

Oryginalna praca badawcza

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FROM WEIMAR TO THE THIRD REICH. YOUTH ORGANISATIONS IN GERMANY BETWEEN 1918-1933 AND THEIR DIRECT INFLUENCE ON NATIONAL SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

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Słowa kluczowe: Republika Weimarska, Trzecia Rzesza, organizacje młodzieżowe, pedagogika i edukacja

Education under National Socialism became a tool for indoctrinating the youth of the Third Reich. The foundation of the new totalitarian pedagogy was Adolf Hitler's (1889-1945) ideological manifesto *Mein Kampf*, which influenced its core elements: the cult of the Führer, militarism, racial purity, worldview conformity, and physical fitness. According to these principles, the ideologues and educators of National Socialism sought to shape the „German man” with a distinct national character¹. However, in reviewing the concept of education in the Third Reich, the influence of pedagogical currents that predated Hitler's rise to power cannot be overlooked. These movements significantly contributed to the emergence of totalitarian practices in Nazi Germany. It should be noted that the key elements of this educational concept originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To some extent, they were part of the value systems of various youth organisations such as the Wandering Bird, Gustav Wyneken's Free School, the Artaman League, the Martin Voelkel Movement, and the

¹ E. Krieck, *Menschenformung. Grundzüge der vergleichenden Erziehungswissenschaft*, Leipzig 1933, pp. 150-151.

Union of Youth. Scholars such as George Lachmann Mosse, Werner Kindt, and Felix Raabe point to these groups as early cultural and ideological foundations for the totalitarianism of the Third Reich². These organisations, which gained prominence after World War I, attracted disillusioned youth and became fertile ground for political experimentation – from both the radical nationalist right and the communist left.

Other significant influences on the educational concepts of the time included the Stefan George Circle, the gymnastics movement, the so – called Conservative Revolution, and the Front Community³. The ultimate impact of these groups lay in how their ideas were reassembled into a composite ideology by Nazi educators, forming part of a vision for the spiritual and physical „maturation” of the German youth. These ideological foundations are essential to understanding the utopian appeal of Nazism within German society. They played a critical role in the mesmerization of the younger generation and the creation of Nazi elites intended to secure the continuity of the Third Reich. Although there are efforts to distance these early youth movements from National Socialism – portraying Nazi ideology as the sole creation of Hitler – one cannot ignore their indirect contributions. This connection is further supported by the fact that many Nazi teachers and educators emerged from these same cultural and intellectual backgrounds.

Among these movements, the *Wandervogel* (Wandering Bird) is particularly noteworthy. This group consisted of idealistic youth longing for a strong leader, who could unite them. Leadership became the central unifying element. The *Wandervogel* was a romantic and spiritual youth movement steeped in symbolism. It promoted transformation through dreams, unfulfilled love, suffering, and a metaphysical view of death. One of its key symbols, the Blue Flower (from German Romanticism), represented a longing for transcendence – something worth sacrificing for, even dying for. In defiance of conservative educational models, *Wandervogel* members sought freedom by leaving home and reconnecting with nature⁴. After 1933 many of these young wanderers found their place in the Nazi movement, eagerly volunteering for formations led by their long-awaited messianic figure – Hitler⁵. The Artaman League, on the other

² G.L. Mosse, *Ein Volk – Ein Reich – Ein Führer: Die völkischen Ursprünge des Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1979, pp. 185-205; *Grundschriften der Deutschen Jugendbewegung*, W. Kindt (ed.), Düsseldorf-Köln 1963, pp. 33-62, 180-197; F. Raabe, *Die Bündische Jugend. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Weimarer Republik*, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 12-56.

³ H.U. Wehler, *Vom Beginn des ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914-1949*, München 2003, pp. 390-393; F. Ryszka, *Państwo stanu wyjątkowego. Rzecz o systemie państwa i prawa Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Wrocław 1985, pp. 90-92.

⁴ F. Raabe, *Die Bündische Jugend...*, p. 13; A. Messer, *Die freideutsche Jugendbewegung (Ihr Verlauf von 1913 bis 1918)*, „Friedrich Mann’s Pädagogisches Magazin. Abhandlungen vom Gebiete der Pädagogik und ihrer Hilfswissenschaften” 1924, 597, pp. 33-57.

⁵ T. Butkiewicz, *Koncepcja mesjanizmu oraz jego rola w kształtowaniu totalitaryzmu w Niemczech*, „Słupskie Studia Historyczne” 2010, 16, pp. 89-102.

hand, were influenced by thinkers such as Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), author of *The Decline of the West*, and sought to reconnect with a rural, agrarian lifestyle⁶. Organised hierarchically, the Artamans reflected proto – totalitarian structures⁷. Their upbringing model was Spartan in character⁸. Many members from other youth groups – including the Eagle and Falcon, German Scouts, and the Schill Youth – also joined the new Nazi-aligned organisation⁹. Paramilitary youth groups such as the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), and the Steel Helmet, League of Front – Line Soldiers also played a part in this process of ideological and military preparation¹⁰.

