

ROSENBERG CONTRA KLAGES

I.

Excerpts from *Gestalt und Leben*, Reichsleiter Dr. Alfred Rosenberg's Address, delivered on April 27, 1938, inaugurating the University of Halle's Summer Semester:

It is not my intention to make use of this occasion to analyze the philosophy of Ludwig Klages. I do not intend to refute Klages, as one might expect, but to examine his concept of life as it is in itself, as well as in the context of our Germanic life.

Nevertheless, there must be no confusion here, for the National Socialist Movement does not "endorse" the philosophy of Ludwig Klages, and it most emphatically does not "stand by his side"¹; on the contrary, what is at issue here is our need for a straight answer to a crucial question: now that the Reich has recovered from the critical disease that almost destroyed it, are Klages and his circle of disciples willing to reconcile themselves to this reborn German way of life?

As I have indicated a moment ago, I have no interest in utilizing this forum as an opportunity to indulge in a bit of carping criticism, for I must resist the temptation to participate in petty polemical disputes. Instead, I will avail myself of this opportunity to cite a series of pronouncements that Klages himself has made in his various publications, and to confront them with pronouncements that have been formulated by the official spokesmen of the National Socialist Movement in the course of almost twenty years of struggle, during which our movement ceaselessly re-evaluated its most fundamental principles.

In his entire career Klages has formulated but one basic thought, and it would be improper for me to seek to trivialize this central principle that has, in effect, determined the whole course of his speculative life. On the contrary, the philosophy of Ludwig Klages stands or falls solely on the basis of the validity of the crucial postulate to which I allude, and which can be summarized as follows: the original sin of mankind transpired at the moment when the ecstatic, image-laden, and rhythmically pulsating life that man enjoyed during the primordial ["Pelasgian"] phase of existence was invaded by "spirit" (Geist), an entity whose essence is expressed in such phenomena as the will-to-power, purposeful activity, and the dictatorship of reason. All of the manifold horrors that comprise "World History" are, in the view of Klages, the ineluctable results of this invasion. In a characteristic utterance drawn from one of his major works, he explicitly states that the history of mankind clearly reveals the fact that it is in man, and only

in man, that there occurs a "battle to the knife" between the power of universal love and a force that erupts into the sphere of life from outside the spatio-temporal continuum. This invader is spirit, the force that seeks to sever the poles of life in order to destroy life by tearing the soul from the body and the body from the soul.

In addition, Klages interprets the duality of our nature as the result of the destructive effects of critical consciousness and purposeful will upon man's living substance. From this inner turmoil arises the ego or self, viz., the person. These are merely the masks that now govern our lives, which are conducted solely under the demands of thought and will. It is only through the ego that we can still hear the voice of the cosmos from which we have been expelled. Our masks have at last grown into our very flesh, to which they cling more tenaciously with every passing century. Thus, after a pre-history guided by the soul, Klages tells us, follows the history that is ruled by spirit; finally, in "post-history" man will become the mask itself, the hollow simulacrum of a living being.

After all the filth and humiliation that it has had to endure, life comes to its dreadful end at the moment when the triumphant mask celebrates the conversion of once-living man into the "mock-man," the Golem.

Thus speaks Klages, our own Cassandra, and you'll doubtless recall that it was the unfortunate destiny of Cassandra to be dismissed as an utter lunatic by those whose blindness to the actual state of affairs was so complete that they ignored her (accurate) prophecies, thereby assuring the consummation of the awful doom that awaited them. We might even see in this allusion to Cassandra a crystallization of Klages's whole attitude to life. In truth, he never seems to tire of proclaiming such dire prophecies in the most strident accents.

In one utterance, he informs us that spirit is, in fact, the parasitic logos. In his later works he excoriates the spirit as a void without revelations, a nothingness whose only purpose is the ultimate annihilation of the substance of life. Briefly expressed, Klages insists that life and spirit (which in this philosopher's thought comprises reason, understanding, and will) constitute the irreducibly antagonistic principles of existence. In this proposition, Klages effectively epitomizes the conclusion to which his examination of the phenomena of life as well his scrutiny of history have inexorably led him, and, we must admit, he defends this unique position with an incomparable eloquence and with a truly massive scholarship.

Contemporary realities, however, have confounded the certainties of this oracle, for the Germanic powers of resistance that have recently been manifested were far greater than could ever have been

imagined by admirers of the metaphysical dirges of this prophet of doom. At last the Faustian spirit shouted his defiant: "Alone, I will!" And it was precisely in the time of our most dreadful decline that there began not only Germany's political rebirth, but the rebirth of our spirit and soul as well.

