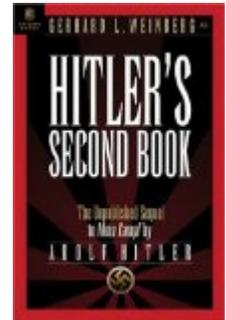


**Adolf Hitler.** *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf.* New York: Enigma Books, 2003. 325 pp. \$32.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-929631-16-2.



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In our desperate post-ideological age, as Slavoj Žižek argued in *The Desert of the Real, Five Essays on September 11*, the only absolute value is "absolute evil." According to Žižek, who quotes from the Idealist life-philosopher F. W. J. von Schelling, the concept exists in a state of emptiness that cannot retain any persistent explanation and therefore allows no public discussion. This sounds like an appropriate description for the current "axis-of-evil" type politics.[1] But does it fit historical methodology so neatly? What about the history of phenomena considered to be "evil," or even "absolute evil," as is Adolf Hitler?

The filmic and textual obsession with Hitler's personality during the last few years is an interesting allegory of a current cultural state we are living in and its fascination (obsession?) with "evil." No less does it testify to the desperate need for an absolute reference point, an anchor every system of description can hinge upon with safety. No positive system of ethics or references can supply the same security as an historical devil. It is not a mere chance, then, that all political "evils"--Saddam for Americans and Bush for Mus-

lims--were and still are compared to Hitler. Is the implication that we are living in an age of negative politics, or a "negative theology" as Žižek calls it? After all, it is often easier to formalize an enemy than define one's own self identity.

According to this logic, Hitler's *Second Book*, properly edited and translated into English for the first time, should have been a true sensation, a constant reference point for political philosophers and historians. But the exposure can be described as partial at best. Ian Kershaw revived it as a serious text in his biography of Hitler, Neil Gregor considers it "the clearest and most succinct statement of [Hitler's] views on many issues," but other than those two recent references, only a few historians have even bothered to mention it in their footnotes.[2] Hannah Arendt, who claimed herself that "to know the ultimate aims of Hitler's rule in Germany, it was much wiser to rely on his propaganda speeches and *Mein Kampf* than on the oratory of the chancellor of the Third Reich," still never mentions the *Second Book*,[3] not even in the later editions of her book on totalitarianism. The late exposure of the book to the public, in

1961 (German) and 1962 (a partisan translation into English), is not a sufficient explanation for such disregard.

The reason for such negligence has to do with a wrong understanding of the book's aims. On the surface, the explicit objective of the book is a contemporary reframing of the Nazi policy in foreign affairs. Hitler's focus is on the issue of South Tyrol, a burning issue in 1928, but utterly marginal for the understanding of the regime as a whole. In immediate terms, the issue of Tyrol has to do with two key elements: the Nazi party's stand on the issue in the election of May 1928 and its heavy defeat in that election--a month before the dictation of the text--as well as with Hitler's attempt to justify an alliance with Italy over the more natural ally, Austria. The conflict regarding the Tyrol mountains was threatening to burst into flames during the late 1920s, after Mussolini forced all religious classes in Tyrol to change to Italian as a formal language (up until then, German was the formal language). The move was interpreted by Austrians as an attempt to strengthen the Italian rule on the area, and threatened a fragile post-1918 status quo that left the area under Italian rule, but controlled by German-speaking *Kultur*.

However, behind Hitler's unpopular insistence on this alliance lies another dimension, ignored by historians. The framework of the text reveals a very principled and coherent discussion of a small set of key values and a surprisingly--for those familiar with the messy *Mein Kampf*--well-organized argumentation; Hitler opens the book with a more abstract discussion of the value of life (*Leben*) as an immanent power of both individuals and collectives (*Völker*), and deduces from it a whole set of practical conclusions--"practical" from his standpoint, of course. Historians have seen this as an explicit warning: "Today we know that Hitler said precisely what he meant to say," Omer Bartov argued in his review in the *New Republic*; "In the second book Hitler made complete-

ly explicit his view," Richard Overy argued in the *Guardian*.<sup>[4]</sup> Perhaps so, but is it possible that Hitler's words said more than he intended them to say? A discursive perspective might offer a new and fresh prism on the text.