The Artaman League eventually aligned closely with the model of totalitarian education promoted by National Socialism. As such, it is frequently associated with the ideological foundations of the Third Reich. Several high-ranking Nazi officials were former members of this movement, including Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höß (1900-1947), SS leader Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), and Reich Minister of Agriculture Richard Walther Darré (1895-1953). Other ideological sympathizers of the Artaman vision included Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), Baldur von Schirach (1907-1974), and the conservative intellectual Ernst Niekisch (1889-1967)¹¹. It is also noteworthy that the swastika, long before its adoption as a Nazi symbol, appeared as early as 1919 among the Artamans as a Germanic emblem. The sign had been borrowed from the iconography of the Order of the New Templars, an occult-nationalist organization¹². Given the ideological proximity and the personal trajectories of many of its members, it is unsurprising that several Artaman ideals and symbols were later integrated into National Socialist ideology.

Among the youth movements that influenced the Nazi cult of the leader were Gustav Wyneken's Free School Community and the Union of Youth (Jugendbund). Wyneken (1875-1964) played a pivotal role in shaping the ideal of youth culture (*Jugendkultur*)¹³. Through his experimental Free School, he sought to transform the traditional teacher – student relationship into a more spiritual, communal bond centered around

⁶ O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, München 1923, vol. 1, p. 49; vol. 2, p. 113.

⁷ W. Heinrich, *Land und Leute. Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Sozialpolitik*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1861, p. 70; A. Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden*, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, pp. 92-95; P. Schmitz, *Die Artamanen, Landarbeit und Siedlung bündischer Jugend in Deutschland 1924-1935*, Bad Neustadt a.d. Saale 1985, pp. 22-23.

⁸ P. Schmitz, *Die Artamanen...*, pp. 63-64.

⁹ B.B. Campbell, *The Schilljugend. From Wehrjugend to Luftschutz*, [in:] *Politische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik*, W.R. Krabbe (ed.), Bochum 1993, pp. 183-201.

¹⁰ P. Schmitz, *Die Artamanen...*, p. 52.

¹¹ H.Ch. Brandenburg, *Die Geschichte der HJ: Wege und Irrwege einer Generation*, Köln 1982, pp. 77-80; P. Schmitz, *Die Artamanen...*, pp. 72-73.

¹² T. Butkiewicz, *Koncepcja mesjanizmu...*, pp. 89-102.

¹³ *Grundschriften der Deutschen...*, p. 88.

a charismatic leader figure¹⁴. In this structure, the educator was not merely an authority, but a guiding, almost prophetic presence – anticipating the Nazi glorification of the Führer as a national messiah after 1933¹⁵. From 1927, the Union of Youth became an organized and visible force in the state. It established its own symbols and publications, adopted uniforms, and regularly staged ideological parades. Despite varying political leanings – from socialist to nationalist – these movements projected an image of a mobilized, united youth¹⁶. After the fall of Imperial Germany in 1918 and the establishment of the Weimar Republic, these youth organizations, almost without exception, expressed strong dissatisfaction with parliamentary democracy. Especially among those in their twenties, there was a widespread sense of betrayal. Their wartime sacrifices seemed futile, and the memory of the 1914 Battle of Langemarck – mythologized as a youth martyrdom – became a symbol of generational loss and unfulfilled destiny¹⁷.

Another influential figure was Martin Voelkel (1884-1950) and his magazine *Der Weiße Ritter* (*The White Knight*). The titular knight did not merely evoke medieval romanticism but represented a militant stand against the perceived Slavic threat¹⁸. The magazine gave voice to a yearning for a male-centric order and charismatic leadership – ideas often couched in the imagery of Teutonic chivalry. The knight from Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Knight, Death and the Devil* became a symbol of German virtue resisting Western urban decadence. The rural German *Bauer* (farmer) was presented as the guardian of a primal, unspoiled culture. Eventually, such ideologies were noticed and appropriated by the Nazis. These cultural frameworks laid the groundwork for a disciplined youth culture, later unified under the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*, HJ) in 1936. The existing trend toward male-dominated, hierarchically structured circles made it easier for National Socialists to consolidate youth movements into a single, obedient organization devoted to Hitler.

In contrast to the fragmented and ideologically diverse youth groups of the Weimar Republic, several homogenous, male – dominated intellectual communities also emerged – most notably the Stefan George Circle, the neo – conservative movement, the *Frontgemeinschaft* (Front Community), and the Turnerschaft. Among these, the George Circle played a particularly important role in shaping the symbolic and spiritual credibility of the Führer cult¹⁹. Within the Circle, spiritual devotion to a singular,

¹⁴ M.S. Szymański, *Niemiecka pedagogika reformy 1890-1933*, Warszawa 1992, p. 96; G. Wyneken, *Schule und Jugendkultur*, Jena 1913, pp. 2, 71.

¹⁵ H. Giesecke, *Vom Wandervogel bis zur Hitlerjugend. Jugendarbeit zwischen Politik und Pädagogik*, München 1981, pp. 90-91, 140; F. Raabe, *Die Bündische Jugend...*, pp. 43-45.

¹⁶ H. Giesecke, *Vom Wandervogel...*, pp. 176-177.

¹⁷ H.W. Koch, *Geschichte der Hitlerjugend*, Starnberger See 1975, pp. 53-54; M.S. Szymański, *Niemiecka pedagogika...*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁸ M. Voelkel, *Hie Ritter und Reich*, [in:] *Grundschriften der Deutschen...*, vol. 1, pp. 368-373.

