



The Cause of Hitler's Germany

Leonard Peikoff

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"A truly revolutionary idea... Clear, tight, disciplined, beautifully structured, and brilliantly reasoned."--Ayn Rand

Self-sacrifice, Oriental mysticism, racial "truth," the public good, doing one's duty--these are among the seductive catchphrases that circulated in pre-Nazi Germany. Objectivist author and philosopher Leonard Peikoff was Ayn Rand's long-time associate. In *The Cause of Hitler's Germany*--previously published in *The Ominous Parallels*--Peikoff demonstrates how unreason and collectivism led the seemingly civilized German society to become a Nazi regime.

The Cause of Hitler's Germany Details

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Joel says

“You can’t be sure of that. I mean, we really can’t know anything for certain, there’s so many variables and everybody sees things through their own lens. Their own experiences help them decide what is right and good. And besides, what’s right for you might not be right for me; we are different people and have different needs.”

I turn away.

“Well, I don’t mind really. You know, sometimes we have to sacrifice our desires for the common good. That’s part of living in community – knowing that sometimes they have to come first. If that means a few people get screwed in the process, that’s just the way it is – there is a social contract after all. We all have to do our fair share; it’s just the right thing to do.”

I get up, moving to the back of the train.

“I hate the sheeple. Look at all these idiots around us, living their miserable lives. They are so stupid, willing to follow the next moron right off a cliff. What a waste. Not me, I am my own man, I think for myself. Nobody can tell me what to believe.”

I shrug – there is no escaping it.

If Satan’s greatest trick was convincing the world he did not exist, so too the philosophers. Not that I’m saying philosophers are the devil. Having a handle on our own epistemology is valuable as it helps us to see and to live in a world where things are clear, where we understand why. There are many fraudulent ideas out there that masquerade as truth to prey on the uninformed. Some of these ideas are so attractive, and so often repeated that it’s easy for even the most sophisticated among us to become confused – not only to our own peril but that of those around us.

Cue Hitler’s Germany, because this is exactly what happened; a story masterfully explained in Leonard Peikoff’s “The Cause of Hitler’s Germany”.

Most of us like to think of Hitler’s Germany as a result of some sort of genetic deviation in the Aryan chromosomes. “Surely the Germans are just a warlike people who have barbarity in their blood, right? They’re a tribal people, just like the Rwandan Hutus who committed the genocide – I’m sure of it. It could never happen here, that’s for sure; we just aren’t like that. We are different.” This explanation is comfortable, soothing even.

Unfortunately, it is wrong. The reality is that the death of the Weimar Republic and the advance of Nazism was a direct result of bad epistemology advanced relentlessly for centuries. The holocaust was a result of a particular philosophical outlook on man, his role in society and to each other. As Peikoff’s book outlines the precursors to the madness, presenting the ideological baggage of the German nation in the run-up to the war, it’s hard not to notice the selfsame ideas peddled so freely in our own societies – all of them.

The problem actually starts at the very beginning, in the dual of ideas between Plato and his greatest student,

Aristotle. Plato was a proponent of the power of the state and the responsibility of its citizens to each other. He was (albeit simply put) the father of authority. Aristotle took a different path, as the world's first and greatest advocate of reason and individualism, he challenged Plato's statism.

But Plato did abide.

In Nazi Germany, the Platonic view of state authority was met with a cohort of sympathizers who presented those ideas as mainstream, as incontrovertible. Then, as is wont to happen, they made their way into the universities. From there they progressed into art and literature and then into pop culture and finally into the minds of normal men. Ideas that challenged the right of the individual to reason and to question. Speeches that placed state authority above individual responsibility. Plays that lauded the irrational and the incoherent. Nihilism ensued, as did a strange form of faith that allowed and even encouraged the hate. The death of self upon the altar of the other.