We are particularly troubled by the fact that Klages reserves his most bitter diatribes for the Hellenic world, to which he imputes the lion's share of responsibility for the entry into history of the so-called spirit. Klages actually prefers an earlier and, in his view, more vital historical phase, to which he has given the name "the Pelasgian Age." He has delved deeply into the pre-historic cultures of the eastern Mediterranean (kleinasiatichen Völkerschaft), and he finds the ecstasies, mother-goddesses, and matriarchies that are so rampant in that cultural sphere, to be admirable, and even exemplary, expressions of Dionysian vitality. Thus, it is only logically consistent that Klages should break a lance against Nordic Hellas, a procedure that appears to me to be a most dangerous undertaking, since we feel that in adopting this approach Klages seems far less likely to discover the well-springs of a primordial vitality than to find himself proceeding swiftly down the road to madness.

As it happens, we know today that Classical Greece was definitely not an evolutionary cultural development that was the creative achievement of the genetic descendants of "Pelasgian" and hither-Asiatic types; the Greeks of the great period, in truth, constituted the representatives of a new race, one that would eventually force those self-same eastern Mediterranean peoples to submit to their military yoke, just as they would in the course of time replace the spiritual attitudes of the Levantines with their own ethical values and æsthetic ideals.

Hellas formed a unique protest of renewed life against the ecstasies, chthonic cults, and gloomy practices of an alien realm, and Apollo is the god whose name embodies for us the transformed Greek world that took its place. The "Pelasgian" world, on the other hand, represents the sinking back into a formless confusion characterized by rampant race chaos and disorder of soul. We most emphatically refuse to recognize the value of such dismal conditions.

To what extent Klages oversteps the bounds of an authentic philosophical-historical empiricism can be demonstrated in his denial of the existential powers of race (which are the concrete powers of life). An exceptionally blatant manifestation of this blindness occurs in his philosophizing on the so-called "telluric" turn. His statements here clearly indicate that Klages, who has certainly had every opportunity to familiarize himself with the findings of racial science during the last few decades, has utterly ignored these forces of the blood, believing them to be completely irrelevant to his metaphysical speculations.

Likewise, Klages has encouraged certain petty scribblers among his disciples to vilify Immanuel Kant, this greatest of all thinkers. [One of them, Werner Deubel,] has published some of the most demented drivel that has ever been concocted by a sectarian's brain; these documents are the most impudent that have come to my attention in many years, and, indeed, these writings seem as if they had been devised as an attack upon the very foundations of our National Socialist World-View!

These disciples of Klages refer to themselves as the "biocentric" school, and they regard it as their sacred mission to do battle with the so-called "mechanistic" philosophy; nevertheless, the far greater danger that I believe confronts us today is, rather, the biocentric philosophy itself, which must not be permitted to infect with its false teachings the scientific doctrines espoused by the National Socialist Movement.

Precisely how life and the lifeless are related to each other is not a matter that can be settled by dogmatic proclamations. The two most prominent methods, however—the first, to grasp life by means of life (through observation of inner and outer experience), and, the second, to study the cosmos by means of mechanistic and mathematical methods—together comprise the indivisible essence of Germanic scientific research.

In the final analysis, spirit is not, as Klages believes, a power from outside the spatio-temporal continuum that has irrupted into an idyllic paradise. On the contrary, spirit is an integral element of our national life.

And we cannot agree with Klages when he simply equates the God Jahweh of the Old Testament with the "logocentric" principle. On the contrary, Jahweh is to us the very incarnation of the savage fanaticism that has its origins in the deserts of Syria.

Nor can we dismiss the revolt of a new human type against the hither-Asiatic world as "a swindle of the spirit."

The struggle to rescue life, and our own life in particular, through the mission of National Socialism, will result in the restoration of meaning and purpose to those who had succumbed to the pointless drift that ruled the degenerate age of recent memory; and this rescue will be achieved, not on the basis of economic considerations, but solely through the purposive preservation of the powers of life.

Life is, consequently, perpetually plastic in form; the expression of life's inner and outer form is work, regardless of whether this work is artistic, philosophical, or political; when life is organic, it forms the comprehensive expression of soul, body, will, and reason. That is our most dearly cherished conviction. That attitude was, I must insist, the pre-condition for the great German rebirth, for the deliverance of German life from mortal danger. It was also a turning point in an even more comprehensive sense in that the dangers that threatened the other peoples of Europe were also averted, and the future will clearly show that the National Socialist Revolution restored life to all of the cultures of Europe.