¹⁹ K. Kluncker, *Das Geheime Deutschland. Über Stefan George und seinen Kreis*, Bonn 1985, pp. 11-23, 135-140.

charismatic figure was central. Stefan George (1868-1933) came to be seen as a quasi-mystical master, revered by his disciples as a prophet and poetic guide. Through an almost liturgical veneration, the most sacred values of the group were linked to George's person, whose literary and artistic output was interpreted as spiritual revelation²⁰. Though George himself was ambivalent about assuming this messianic role, he nonetheless laid the ideological groundwork for the later Führer principle (*Führerprinzip*), in which national salvation was seen as dependent on the emergence of a single, redemptive leader. In this vision, Germany was destined to save not only Europe but the entire Western world from moral and political collapse²¹.

Other key figures of the Conservative Revolution – a heterogeneous intellectual movement in interwar Germany – also emphasized the importance of strong leadership. According to Karl Christoph Lingelbach, the movement promoted the idea of a „national rebirth”, which was not only a political project but also a psychological and spiritual transformation that laid the groundwork for the totalitarian culture of the Third Reich²². Scholars such as Marek Maciejewski, Klaus Schönhoven, and Hans-Jochen Vogel have also traced parallels between neo-conservatism and early National Socialism, particularly in the 1920s²³. Jerzy Krasuski saw the Conservative Revolution as an intellectual precursor to German militarism, which in turn shaped the foundational educational ideals of Nazism²⁴. According to this view, the Conservative Revolution offered a reservoir of ideological inspiration for Nazi pedagogues. Similar conclusions were drawn by Henryk Olszewski²⁵ and Wojciech Kunicki, who argued that many conceptual and symbolic elements of Nazism were directly borrowed from the conservative-revolutionary milieu²⁶.

By the late 1920s, then, revolutionary conservatism had become an ideological breeding ground for elements later absorbed by Nazism²⁷. Even thinkers who were

²⁰ H.-J. Linke, *Das kultische in der Dichtung Stefan Georges und seiner Schule*, München-Düsseldorf 1960, pp. 46, 48, 57.

²¹ S. George, *Der Krieg. Geheimes Deutschland*, [in:] idem, *Das Neue Reich*, Berlin 1928, pp. 27-34, 59-65; P. Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus*, München 1996, pp. 102-103.

²² K.Ch. Lingelbach, *Erziehung und Erziehungstheorien im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, Weinheim-Berlin-Basel 1970, pp. 47-51.

²³ M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego konserwatyzmu wobec narodowego socjalizmu 1921-1945*, Wrocław 1991, pp. 80-86; K. Schönhoven, H.-J. Vogel, *Die Herausforderung der Republik durch den Hitler-Ludendorff-Putsch*, [in:] *Frühe Warnungen vor dem Nationalsozialismus. Ein historisches Lesebuch*, K. Schönhoven, H.-J. Vogel (eds), Bonn 1998, pp. 56-57.

²⁴ J. Krasuski, *Historia Rzeszy Niemieckiej 1871-1945*, Poznań 1971, p. 269.

²⁵ H. Olszewski, *Nauka historii w upadku. Studium o historiografii i ideologii historycznej w imperialistycznych Niemczech*, Warszawa-Poznań 1982, pp. 150-159.

²⁶ W. Kunicki, *Rewolucja konserwatywna w Niemczech w latach 1918-1933*, Wrocław 1999, pp. 7-9.

²⁷ A.E. Günther, *Was wir vom Nationalsozialismus erwarten. Zwanzig Antworten*, Heilbronn 1932, pp. 87-93.

initially critical of Hitler – such as Oswald Spengler and Edgar Julius Jung (1894-1934) – later entertained political cooperation with the Nazi movement. Among the neo-conservatives, Hans Blüher (1888-1955) deserves special mention for his unique theory of male leadership. Blüher promoted the idea of the *Männerbund* (male-bonded group), a homogeneous, exclusively male collective ruled by a charismatic leader²⁸. In this ideal, the leader embodied a unique set of character traits believed to be inherently German – strength, discipline, and spiritual vitality. The *Männerbund*, in Blüher's view, was essential to state formation and cultural continuity, acting as both a guardian of tradition and a forge for future leadership²⁹.

Turning to militarism as a foundation for Nazi education, the influence of neo-conservatives and the Front Community becomes particularly evident. Their ideological legacy resonated in the militarized vision of society promoted by National Socialism. Figures such as Ernst Jünger (1895-1998), Thomas Mann (1875-1955), and Ernst Niekisch³⁰ – though differing politically – each contributed to the discourse on the transformative power of war and nationalism. Historians have often referred to these groups as belonging to the wave of „new nationalism” that emerged after World War I. This current incorporated elements such as expansionist militarism, Pan-Germanism, Social Darwinism, and eventually National Socialism³¹. While the outbreak of World War I marked the ideological birth of this nationalism, it was only with the Nazi seizure of power that these ideas were institutionalized. As Ernst Jünger suggested, the war produced a new sociological archetype: the *soldier – worker*, a disciplined, mechanized, and ideologically prepared individual³² who embodied the „titanic man” – a term echoed by his brother, Friedrich Georg Jünger (1898-1977). This figure symbolized the biological and cultural supremacy of the fittest, destined not only for survival but for domination within the new Reich. His role transcended the battlefield and was recast as that of the builder of the future state³³.