The thread is guiding us from the immanent life of the true German--racially purified--to the contemporary needs of politics, keeping in mind the urgent need for living-space (*Lebensraum*) in the East, according to Hitler Germany's geopolitical sole option. Foreign relationships are presented and directed to serve this objective and in contrast to what historians often think, do not precede them. In fact, the argument as a whole is ruled by the absolute value of the concept of (aesthetic, organic) life, and can be read as an immanent discursive argument that keeps a constant awareness of "living-form" in the background. Of course, one once again reads about the Jewish conspiracy, the unworthiness of Slavic races, and a new and more radical emphasis on American power, with the United States declared a long-range enemy of Germany (this last point is a key innovation of the *Second Book* in political terms). But even more important than that is the conceptual frame Hitler portrays in the following words: "Human beings know no more than any other creature in the world why they live, but life is filled with the longing to preserve it.... the same laws that determine the life of the individual, and to which it is subject, are therefore valid for the people" (pp. 7-8). These laws, Hitler argues, are the "life-laws of the peoples" (*Lebensgesetze für die Völker*). These are also the laws that construct Hitler's view of "world history" ("Weltgeschichte"), which he separates into the "wrong" academic history, the official history of teachers and academics, and the popular "world history" or "world-politics," a history of the people, which he considers to be his own. Within this logic, Hitler criticized "those who feel called to educate a people"; not us--readers and writers of provocative reviews--but actual "doers," the politicians: "it is their task to learn from history and to

apply their knowledge practically without regard to the understanding, comprehension, ignorance or even repudiation of the masses ... [to] learn from the experiences of the past and impose on the German people the laws of life" (p. 40). Even more explicitly: "When I am nevertheless forced to observe the past and present critically, I do so only to justify and explain our own positive path" (p. 46). To put it plainly: Hitler identified himself as an über-politician, who relies on his unique understanding of the past, based on life-laws, that is, on a past that liberal and erudite historians can never agree to accept as a meta-narrative. The most essential concept for the book as a whole is therefore the "life-struggle" (*Lebenskampf*): "politics," he opens the first chapter of the book, "is history in the making [werdende]. History itself represents the progression of a people's struggle for survival." The German origin is still closer to the discourse of life: "history itself is the description of progression of the life-struggle of the people" ("Geschichte selbst ist die Darstellung des Verlaufs des Lebenskampfes eines Volkes," p. 7).[5] A clumsier phrasing than the English edited version, no doubt, but one that gives full voice to Hitler's discourse and its implications; what the "life-struggle" and "life-laws" emphasize is the importance of certain life-concepts for Hitler, as a vocabulary that controls the principles of political action, the historical interpretation, and the philosophical-populist as it may be--meta-narrative of Hitler's notion of space. The evolutionary *Lebenskampf* is formalized here as an immanent *Weltanschauung*, and politics are controlled by the dynamic laws of aesthetic creation.

*Lebensraum*, according to Hitler, is the byproduct of "ideas" that enable a life-reality (*Lebenswirklichkeit*). Other ideas, the inheritance of "idealist pacifism," equality and democracy, are for Hitler nothing else than "evil" itself: "Ideas that do not serve that purpose, even if they appear a thousand times beautiful outwardly, are nevertheless evil, because they gradually distance a people from the reality of life. But the bread that

a people needs in order to live is determined by the *Lebensraum*" (p. 17). Why did the editors leave *Lebensraum* in the original but ignore all other life-concepts? Maybe because *Lebensraum* has an immediate political and territorial appeal in their minds, an assumption that Hitler himself absolutely rejects: "The Germany of today must under no circumstances see its foreign policy task in a formal border policy ... the division of territory on the earth is always the momentary result of a struggle and an evolution that is in no way finished, but that naturally continues to progress" (pp. 94-95). In other words, space itself is dynamic, and moves according to the same laws of motion that operate behind the "peoples-life." There is little doubt Hitler was thinking about a dynamics of constant occupation and war, but not as a final objective. Rather, as he warns himself, "a wise political leadership will not see war as the purpose of a people's existence, but only a means to preserve this existence" (p. 12). Hitler's discourse portrays a movement that incorporates the globe, but not as a final goal; as the book shows, Hitler viewed this as the *result* of a given inner state. The implications for a proper intellectual history of the Nazi regime are decisive: Hitler's weight is laid on the immanent principles of borders as a philosophical concept, as a *Lebens-raum*, as an open political arena, and not as a closed target. Politics turn here to be the wide open "art of carrying out a people's [life]-struggle," a conscious choice of words that must turn our attention to politics as based on aesthetic corpus and the "creativity of the individual" (p. 34). What interests Hitler more than anything is the "historical cultural image of a people" (p. 32).

