In extremis* it thus means the totalitarian desire for a shared faith from which a single communal purpose emerges; in a more open sense it tends towards tolerating a variety of personal convictions, as long as they come together in a single communal political mission or a civic religion. From an analytical point of view it is obviously not ideal to have such a loose term, but exactly this openness makes it more adequate to encompass the historical reality, which does not fall neatly into the two categories, but is largely situated in the space in-between. Even the expressions of individual historical actors rarely take a wholly consistent position; it is much more characteristic for the search for a single communal faith to shift and fluctuate in the middle ground. The general term is thus used to show that we deal with a single historical phenomenon, while the text will draw a more nuanced

picture by paying attention to communalities *and* differences within this historical tradition.

Conservatives had their own clear political agenda, but came to claim (and believe) that they spoke in the name of the nation. Personal convictions shaped the content of nationalism, but the belief in acting in accordance with the values of the past or with eternal Germanic traits could give it an apolitical aura, which, for the believers, protected it from critical scrutiny. Nationalism claimed to rediscover an eternal German truth, while formulating a contemporary political agenda. Of course, every faith is reinterpreted according to current conditions, but a sacred text like the Bible and a long institutional tradition put obstacles to or limits on self-serving reinterpretations. In contrast, nationalism is highly flexible and can adapt to a wide range of purposes. The combination of political ideology and a semi-religious claim to truth made such a world-view particularly dangerous. While different religious beliefs about transcendental questions can coexist without conflict, right-wing nationalism was much more intolerant in fighting for a homogeneous society according to its own conservative ideals of hierarchy and order.

Traditionally, studies of conservatism have accepted its own self-understanding that it tries to preserve old, stable and secure structures. The Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal captured this sense when characterizing Conservative Revolutionaries in the Weimar Republic: ‘They do not search for freedom, but bonds [*Bindung*] ... Never was a German battle for freedom more fervent and persistent than this battle for real compulsion in a thousand souls of this nation’ (1927: 27). But can a freely chosen compulsion be a true compulsion? This brings us back to the question of whether conservatism grew out of the past or, like progressive political forces, was a new political movement shaped by current concerns and oriented towards the future. The same point has been debated with respect to nationalism. Like conservatism, nationalism frequently draws on the past. It stresses the importance of one communal language, old sagas and myths, folk traditions like songs and dances, costumes and festivities. All this can play an important role in shaping a national identity. In contrast to the current view of German conservatism, however, the idea that nationalism naturally emerges from an ethnic identity has been largely discredited since the 1980s. Traditions have often (to follow Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger) been ‘invented’, or at least, according to Koshar (2000), been framed for a particular contemporary purpose through a specific ‘historical gaze’. In the case of Germany, at least, the spoken language used to consist of so many dialects that Germans from different regions could hardly communicate; the fairy tales allegedly revealing a folk culture were selected by Romantics and substantially changed for publication; and seemingly old customs can frequently be shown to have a surprisingly brief history. While it would go too far to deny an older sense of ethnic belonging articulated since the early modern period and more intensely in the eighteenth century, early nationalists played a key role in mobilizing this for current purposes: a general

sense of Patriotism came to be mobilized for political purposes. ‘Small circles of educator-intellectuals ... were intent on purifying and mobilizing “the people” through an appeal to the community’s alleged ethnic past. To do this, they had to provide cognitive maps and historical moralities for present generations ... In this way, they hoped to transform a backward traditional ethnic community into a dynamic, but vernacular, political nation’ (Smith 2001a: 68 f.).

What Anthony Smith describes for nationalism in general also applies to German right-wing nationalists: they used history for present purposes. They did not accept the past as a restriction to their actions, but picked from history whatever served their current concerns and their future goals. This makes the movement modern and potentially revolutionary (Schmitt 1982).

Nations are based on the conscious belief in communalities. ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist’ (Gellner 1964: 169). Nationalism emphasizes a communal past and a shared political will in trying to create a sense of collective political identity. This is clearly the case in Germany, where nationalism did not emerge within an existing state, but set out to create it. When there is no state, there can be no national past. A history of the German state had to be constructed as much as a political identity.