Although the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles aimed to foster a liberal – democratic consciousness, the period of German democracy – particularly during the Weimar Republic – produced fertile ground for radicalism and militarism, especially within the *frontline community* (Frontgemeinschaft)³⁴. This environment was shaped

²⁸ W. Kunicki, *Rewolucja konserwatywna...*, pp. 256-257.

²⁹ Ibidem, pp. 254-255; H. Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der Männlichen Gesellschaft. Eine Theorie der menschlichen Staatsbildung nach Wesen und Wert*, vol. 1: *Der Typus Inversus*, Jena 1924, pp. 151-152.

³⁰ F. Ryszka, *Państwo stanu...*, pp. 90-92.

³¹ M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, pp. 80-86.

³² Ibidem, p. 77; W. Hermann, *Der neue Nationalismus und seine Literatur. Ein besprechendes Auswahlverzeichnis*, Limburg a.d. Lahn 1984, pp. 9-10.

³³ F.G. Jünger, *Die Titanen*, Frankfurt a.M. 1944, pp. 113-120.

³⁴ E. Niekisch, *Die Legende von der Weimarer Republik*, Köln 1968, pp. 67-72; M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, pp. 2-10; H. Olszewski, *Nauka historii...*, pp. 150-159; T. Gabiś,

by a widespread perception among Germans of having been deceived and betrayed following World War I. The so-called „stab-in-the-back legend” (*Dolchstoßlegende*) – which claimed that Germany’s military defeat in 1918 was not due to battlefield losses but to betrayal by civilians at home – became deeply embedded in the national psyche. For many, this legend was not mere myth but a lived reality after 1918³⁵. Relentless attacks on the fragile Weimar democracy offered the hope – at least to its critics – of its imminent collapse. On its ruins, neo-conservative theorist Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925) envisioned the foundation of a new German Reich, which he termed the *Third Reich*³⁶. For its supporters, this vision was not just a political alternative but the existential bedrock of every true German’s identity. In this worldview, militarism and war were elevated to the status of art forms – expressions of national morality, instruments of state functionality, and vehicles for the shaping of the „human individual”. Life itself was viewed as a constant battle for survival³⁷. Within this framework, Ernst Jünger and Edgar Julius Jung considered the militarism of war to be the most essential component of human existence. According to Jung, war was not defined by its cause but by the outcome. What mattered was not *why* one fought, but *that* one fought – and won. War was the ultimate confrontation between two rivals, from which only one could emerge victorious. For the soldier, war represented a transformative event that redefined his being and marked a rite of passage³⁸.

Alongside the Jünger brothers, Thomas Mann also perceived in militarism and war a metaphysical purpose: a path to transcendence through sacrificial death in service to the nation. This ideal of voluntary servitude and blood sacrifice, however, was shattered by the birth of the Weimar Republic. The sacred bond of brotherhood forged on the battlefield was disrupted and fragmented by the new social order. The heroic German worker-soldier was left without a tangible enemy – yet the desire to fight remained.

Konserwatywna Rewolucja, „Frona. Pismo poświęcone” 1997, 8, p. 109; W. Kunicki, *Rewolucja konserwatywna...*, p. 10.

³⁵ W.L. Fraser, *Kriegsschuld und Propaganda. Deutschland zwischen zwei Weltkriegen*, Zürich 1947, p. 31.

³⁶ A. Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich*, Hamburg 1931, pp. 227-229; M. Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers. Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung*, München 1969, p. 14; B. Schwertfeger, *Rätsel um Deutschland*, Heidelberg 1947, p. 383; K. Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, München 1968, pp. 249, 271, 280; E. Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1926, p. 2.

³⁷ F.G. Jünger, *Krieg und Krieger*, [in:] *Krieg und Krieger*, E. Jünger (ed.), Berlin 1930, p. 60; A. v. Martin, *Der heroische Nihilismus und seine Überwindung. Ernst Jüngers Weg durch die Krise*, Krefeld 1948, p. 59; H.-J. Mauch, *Nationalsozialistische Wehrorganisation in der Weimarer Republik. Zur Entwicklung und Ideologie des „Paramilitarismus”*, Frankfurt a.M. 1982, pp. 97-98.

³⁸ E.J. Jung, *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen. Ihr Zerfall und ihre Ablösung durch ein neues Reich*, Berlin 1930, p. 17; F.G. Jünger, *Krieg und Krieger...*, p. 60; E. Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoßtruppführers*, Berlin 1942, p. 137.

Consequently, the political structure of the post – 1918 republic became the target of scathing critique from the neo-conservative camp and the *frontline community*. They opposed the values of the new order while nostalgically reaffirming military virtues³⁹. Despite the Weimar Republic's ambition to transform the militarized German psyche – shaped by the Prussian tradition – into one more aligned with democratic and civil norms, the Treaty of Versailles had the opposite effect. In a society lacking a clear national identity, militarism reemerged in the form of revisionism. The disbanded officer corps, disoriented by the loss of status and function, sought relevance in the unstable postwar political landscape. The reconstitution of old military structures – often under new political banners – offered the prospect of restoring national tradition and strength⁴⁰. In this context, Ernst Jünger placed the true locus of national interest not in parliamentary deliberation but on the battlefield. Like Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), he envisioned the destiny of the Reich not only within continental Europe but on a global scale. Both thinkers extolled the ideal of the German as a heroic warrior, and both believed that only through warfare could a new Third Reich be born⁴¹. This conception of war drew its ideological nourishment from the militarism of the Wilhelmine era, presenting war as the authentic expression of the German national spirit⁴².