This was all well and good, and did not seem to have any real impact until a perfect storm hit. Post-war reparations, national humiliation, high unemployment. Hate, resentment, frustration, a people looking for excuses and scapegoats. And then finally, a soothsayer. By the time Hitler arrived, the Weimar Republic was so far gone that they could do nothing but watch him seize power. They had trashed their own liberties one by one – there was nothing to protest in what Hitler proposed, he was the final result of their ideas. When he came after men's bodies – there was not any individual left to fight him, for they had surrendered their minds long ago.

For those who think this was a once-off, take a look around. It happens all the time; the most recent case in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela. After fifty years of social democracy, that country too fell to a soothsayer at a moment of national stress. Same for Argentina, and for Ecuador, and for Bolivia, and for Nicaragua, and for Greece, and soon in Spain. For those who do not agree, I entreat you to read "The Cause of Hitler's Germany". Lest we cease being attentive and it happens next to us.

Daniel Manske says

A primer on the philosophy that made it possible. I've learned more about philosophy reading this book than I knew before. Immoral philosophy makes for immoral outcomes.

ROBERTO RODRIGUEZ-NUNEZ says

I really enjoy reading this book.

I liked the way the author explained Kantian philosophy and the Hegelian philosophy to explain the Nazi rise to power.

This book gives you a solid understanding of how philosophy can change a nation for the worse. I recommend it wholeheartedly because it will open your mind to our current reality. The author knows his subject quite well and he weaves a narrative based on philosophical facts. I couldn't stop reading it.

Cary says

Illuminating

I have long considered how certain ideas give way to others, and seen their practical directions. But I had no idea that any groups executed philosophy's worst ideas so wholly. This book began by affirming some of my thoughts, then proceeded to demonstrate, right down to the bone, the philosophical death march that Nazism had to make. From the second chapter, reading was as walking downhill on a narrow road: there were no turns, the destination was always in sight, with logic leading the way.

Gail says

This book examines the post-enlightenment philosophy that both created the Nazi's and made it possible for them to gain power. It's a difficult read, especially if you have not studied much philosophy, but worth the extra effort. Piekoff dismisses the usual causes for the rise of Hitler in favor of a deeper look at the common philosophy of the German people. A philosophy of nihilism, complete obedience and distrust or dismissal of logic. The result is the most complete explanation of how the Nazi's happened.

I won this book through a First Reads giveaway.

Rhys says

Despite generally unsupported claims against leftist idealism and Ayn Rand circle-jerking, it is a good argument about some of the philosophical causes of the Nazi regime and their atrocities.

Eddy Bryant says

Interesting ideas and well written. Thought provoking. I won my copy from first reads giveaway at goodreads. Glad I did.

Rodney Falberg says

The philosophy of Plato and Immanuel Kant were the origins of collectivism, Romanticism, and embracing irrationality over reality and reason. This was the seed planted that others harvested and developed into the collectivism of Socialism, Communism, Marxism, and National Socialism. The Nazis didn't create their philosophy, all of it was borrowed anti-Western, anti-Intellectual, anti-Reason, anti-Capitalist thinkers, who simply took the philosophy of Romanticism and Statism, simply adding Germanic ideas of Race to the mix which led to the slaughter of millions. People wonder, how could an industrialized people living in the 20th century resort to the barbarism and evil that the Nazis perpetrated to fulfill their dreams of a Socialistic utopia? Read this book and you will understand that decades of the philosophy of Romanticism, the revolt against reason and rational thought, Collectivism, that we are not individuals with rights but just a 'cell' in a

'body' that is society, Altruism, the idea we must sacrifice our liberties and happiness for the collective, Statism, the rule of the party and of the state is the highest moral authority, and Pragmatism, moral truth is simply expedient, which all preached whole or in part by German philosophers and thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Martin Luther, Aguste Comte, laid a fertile ground for the Nazis to reap followers to their cause when they developed. The best argument this book gives is that we can prevent these movements from finding soil to grow when we stress the importance of reason over feelings, individual freedom over group comfort, and capitalism over socialism.