Nationalism did not emerge and evolve spontaneously, but was developed, shaped and promoted by a comparatively small elite of writers and artists, scholars like philologists, historians and philosophers, public intellectuals and politicians. These individuals were not, however, cool political strategists, but for the most part true believers. The later right-wing nationalism has frequently been analysed as a tool in the hand of the ruling elites, serving, it has been argued, to integrate the population, thus avoiding political upheaval and furthering a strong Germany (see above all Wehler 1985; Breuilly 1993, 2001). But even then nationalism was not simply a political tool, but first of all an answer to the elites’ own anxieties and desires. And even if nationalism did come to be used as a political tool, it could only fulfil this function because it drew on a communal culture and resonated with the emotion of society at large. The political function of the ideology cannot be separated from its cultural content and popular appeal.

If previous interpretations have considered the political attraction of Conservative nationalism, it has largely been explained as a response to a crisis situation: disoriented and fearful, people looked for a clear-cut world-view; lonely in the anonymity of modernity, they sought a sense of belonging. An obvious historical example for this would be the view that the world economic crisis was a necessary prerequisite for the meteoric rise of Nazi votes – but many other situations were more ambivalent. Public intellectuals and a cultural avant-garde diagnosed a crisis of meaning before the First World War, but both the war and the rise of a new populist nationalism actually occurred, as we shall see, during an economic boom, and were maintained, in large part, by a middle class optimistic about its future role in society (Eley 1986: 266). Nationalism expressed itself in anxiety and fear, but more often it was marked by a jubilant and opti-

mistic tone. More generally, any diagnosis of a spiritual crisis is, to a large part, dependent on the disappointment of a positive vision which is regarded as achievable (otherwise the sense of crisis turns into a mood of doom and despair). The frequent diagnosis of dangerous social divisions corresponds with the hope for a harmonious national community; using Jews or Marxists as scapegoats, for example, corresponds with the hope that a community of like-minded people would be harmonious. Even negative expressions of fear and lament tend to imply the optimistic belief in a positive alternative.

Nationalism could serve as an anchor in seemingly timeless ethnic traits for people feeling the threatening force of change. However, the reliance on a traditional faith like Christianity could have served the same function. Why did a growing number of people feel that something was lacking in traditional church doctrine, finding more life-relevant orientation in a new worldly ideology instead? Was the faith in personal redemption alone experienced as not wholly sufficient because even conservatives were infected by the desire to improve the world? To some extent, old answers lost in plausibility in the age of science, historicism and exposure to a growing multitude of different convictions, but nationalism did not mark a step towards an intellectually superior or more adequate world-view. Instead, I try to show that right-wing nationalism thrived, because it seemed to provide answers more relevant to the concerns and desires of the time than Christianity did. Nationalists spoke more about their enthusiasm and vision for the future than about their anxiety. They drew horror pictures of danger and decline, but largely in order to justify their own political remedies; and they frequently enjoyed the battles to realize their aims. Thus, while it is always possible to see signs of crisis, right-wing extremism did not decline during prosperous and optimistic periods like the turn of the twentieth century (Blackbourn 2003: 204–214; Rohkrämer 1999: 38–55).

All this is not to deny the importance of a sense of crisis for the story told here; but I shall argue that previous studies have significantly neglected the positive impulses. Many of the intellectual pioneers enjoyed the act of creating a new nationalist faith, and they frequently presented their ideas in catching imagery. From Richard Wagner's operas – which even succeed in beautifying the murderous 'twilight of the gods' by giving it heroic grandeur – to Nazism, it is easy to discern what Albert Speer rightly described as 'a striking need for beauty', a stress on the 'idyllic, the pure, the unscathed' (2002: 585). Although Nazism was certainly full of murderous hatred, its propaganda and rituals largely stressed the vision of a happily united *Volk* in a mighty Reich. While anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism were always present, propaganda emphasized heroism and grandeur, harmony and wealth.¹⁶ It was not a desperate struggle for survival that was mainly stressed, though it undoubtedly played a key role in Hitler's world-view; instead, the emphasis was on the beauty of ideals and the joy of realizing them. How else can we explain the widespread enthusiastic sense of a national reawakening in 1933?

Aesthetics played a key role in the attempts of revolutionary conservatives to construct a nationalist vision. It was only natural that nationalists, intent on celebrating the nation, were drawn to all forms of creative expression. Artists seemed to be best suited to envisaging and disseminating nationalist ideals. While right-wing ideas about the future were often vague and inconsistent, aesthetic images could give expression to the underlying coherent sentiment. Political doctrines were often not worked out in detail, or details threatened the popular appeal. Thus it was wise to stick to a more general aesthetic expression.