The conception of militarism in the works of the neo-conservatives was closely tied to the conviction that a true German was, above all, a good soldier. A clear distinction was drawn between the warrior and the selfish bourgeois⁴³. The battlefield was considered the arena in which the male organism was forged and hardened. He was not formed for the submissive, servile existence imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, but for war and victory. The ideal German male was selected for his strength and courage – traits that filled him with pride⁴⁴. Combat, in this ideological framework, was perceived as an eternal condition: it transformed the soldier into a hunter. By nature and eternal instinct, every man was viewed as a hunter, one who fought for the very act of hunting. War was the arena in which the enemy was seen not as a human adversary, but as a target to be eliminated⁴⁵. The battlefield thus became the only space in which the

³⁹ I. Klein, W. Triebel, „*Helm ab zum Gebet!*”. *Militarismus und Militarisierung – ein deutsches Schicksal?*, Berlin 1999, pp. 86-91.

⁴⁰ E. Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern...*, p. 137.

⁴¹ T. Mann, *Friedrich und die große Koalition. Sammlung von Schriften zur Zeitgeschichte*, Berlin 1916, p. 126; H. Olszewski, *Nauka historii...*, pp. 76-78; M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, pp. 76-78.

⁴² E. Jünger, *Der Kampf...*, pp. 47-48; W. Kunicki, *Rewolucja konserwatywna...*, p. 55; T. Gabiś, *Publicystyka polityczna pruskiego anarchisty*, „Stańczyk. Pismo konserwatystów i liberałów” 1995, 3 (26), p. 31.

⁴³ E. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Hamburg 1932, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Der Kampf...*, p. 73.

⁴⁵ E. Schultz, *Die veränderte Welt. Eine Bilderfibel unserer Zeit. Mit Einleitung E. Jünger*, Breslau 1933, p. 6.

strongest could survive; the weak, unaware of lurking dangers, were destined to perish. As Ernst Jünger and Edgar Julius Jung argued, Germany lost the First World War because it had not fought to the death⁴⁶. In this view, the purpose of war was to forge a powerful „individual” – a fighting machine. Particularly in this context, sacrificial service was believed to bring fulfilment to both the individual and the nation. Reconciliation with death became an integral element of German militarism and the cult of war. War was understood not merely as conflict, but as a fundamental mode of existence for the man of valour – an inner necessity and vocation for German youth. Sacrifice in war was not the end of something, but the beginning of a new world. What came to be known as the „cult of war” emerged as a broader European need⁴⁷.

In this context, the heroism and sacrifice displayed on the battlefields of the First World War became central reference points for veteran circles, which resisted any attempt to declare the end of the „frontline generation”. Ernst Jünger, a decorated veteran of the war, openly expressed his admiration for it⁴⁸. He glorified the militarism of war for its own sake: for the fighting, the brutality, and the masculinity it revealed – qualities he believed expressed the innermost nature of the individual⁴⁹. He predicted that the next war would be characterized by even greater brutality and by the technological advancements of modern armour and weaponry. It would demand a new ideal of the warrior one forged in industrial labour. For the frontline community, the future soldier was already present in the figure of the worker. It was he who would bring technological progress to bear on the battlefield⁵⁰.

Neo-conservatism was not only a political movement but also a crucial component of the frontline community, whose nationalism anticipated a radically new reality. It served as a barometer for the vitality and function of the *Volk* and, by extension, the state. German nationalists linked these qualities to the very essence of the state’s existence – life itself, subordinated to the process of political transformation⁵¹. With the adoption of the soldierly ideal, this current was transformed into a political organization. The *Stahlhelm*, in particular, along with the broader *Frontgemeinschaft* (Front Community), played a significant role in shaping the profile of German militarism⁵². This militarism contributed to the formation of a new worldview within the state, grounded in the education and conditioning of the nation. As such, schools were not merely places of instruction, but institutions tasked with shaping a unified worldview. According to this view, education was to be stripped of Christian moral values in favour

⁴⁶ E.J. Jung, *Die Tragik Kriegsgeneration*, „Süddeutsche Monatshefte” 1930, 27 (3), p. 34.

⁴⁷ Idem, *Die Herrschaft...*, p. 16.

⁴⁸ W. Kleinau, *Stahlhelm und Staat. Eine Erläuterung der Stahlhelm-Botschaften*, Berlin 1929, p. 7.

⁴⁹ E. Jünger, *Hier spricht der Feind. Kriegserlebnisse unserer Gegner*, Berlin 1931, p. 9.

⁵⁰ J. Krasuski, *Historia Rzeszy...*, p. 266.

⁵¹ E.J. Jung, *Sinndeutung der deutschen Revolution*, Oldenburg 1933, p. 10.

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 15-17.

of military discipline and readiness. The term „educational establishments” came to signify institutions focused on character formation through militaristic and ideological indoctrination, rather than the pursuit of knowledge in traditional „educational institutions”⁵³.