¹ In early 1938, an article entitled *Wir stehen zu Ludwig Klages* appeared in the second January number of *Wille und Macht*, the official journal of the Hitler Youth. The (anonymous) author of the piece expressed a qualified approval of the Klagesian philosophy, and it was after reading this essay that a furious Rosenberg—whose hostility to Klages was so persistent that, as we shall see below, he was still obsessing about Klages as he sat awaiting death in his cell at Nuremberg—Rosenberg finally decided to mount an official campaign against the philosopher and his disciples.

II.

Excerpt from *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*:

We now find ourselves in conflict with genuinely original forces of our age, with men who have also been willing to bury their dead, and with whom we have often come into sympathetic contact. Nevertheless, these very forces, justifiably rebelling against a frightful, ice-cold rationalism, now seek to revert to "primordial depths" (*Urtiefen*), proclaiming an all-out war against the spirit (*Geist*) itself in order to restore the body-soul unity by means of a philosophy that rejects reason, understanding, and will as manifestations of that spirit.

One is reminded at once of the emotional "return to nature" as well as of the valorization of the "primitive" that came upon the scene during the latter half of the eighteenth century. However, even the excesses of that age seem temperate and rational by comparison with the formulations of men like Ludwig Klages and Melchior Palágyi. What today's psychology (*Seelenkunde*) and characterology are lacking, in fact, lies at an even deeper level than that to which these men have penetrated, for the only thing that can provide an organic infrastructure for their enterprise is the substance of the race-soul.

The appearance of a clearly defined consciousness is seen by these thinkers as the initial alienation of heroic man from his creative original state (Urzustand), his loss of a world that he had hitherto regarded with awe and reverence. They see in this primordial state the only authentic life that man has ever lived, a life that has since become tainted by exaggeratedly rational ideas and conceptual schemes. We immediately perceive the affinity as well as the incompatibility that exists between our own racial-spiritual world-view and that of the cosmogonic-psychical (Psycho-Kosmogonie) school. For them, the intellect is reduced to a mere implement that is completely without substance; its sole use is as a tool that facilitates the establishing of the causal nexus. However, once the intellect seizes the throne as a universal law-giver, this eventuality can indeed be seen as the downfall of a culture, since it provides conclusive evidence (unfortunately ignored by our neo-vitalists) of racial contamination. Up to this point there are many points of agreement between the two schools. Nevertheless, we insist that there is no necessity to assail reason and purpose as spiritual enemies. We realize just how, in sharp contrast to the peoples of the Semitic world, the Nordic world's attitude toward the cosmos manifests a complete union between soul, will, and reason. We have no interest in such an abstraction as "primitive man," with his putative "confidence in earthly existence" (Weltsicherheit), for what interests us is the man of clearly distinct racial character. And one fact here seems to us to be quite curious, because we cannot avoid the impression that these embittered warriors against the life-alien rationalism of modernity have concocted their instinctively creative and heroic primitives—in what seems to us to be a completely rational manner.

III.

Excerpt from Heinrich Härtle's edition of Dr. Rosenberg's Memoirs, entitled *Grossdeutschland: Traum und Tragödie—Rosenberg's Kritik am Hitlerismus* (SELBSTVERLAG H. HÄRTLE MÜNCHEN 1969):

For many years Frau [Else] Bruckmann had been sponsoring the lecture-cycles given by Ludwig Klages and [Alfred] Schuler, and she was obviously quite impressed by their doctrines. After I had thoroughly familiarized myself with the thought-world of Klages, I had occasion to say to her that he had made a whole career out of a single aperçu; she was visibly offended by my remark.

APPENDIX II:

NSDAP's Official Greeting to Klages on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday (Berlin Edition of the Völkischer Beobachter 12/10/42):

On the 70th birthday of Ludwig Klages, we wish once again to insist that we regard this man as our enemy. With regard to all of the decisive philosophical questions, we state that there can be no reconciliation whatsoever between the World-View of Klages and that of the National Socialist Movement. His view of nature and history, of man and his future, is, in principle, utterly incompatible with the fundamental theses of National Socialism!

APPENDIX III:

Communication, dated 7/10/44, from the Gauleiter of Hesse to Martin Bormann:

I recommend that the sternest measures be invoked against the whole circle of Klages-disciples.