Conservative revolutionaries wanted to create a world-view, a new political faith for all Germans. How could that be achieved in the modern age of rationalization and specialization? The obvious starting point is the expressive-aesthetic sphere (Klinger 1995). For most parts of its existence, art had served the glorification of God and communal ideals as the metaphoric expression of the sacred; should it now be nothing but a series of trends or a self-centred *l'art pour l'art*? The arts have never fitted into the modern trend towards differentiation and specialization, but continue to address all issues of life: dreams and desires, anxieties and hopes, political critique and utopian visions, social norms and the religious meaning of life. Their holistic orientation can appear anachronistic, but they are clearly modern and have become the prime vehicle for individuals to express their personal ideals and ambitions for shaping the world. At least since Romanticism, the rationalization, specialization and disenchantment of the world has been accompanied by artistic expressions of the desire for intimate communities, an emotional relationship to the world around us and a sense of belonging in the stream of time. More specifically, many artists and their audiences have felt that modernity has gained more and more means, but has lost any sense of an overarching purpose. Hence the call for a 'new mythology' or faith emerged, in a search for deeper meaning in the modern world (Frank 1982). A future-oriented right-wing nationalism could build on this in formulating its own dreams and goals. Personal creations in the aesthetic sphere wanted to establish themselves as a new faith. The artist's individual creation was aimed at rising to become a collective national myth, in particular when he saw himself as a medium through which a national soul found its most appropriate contemporary expression.

Aesthetic entertainment could serve as compensation or distraction, thus promoting acceptance of the hardship of life. This could be a convenient strategy in trying to stabilize existing conditions, but attempts to construct a communal faith served quite a different function. They constructed aesthetic counter-worlds which claimed to be the true world waiting for its realization. As the neo-Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch pointed out, these two functions of aesthetic artefacts – providing a consoling surface or compensation for a harsh reality and challenging existing conditions through contrasting them with a utopian counter-world – tend to be closely intertwined. Utopias can turn into mere day-dreams if the belief in their realizability is lacking, and ideologies intended to stabilize the status quo draw their popular appeal from positive visions, which can gain an unintended dynamic if people come to demand their realization. While Marxism's

self-understanding as a science inhibited German Socialists from indulging in utopian anticipations of a classless society, conservative revolutionaries worked on giving their dreams collective aesthetic expression to provide popular visions for the future. Thus Ernst Bloch rightly stressed that the popular appeal of the radical right becomes comprehensible only when we accept that their visions were more than 'mere ideology', but also opened a *Glaubensraum*, that is, a space for beliefs in a better future. Right-wing nationalism could provide the hope for a harmonious ethnic community united under a single faith to those who were sick of the 'dreariness and inhumanity' of modern society. As modernists preached the inevitability or even desirability of adapting to the 'iron cage' (Max Weber) of the bureaucratic, scientific and technological world, conservatives criticised the 'contradiction between the mechanical world' and a 'living, complete human being' (Bloch 1991: 196 f., 1985: 58), contrasting it with their hope for a strong and heroic national community where everybody would be filled by a sense of purpose and worth.

A future-oriented right-wing nationalism was predominantly carried by an educated Protestant middle class (Catholic conservatism is an important, but separate, story beyond the scope of this book¹⁷). The conservative artists and thinkers largely emerged from this milieu, and they found the most immediate resonance there. From Luther onwards, mainstream Protestantism had stressed that Christians owed obedience to a state which served a godly function in providing law and order. In Prussia and other states, Protestantism was basically *the* state religion, operating in close connection with the political authorities. The king was the highest church authority, and ministers had to read out official political announcements in church. Professors and grammar school teachers, church ministers and higher civil servants, who all played a central role in formulating and spreading nationalism, needed a conservative orientation if they were to pursue their careers successfully. A cultural elite largely growing out of this social milieu saw it as its mission to provide spiritual leadership for the mass of the population. Their distance from traditional Christianity grew, but simultaneously they rejected a purely secular popular culture, trying instead to maintain a sense of the sacred and a higher purpose in life.¹⁸ The growing importance of the propertied middle class and of practical vocations like engineering, which meant a certain loss of status and influence for the humanistically educated, made them even more determined to stress the importance of spiritual values like individual civilization through a general education (*Bildung*), idealism and a deeper meaning to life.¹⁹