In this context, one cannot overlook the influence of previously mentioned youth groups and cultural environments that shaped the worldview of German youth. In the educational realm, the philosophical interpretation of the individual’s worldview became central. The most important element was the surrounding world and the young man’s function within an ideologically driven system of education. According to the dominant theory, ideas were understood as part of a broader struggle for survival. For Germans – and indeed for other nations – this struggle was seen as an eternal contest for existence⁵⁴.

These ideological plans also required *Lebensraum* – living space – which necessitated the revision of national borders and, by extension, a rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. In this context, the work of Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) is of particular note. Considered a neo-conservative, Haushofer became one of the key proponents of the Third Reich’s geopolitical doctrine. His ideas, grounded in nationalism and anti-liberalism, contributed to the delineation of a German-dominated Western civilization, in which Germany was to dominate the culture and territory of the East⁵⁵.

It is also important to note that, despite Arthur Moeller van den Bruck’s advocacy for a European federation under German hegemony, Ernst Niekisch promoted a distinct foreign policy vision that favored an alliance with Soviet Russia. Although he initially supported radical neo-conservatism, Niekisch became one of the earliest and most vocal critics of the version of conservatism appropriated by National Socialism. The brothers Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger published in his magazine *Widerstand. Zeitschrift für nationalrevolutionäre Politik* (*Resistance: Journal of National-Revolutionary Politics*), which Niekisch edited. Eventually, Niekisch joined Otto Strasser’s camp, believing Strasser’s influence within the NSDAP might offer space for ideological divergence. However, his open critique of Hitler – particularly in his 1932 pamphlet *Hitler: Ein deutsches Verhängnis* (*Hitler: A German Fate*) – condemned the Führer and predicted Germany’s downfall under his leadership⁵⁶.

Niekisch was originally influenced by A. Moeller van den Bruck, whose 1923 work *Das Dritte Reich* (*The Third Reich*) envisioned a synthesis of nationalism and socialism – an idea later co-opted by the ideologues of National Socialism. However, as

⁵³ Idem, *Die Herrschaft...*, pp. 416-417.

⁵⁴ W. Kunicki, *Rewolucja konserwatywna...*, pp. 271-272; M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, p. 83; A. Moeller van den Bruck, *Sozialismus und Außenpolitik. Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1919-1923*, Breslau 1933, pp. 70-71; A. Wolff-Powęska, *Doktryna geopolityki w Niemczech*, Poznań 1979, p. 175.

⁵⁵ M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, p. 86.

⁵⁶ E. Niekisch, *Hitler – ein deutsches Verhängnis*, Berlin 1932, pp. 10-12.

the Nazi regime consolidated power, it reversed the original order of these terms, placing nationalism before socialism. For both van den Bruck and Niekisch, the vision of national renewal was central. Yet unlike van den Bruck, Niekisch believed that Germany's political future lay in the East⁵⁷. Though their ideas may have seemed unachievable in the 1920s, following Hitler's rise to power in 1933, and the Anschluss of Austria in 1938, as well as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, these aspirations became geopolitical reality. Thus, the neo-conservatives could be seen as having laid the intellectual groundwork for elements of the Third Reich's foreign policy. On both sides, the reality that had arisen favored the reactivation of military organizations fighting against the political opponent⁵⁸. Here, without exception, everyone, from the right to the left, sought to overthrow democratic governments in favor of a strong state represented by the Front Community. Therefore, it can be assumed that without the solid foundation created by the Conservative Revolution and the Front Community, Nazism, anchored in the political scene of Germany, would have been ideologically limited. It's about those factors that later coincided with the doctrine of A. Hitler's ideology: anti-liberalism, anti-democratism, and anti-parliamentarism, or militarism and the geopolitics of the Third Reich. This is indicated not only by the fact that the Nazis took power in 1933, but also by the driving elements of the Conservative Revolution⁵⁹. This continuity raises the question: Were the values promoted by Nazi pedagogues and ideologues truly novel, or were they rather extensions – or appropriations – of earlier ideas that had already been internalized by German intellectual and political culture?

In the context of racial purity, many of the concepts that were later codified in Nazi ideology can be traced back to earlier intellectual developments. Although these early notions did not yet encompass the rigid racial dogmas of later National Socialist doctrine, they already presented the German people as a community defined by spiritual and biological purity. These criteria were present from the outset in educational concepts aimed at producing *Menschenmaterial* (human material) trained in absolute obedience to authority. Before the regime could achieve this goal, however, it needed to educate the youth in the „correct“ manner. National Socialist educators saw in the term *Schulterziehung* (school education) the opportunity to impose their revised ideological and pedagogical model. In all schools, physical fitness was emphasized alongside academic subjects – a reflection of earlier German concepts of holistic education. Moreover, the broader cultural critique of Western civilization helped foster a climate conducive to shaping the „new German“ – a racial and ideological ideal focused on

⁵⁷ Idem, *Der deutsche Nationalsozialismus*, „Widerstand. Zeitschrift für nationalrevolutionäre Politik“ 1929, 5, pp. 129-135; idem, *Die Nationale Opposition. Was sie tun müsste, wenn sie Ernst machen wollte*, „Widerstand. Zeitschrift für nationalrevolutionäre Politik“ 1929, 7, p. 199.

⁵⁸ W.E. Williams, *Versuch einer Definition paramilitärischer Organisationen*, [in:] *Militarismus*, V.R. Berghahn (ed.), Köln 1975, pp. 139-151.

