Spengler, Race and the Nazis

CONSTANTIN VON HOFFMEISTER

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Spengler was a self-proclaimed man of facts and juggler of inconvenient truths and, like a cat, little balls of dust and detritus. Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of life is pivotal to his view of history, which does not simply talk up doom but preaches heroic endurance and imperial self-empowerment: life is “the fact within the world as history.” “History is about life and only ever about life, race, the triumph of the will to power, and not about the victory of truths, inventions, or money.” Nietzsche saw “race” as something historical as well as something natural. It could be a product of nature, as the blond Aryans of early European and Indian times were. But it could also be the result of artificial breeding processes, which started with “impure,” i.e., mixed or crossed populations. This artificial race formation seemed to Nietzsche more important than the naturally occurring diversity of races. Spengler also speaks of races, but for him these are not the basis but the consequence of cultures. In a polemic antithesis to the prevailing race doctrine, Spengler declared that an ancient Mayan priest and a modern bank director were more physiognomically similar to each other than to the workers of their respective societies.

The Baltic German Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, who studied engineering in Moscow before the October Revolution, told Spengler that the racial view of history would soon become self-evident. Meritorious men were already serving it. Restoring the impartiality of the healthy blood was the most significant task a man could set himself that day. At the same time, this statement testified to the sad state of the spirit and the body, that such an act had become a vital necessity. The values of the race soul, the driving force behind the new world picture, had yet to become living consciousness. Soul means race seen from inside, and, vice versa, race is the exterior of the soul. To bring the race soul to life means to recognize its supreme value and, under its rule, to assign to the other values their organic place: in state, art, and religion. According to Rosenberg, this is the task of our time: to create a new type of man out of a new myth of life. Spengler nodded but quickly fell asleep after, nodding in assent only in his dream, in which he was again a cat chasing after balls of dust and detritus so as to juggle them.

Spengler’s view on race is such that it can be essentially treated as a function of a specific landscape and place — with individual races being inextricably tied to their geographic birthplaces as peoples. He did not believe in the greater value of the Aryan race but in the differences between the “White” and the “colored” cultures — and these would lead to the struggle which the “White” culture would have to lose in the end.

Spengler vehemently disapproved of the Nazis’ “plebeian” anti-Semitism and their distorted interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche’s views. According to him, Judaism does not appear as a “counter-race” as it does in Nazi ideology but as a foreign religion in the context of Arab culture. He also disliked Adolf Hitler as the leader of the German Reich, mainly because Hitler wanted to be the leader of the party at the same time. Spengler’s envisioned Caesar, on the other hand, incinerates a civilization by unleashing great wars to make way for a world-historically new culture and uses the party solely as an instrument for exercising his power and implementing his plans. Spengler ridiculed Hitler as a “Prolet-Aryan” and scornfully described the NSDAP (Nazi party) as “the organization of the unemployed by the work-shy.”

The Night of the Long Knives (June 30 to July 2, 1934 — also known as the “German St. Bartholomew’s Night”), in which the Nazis massacred some of their comrades because the former were afraid of the sheer intensity of the latter’s revolutionary fervor, deeply disillusioned Spengler. The Nazis’ murder of Gregor Strasser (the leader of the left-wing National Socialist opposition) and Edgar Julius Jung, two of Spengler’s political comrades, heralded Spengler’s final break with the regime.