The predominance of one social milieu does not diminish the importance of this tradition. Educated Protestants (or lapsed Protestants) expressed and shaped the world-view of a functional elite which played a crucial role in promoting Conservatism and Nazism. Even if some of the individuals or small groups studied here were not immediately successful in spreading their message during their own lifetimes, they established a reservoir of ideas and images which could

show its mass appeal later, when it was adopted (at a more suitable time) in a watered-down version by populist right-wing movements.²⁰

The members of the educated middle class not only played an important role in right-wing activities themselves, but they also exerted an influence far beyond their number. Naturally this influence is not quantifiable, but it is clear that the high social prestige of a general education or *Bildung* gave their voices extra weight (Bollenbeck 1996). They were the most important communicative multipliers in society, strongly influencing public opinion through their role in church, education and published opinion. Of course, a wide variety of opinions existed in the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. Thus the educated middle class did not speak with one voice; nor could it 'sell' just any idea. But, as we shall see, within their circles many of the ideas emerged, which then came to be adopted by mass movements including National Socialism (Sonthheimer 1983: 283 f.).

Ideas not only played their role in the historical process, but they can also enable us to comprehend the mentality which succumbed to the lure of right-wing extremism (Stackelberg 1981: XI). Engaging with the individuals who developed right-wing ideals in the most consistent, elaborate and comprehensible ways opens up an avenue towards understanding a political epoch whose thinking has become strange to us. In addition, it is hoped that close examination of an aspect of European history, in which political faith played a crucial historical role, can contribute towards gaining a better understanding, as will be shown in the conclusion, of the highly dynamic relationship between religion and politics in today's world outside of Europe.

For some decades no monograph has been published dealing with this topic as a whole. In the present book, a wealth of more specific studies, many of which are available only in German, is made more easily accessible.²¹ Its main purpose, however, is to suggest a new interpretation. In contrast to the older, in many ways ground-breaking and still valuable works, it argues that right-wing extremism was not anti-modern, but developed its own visions of an alternative modernity in attempting to construct a new communal German faith. Aesthetic images played a key role, initially in the realm of high culture, but increasingly moving away from it to formulate political visions of integration and mobilization in populist ways, including political slogans and promises with wide appeal, eye-catching posters and films, spectacular rallies and rituals. Even in political actions such as the celebration of labour or the presentation of war as a short *Blitzkrieg*, the creation of appealing aesthetic images was a central concern.²²

These nationalist representations could have an anti-modern appearance, because they used motives from an ethnic past and upheld holistic ambitions, but they were not essentially different to other modern forms of aesthetic productions. Right-wing conservatism did not want to turn back the historical clock; it did not even want to combine modern technical means with a political return to the past. Nor was it simply a panic reaction to the stress caused by a time of rapid change. Instead, it used historical opportunities for realizing its own ideals. It

promoted an alternative modernity, trying to combine industrial society with social harmony and a strictly hierarchical and authoritarian political order. In addition, the label 'irrational', which has frequently been thrown about in trying to distinguish the ideology of the German Right from more moderate and humane political opinions, usually does not mean more than the interpreter's strong rejection of a particular political position and any possible reason for supporting it. After all, most human activities are to a large extent non-rational, and all political movements appeal to the emotions as well as to the mind. Like other political ideologies, the Right tried to serve the interest of their followers – for example, by promising to maintain social privileges in a hierarchical structure, to increase material security through the control of an unlimited capitalism or to make all Germans profit from a more powerful fatherland – but they also realized that they had to present more general emotional visions to be politically successful. Irrationality is thus not a distinguishing feature for the German Right. The question is rather: to what emotions did they appeal, and to what effect?

The danger was not the irrational character of the Right's ideology and propaganda, but its desire for a harmonious society united in a single communal faith and political purpose. This ambition stood for the attempt to overcome the irreducible plurality of modern society. As a consequence, citizens and political movements who did not seem to fit into this image of a tightly knit national community became targets of violent aggression – even more so when they came to be blamed for the failure in achieving that unrealistic goal. The danger was also that Germany's alleged superiority was stressed to such an extent that ruthless expansionism and an egotistical rule over others would appear justified for the improvement of humanity as a whole. Lastly, there was the further danger that this nationalist faith would immunize against critiques and doubts, partly because democracy and freedom of speech were rejected, and partly because a specific political opinion was given the religious aura of transcendental truth. Such a righteous belief in a polarized world-view of right and wrong turned the political opponent into an existential enemy and demon.