⁵⁹ M. Maciejewski, *Doktryna rewolucyjnego...*, pp. 34-38.

physical and spiritual strength. This ideal had already been emphasized by the Turner (gymnastics) movement⁶⁰. The Turner tradition, with its focus on *freie Bewegung* (free movement) – marching, calisthenics, and physical exertion – had long promoted the ideal of a strong, disciplined body⁶¹. Educators of the Wilhelmine era had already warned of the dangers of intellectual overburdening among youth⁶², advocating instead for balance between physical and spiritual education. Movements such as the *Wandervogel*, the *Artamanen*, Gustav Wyneken's Free School Community, and the *Deutsche Jugendbewegung* (German Youth Movement), as well as the romantic rediscovery of nature by urban dwellers, all contributed to this cultural shift⁶³.

The uniqueness of participation in a physical culture group lay in the sense of belonging to a community defined by Germanness and loyalty to it. Hardening the body was accompanied by criticism of excessive intellectual burden, perceived as a by-product of broader civilizational development and the increasing academic demands of secondary and higher education. The objective was to *de-intellectualize* students in both the humanities and in science and mathematics gymnasias. Among Nazi ideologues and educators, this tendency favoured a renewed emphasis on the body over the intellectual cultivation of the spirit. In short, the entire culture of the German right – and, to some extent, segments of German liberalism – was not only animated by aspirations for political expansion and national greatness, but also by a vision for the development of a new German man. This urgency was exacerbated by the perceived consequences of modern urban life. The civilization of the big city, it was believed, engendered the feminisation of youth – an aversion to physical exertion, a weakening of patriotic values, and ultimately, decadence. The structural changes introduced after 1933 guaranteed the implementation of a totalitarian system of physical education for German youth. After Hitler seized power, the presidium of the German Turner movement formally paid tribute to the Führer,

⁶⁰ G. Pätzold, *Zur industriellen Berufserziehung im Nationalsozialismus. „Lehrwerkstatt als Exerzierplatz des praktischen Lebens“*, [in:] *Erziehung im Nationalsozialismus „...sie werden nicht mehr frei ihr ganzes Leben!“*, K.I. Flessau, E. Nyssen, G. Pätzold (eds), Köln 1987, pp. 83-100; H. Kupffer, *Der Faschismus und das Menschenbild der deutschen Pädagogik*, Frankfurt a.M. 1984, pp. 60-66.

⁶¹ H. Eichberg, *Jugendbewegung Lebensreform und der Akademische Turnerbund*, [in:] *1883-1983 Akademischer Turnerbund. Festschrift aus Anlass des 100 jährigen Bestehens*, Melsungen 1983, pp. 53-71.

⁶² G. Kotowski, W. Pöls, G.A. Ritter, *Das Wilhelminische Deutschland, Stimmen der Zeitgenossen*, Frankfurt a.M.-Hamburg 1965, pp. 9-26, 76-91.

⁶³ W. Fischer, *Das Wachstum des Wandervogels*, „Wandervogel. Monatsschrift für deutsches Jugendwandern“ 1913, 8 (1), pp. 23-25; G. Grisemayr, O. Würschinger, *Idee und Gestalt der Hitlerjugend*, Starnberger See 1979, pp. 24-26; H. Scholtz, *Der Wandervogel im Kontext der Jugendpolitik des Wilhelminischen Kaiserreichs*, [in:] „Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit“. *Der Wandervogel in der deutschen Jugendbewegung*, U. Herrmann (ed.), Weinheim-München 2006, pp. 129-137.

thereby acknowledging the supremacy of National Socialism over the *Turnbewegung* (gymnastics movement), which had existed since the early 19th century. This tribute made Hitler's task easier, allowing him to retroactively claim the idea of athletic body cultivation as part of his own original ideological and pedagogical vision. In contrast to the intellectual ideals of Weimar democracy and the constellation of creative and cultural initiatives developed by earlier circles and organizations, Hitler proposed his own model: the formation of a healthy and racially pure Aryan, free from Jewish ancestry.

Education within a purely racial community was inseparably linked to continuous physical hardening – mass-scale physical fitness training. The ideal was not the individual, but the collective body subjected to rigorous physical discipline: gymnastics, running, jumping. Even in this realm, however, National Socialist ideologues and educators were not entirely original. While promoting their concept of *Menschenmaterial* – the idealized human material of the Third Reich – they borrowed heavily from the traditions of German Turnerism. The strict bodily discipline of Turner culture aligned with the Nazi ideal of the Aryan – a „new German” glorified in the rhetoric of National Socialist ideology⁶⁴.

Hitler, in his singular work *Mein Kampf*, articulated not only the ideological canons of the movement but also the programmatic foundation for National Socialist physical education. The new leadership of sport and physical education felt compelled to implement the educational principles defined by the state. Hans von Tschammer und Osten (1887-1943), head of the Reich Sports Office and self-proclaimed representative of the teaching profession, explicitly advocated this vision⁶⁵. One example of the practical realization of this aim was the physical fitness competition for Turner Youth held in Nuremberg in 1934. The entire staging of this event was tailored to the ideological formation of a strong, athletic individual⁶⁶.