While some of the points I want to make with this book could have been demonstrated more powerfully in a more detailed study of either the nineteenth or the twentieth century, I have decided against that, because the challenge of combining two quite distinct periods raises revealing issues. A study trying to show that the search for a single communal faith was consistently at the heart of German right-wing ambitions must deal with the period before and after the First World War to show crucial continuities despite dramatic changes. Within the continued search for a communal faith, the actors became increasingly political, leaving the realm of high culture and formulating visions of integration and mobilization in increasingly populist ways. Trying to mark their distance from naive, allegedly 'romantic' notions, the Right disguised its desires behind a new matter-of-factness or 'cool conduct' (Gründel 1933; Herbert 1991; Lethen 2002). But this

book will try to show that despite all these developments the dream of a nation united in a single faith did not lose its fatal attraction.

The book follows a chronological structure with the aim of showing the elements of continuity within change. It begins with the emergence of the desire for a single conservative faith in the nineteenth century, deals with the First World War as a deep dividing line producing a much more extremist political Right in the Weimar Republic, and ends with National Socialism as the right-wing movement which was able to reach out to the mass of the population on a wholly unprecedented scale. One can thus distinguish three distinct periods. The development from one to the other was by no means inevitable, but the vision of a community united in a single faith played a central role throughout the whole historical development.

A study emphasizing the political influence of an ideology needs to demonstrate the appearance of the same core idea in a wide variety of sources, particularly ones with a high circulation (see, for example, the publications of Jost Hermand and George Mosse). In contrast to this, the subjective appeal of an ideology can best be revealed through a close reading of a limited number of complex sources. I have therefore been selective in the discussion of individuals, but have used the study of social movements to show that those selected were not unrepresentative. Of course, it is possible to argue about any selection, but I hope that my choice will become plausible throughout the text. While the limitation of sources will allow for some detailed interpretation, the purpose is not to discuss works in all their complexity, but to show their place in the long search for a single communal faith.

Notes

1. Particularly useful, also in connection with right-wing traditions leading up to National Socialism, are Bracher 1984; Kershaw 1998 and 2000, Evans 2003, and Wehler 2003.
2. Burleigh 2006 was published after the manuscript for this book was completed. It is thus not systematically integrated into this study, but I do not see that it challenges my main arguments.
3. For an important recent account trying to historicize the *Sonderweg*, see Geyer and Jarausch 2002: Introduction and Ch. 1.
4. Rohan D. Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism, 1783–1933* (New York, 1968), 276–277. Similarly William M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (Boston, 1941), whose title expresses its programme.
5. The focus on culture and ideas does not imply a disregard of other aspects of history. On the contrary; social, economic and political histories offer important information to help situate ideas and understand their function. Since the early 1960s, historians like George Mosse, Fritz Stern, Kurt Sontheimer and Karl Dietrich Bracher have done so. Thomas Nipperdey's

work, in particular, offers a good example of integrating careful attention to culture and ideas into a general history.

6. Stackelberg 1981: XI. I thus reject Goldhagen's argument that Germans were drawn to Nazism by an extreme anti-Semitism. His opinion cannot account for the toning down of anti-Semitism in Nazi propaganda in the early 1930s, when the party achieved its greatest electoral successes. Even after 1933, open anti-Semitic propaganda was the exception (Koonz 2003). Robert Gellately makes a much stronger point when he stresses that the Germans who backed Hitler were fully aware of, and appreciated, the regime's terror, because it seemed to guarantee law and order. Gellately shows convincingly how much Germans knew about the terror and slave labour system, but does this mean they regarded it as a positive feature? From the beginnings, National Socialism showed its racist and militarist character, and its supporters at least tolerated these policies. However, this does not mean that those ideas and activities we rightly identify with Nazism were also the points which Germans at the time found most attractive. The Nazi elite largely shared Hitler's world-view, but the wider attraction was largely due to other factors, even to Hitler's emphasis on peace in the first years of the Third Reich. If terror was welcomed in wider circles, a key motivation was that it was seen to serve the creation of a harmonious nation united in a single communal faith.
7. In the same vein, Krockow argues that Hitler is 'a possibility inherent in humans, that is in us'. Accepting this, he no longer appears as 'ridiculous' or 'monstrous', but 'shows himself in a terrible, pressing closeness; he could return, of course disguised, behind another façade. And the question what we can do to prevent this return then becomes even more urgent' (2001: 9).
8. My distinction between subjectivist perspective and objectivist function is shaped by Jürgen Habermas's distinction between system and life world (1984 and 1987).
9. Kondylis 1986. Breuer follows Kondylis in his many publications, while Schildt raises important objections (1998: 14 f.). For a more detailed account of my position, see Rohkrämer 1999: 270–275.
10. Central for my understanding of nationalism are Anderson 1991, Berger 2004, Wehler 2004, and the publications of Anthony D. Smith.
11. As Anthony D. Smith convincingly argues, nations and nationalisms cannot be understood just as objective or wholly pragmatic entities. Instead, they all rely on national identity as well, that is, a common language or cultural sentiments and symbols. Part of nationalism is the belief in a historic territory or homeland, common historical memories, a shared culture and economic links. Nationalism needs 'bonds of solidarity among members of communities united by shared memories, myths and traditions that may or may not find expression in states of their own'. This ethnic core plays a key role in the attraction of nationalism. As individuals believe to share a communal history, cultural traits and political aims, they get a sense of who they are, where they belong and what they should do (Smith 2001a: 15 and passim; see also Brubaker 1992, Kedourie 1993 and Greenfeld 1992).
12. See also the much cruder Lukács 1962 and the summary of the arguments in Turner 1975.
13. Bavaj 2003 provides an up-to-date overview, Rohkrämer 1999b a more detailed account of my position. See the Conclusion of this book for a discussion of fundamentalism.
14. Theodor Fontane rightly observed that those trying 'to re-establish the ancient' actually broke with the 'old' (quoted in Puschner et al. 1996: 487). For an opposing view see Fritzsche (2004).
15. The articles by Klaus Schreiner and Hans Günter Hockert provide interesting critiques; Williamson (2004: Introduction) sensitively explores the complex interaction between politics and religion. See also Evans 2005: 258–260 and Gregor 2005.
16. Koonz 2003 and also Mosse 1975: 229, Behrenbeck 1996: 334. A good example is Leni Riefenstahl's documentary of the 1934 Nuremberg rally, *Triumph of the Will*.
17. Catholicism continued to be a powerful influence, both in shaping the mentality of a third of the population and in political life. While Protestantism opened itself up to current political and cultural trends, Catholicism tried to maintain its identity in a changing world. While

- Catholics also tended to feel increasingly nationalist, they remained distinct to the mainstream of the extreme Right discussed here.
18. Helmuth Plessner regarded this *Weltfrömmigkeit*, that is a sacred view of the worldly, as a peculiarity of Germany as a belated nation (1959: 73 and *passim*). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the voices of a largely Protestant middle class became more urgent because they came under pressure from a cultural mass market and new cultural elites. The educated middle class gradually lost its exclusive status, and adverse times eroded its homogeneous orientation (Langewiesche 1989: 112).
 19. Ringer 1969. See Lepsius 1992: 11 for a suitable definition of the educated middle class. Rohkrämer 1999: 46–48 provides a more detailed discussion with references to further literature.
 20. As we shall see throughout the book, the educated middle class played a key role in the rise of the extreme Right, for example, in the national leagues and in propagating the ‘ideas of 1914’. Large parts of the middle class continuously worked against the Weimar Republic, and groups like students were among the first Nazi strongholds. As the Nazis did not ‘seize’ power, but came into power in an alliance with conservative elites, the latter’s political orientation was a prerequisite for this development. Furthermore, the widely held right-wing ideals made the young elites serve the Nazi goals in the Third Reich not just for career reasons, but also as devoted and dedicated believers (Herbert 1996; Wildt 2002).
 21. Important literature in English includes Aschheim 1994; Baird 1990; Burleigh 2005 and 2006; Farrenkopf 2001; Field 1981; Katz 1986; Large 1997; Rabinbach 1997; Rhodes 1980; Spotts 2002; Stackelberg 1981; Stern 1999; Wachsmann 1998; Whisker 1982; Wistrich 1996. The following books give a good idea of the main scholars in Germany working in the field: Schnurbein and Ulbricht, eds. 2001; Puschner et al., eds. 1996; Puschner 2001. The literature concerned with Nazism in a narrower sense is too numerous to be listed here. Some core texts have been mentioned in the Introduction; others, which I have found particularly useful, are pointed out throughout the text.
 22. According to Albert Speer, Hitler “took the impression more seriously than the reality” (1976: 311).