Thus, the core texts and journalism related to National Socialist bodily education were firmly grounded in the theses and directives of the Führer. While often framed in terms of *Wehrerziehung* (defensive education), Hitler's orders served as the central documents for the shaping of the German man through physical hardening. The mindset of the era is typified in the views of Johannes Runge, one of the leading figures of

⁶⁴ M. Clemenz, *Gesellschaftliche Ursprünge des Faschismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1972, pp. 87-96; J. Reulecke, *Jugend in Deutschland um die Jahrhundertwende. Aspekte einer Sozialgeschichte der Jugend*, [in:] *Illustrierte Geschichte der Deutschen Turnerjugend*, L. Peiffer (ed.), Essen 1992, pp. 8-14; W. Mogge, *Gemeinsame Wurzeln. Die bürgerliche Jugendbewegung und die Deutsche Turnerschaft*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 14-20.

⁶⁵ H. Bernett, *Nationalsozialistische Leibeserziehung. Eine Dokumentation ihrer Theorie und Organisation*, Stuttgart 1966, p. 19.

⁶⁶ L. Peiffer, *Vom „Unterausschuss” der Deutschen Jugend zum Jugendvorstand im Deutschen Turner-Bund. Aspekte einer Organisationsgeschichte der Deutschen Turnerjugend*, [in:] *Illustrierte Geschichte...*, pp. 28-29.

the sports movement, who praised Hitler's consistency, pragmatism, and openness – qualities that, in his view, elicited boundless admiration from every expert⁶⁷.

If Hitler outlined the ideological parameters and trajectory for radicalizing educational principles, it was the task of National Socialist ideologues and pedagogues to adjust these principles for practical implementation, especially in elite schools. The cult of physical activity and instrumental exercises, inspired by Germanic-paternalistic traditions, was fused with hostility toward Western forms of physical culture. Arno Kunath's textbook *Benennung und Bestimmung der Gerätübungen* (Naming and Defining Instrument Exercises), published by the German Turner Association, exemplifies this effort to redefine physical education according to a uniquely Germanic tradition. Although Hitler and the National Socialists sought to create an original ideological and pedagogical model, their approach was largely derivative. Close examination reveals significant borrowings from earlier environments and organizations that shared similar objectives. For this reason, the National Socialist project for educating the youth of the Third Reich entailed a complete reform of pedagogical foundations⁶⁸. In this context, the state – governed by veterans and *Frontgemeinschaft* members, not the intellectual bourgeoisie – was to assume a superior role in education. Scientists and intellectuals were no longer seen as suitable educators. Instead, only specially trained teachers – ideologically loyal and physically prepared – were considered capable of forming the true German youth. The aim of this redefined education was to preserve the organic unity of soul and body in young men, rendering them ready to devote themselves to the ideal of *Selbstopfer* – self-sacrificing service to the nation⁶⁹.

In the battle to win over the broadest possible masses of German youth, Nazi educators faced relatively little resistance, especially given the political climate of the late 1920s and early 1930s, which increasingly leaned toward National Socialism. As a result, the foundational elements of Nazi educational ideology – leader cult, militarism, racial purity, physical fitness, and worldview indoctrination – were more readily accepted, adapted, and ultimately radicalized. The architects of this ideological system, especially the postwar generation of Nazi pedagogues, drew heavily on the ideological frameworks of pre-Nazi youth organizations, neo-conservative thinkers, and the *Frontgemeinschaft*, all of which had rejected Weimar cosmopolitanism and liberalism. These influences helped shape the broader transformation of the German state – particularly its elite – which was deeply invested in redefining the education of the „German man”.

⁶⁷ J. Runge, *Deutscher Sport. Wie er ist und wie er werden soll. Unter Berücksichtigung der neuern Sportvorschriften*, Berlin 1934, pp. 15-17

⁶⁸ More broadly: A. Kunath, *Die Bezeichnung der Geräteübungen*, Leipzig 1936; H.P. Bleuel, E. Klinnert, *Deutscher Studentenbund auf dem Weg ins Dritte Reich. Ideologien, Programme, Aktionen, 1918-1935*, Gütersloh 1967, pp. 18-25.

⁶⁹ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. 2, Berlin 1933, pp. 418-420.

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Summary

From Weimar to the Third Reich. Youth Organisations in Germany Between 1918-1933 and Their Direct Influence on National Socialist Ideology

In the struggle to win over as many German youths as possible – from the early days of the Weimar Republic to the rise of the Third Reich – it was not difficult to secure social acceptance, particularly given the political climate of the late 1920s and early 1930s, which increasingly leaned toward Nazism. As a result, the fundamental tenets of National Socialist educational theory – namely, the cult of the leader, militarism, worldview indoctrination, racial purity, and physical fitness – were more easily accepted, adapted, and ultimately radicalized. During the Third Reich, schools became tools for indoctrinating the younger generation into the ideology of National Socialism. This process was intensified by the elevation of *Mein Kampf*, often referred to as the „ideological bible of evil”, to the status of a foundational text for totalitarian pedagogy, profoundly shaping the perception of the regime’s ideology. Within this framework, educators and instructors of National Socialism aimed to shape the German man as a distinct and ideologically molded individual. When reviewing educational programs from the Weimar Republic to the establishment of the Third Reich (1919-1933), one cannot overlook the formative influence of various ideological and cultural movements that shaped German youth during this transformative period.