If we chose to take Hitler at his word, the radicalization of the art and image of the *Lebenskampf* marks a change from the previous and more immediate emphasis on the socialist "urban plan." Losing the election in May 1928 made Hitler understand he must make a move that would show both consistency (the emphasis on South Tyrol) and an ability to change. From the

perspective of intellectual history, the *Second Book* might be seen as marking a significant change in Hitler's rhetoric, while keeping its frame: resisting the "November criminals" and the "Jewish conspiracy," i.e., an absolute enemy.

Under that total framework Hitler's power was unbounded: "in the future, the only state that will be able to stand up to North America will be the state that has understood how--through the character of its internal life as well as through the substance of its external policy--to raise the racial value of its people and bring it into the most practical national form for this purpose" (p. 116). Hitler confronted then the "internal life" with the pan-European movement, "a purely formal union of European peoples, without being brought about by force in centuries-long battles by a European supreme power" (p. 116). It is--once again--the life-struggle that is giving both individuals and nations the ability to realize their unique character and identity, a specific tie between life and death.

"It is noteworthy," Hitler states early in the narrative, "how little man thinks during his life about the possibility of death" (p. 39). "[A]ll tactical considerations, however, do not at all indicate a renunciation of the former goals of French foreign policy, but only a concealment of them" (p. 140). In other words, Hitler places *death* and *concealment* as political-historical concepts, and points out their dynamic value.

Let me summarize: what I have tried to do here, in a very narrow space, is to place Hitler not as a philosopher,[6] but rather as the bold realization of a discourse of life which Heinrich Rickert, the neo-Kantian philosopher, called in 1920 "the most fashionable philosophical movement of our time." [7] The purpose of this review is provocative, perhaps, but also limited; not to explain the discourse, or its gradual politicization during the 1920s, but rather to point out the path Hitler explored in 1928 to make this immanent power also an external phenomenon, a spectacle.

It would be an accurate estimation to say that the *Second Book* does so with much greater success than *Mein Kampf*, in a more coherent way, and in a strict line that leads from the philosophical vocabulary of life to the immediate political realization. As such, the *Second Book* should be taken more seriously by those students of National Socialism and those interested in its *Weltanschauung*. An interesting exercise is to compare it to those chapters focusing on foreign relations in *Mein Kampf*, which it extends and makes more principled: the fourth chapter of volume 1 and the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of volume 2.

As has been mentioned in other reviews, the editor and translator, indeed, have done excellent work. Minor printing mistakes (pp., 83, 90) do not affect the high level of scholarly editing, and yet the editor and translator should have included in parenthesis the origin of the many concepts and idioms Hitler uses, especially the many populating the "life-view." An increased awareness of the important role of Nazi discourse would have enhanced the translation. Even if one agrees to view Hitler's character or actions as an "absolute evil," a theological concept that most *Lebensphilosophen* would have rejected *en face*, it needs to be done from within their vocabulary and views. Anything from the outside would be an anachronism, even Žižek's critical reading of the Idealist "absolute negativity," which entered into our daily life "to shatter the insulated daily course of the lives of us, true Nietzschean Last Men." [8]

#### Notes

[1]. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real, Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso Books, 2002), p. 137.

[2]. Neil Gregor, *How to Read Hitler* (London: Granta Books, 2005), p. 5.

[3]. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1979), p. 414.

[4]. Omer Bartov, "He Meant What He Said," *The New Republic* (January 2004), <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1064474/posts>, and Richard Overy, "Mein Kampf: The Sequel," *The Guardian* (July 2003), <http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,988683,00.html>.

[5]. Gerhard Weinberg, ed., *Hitlers zweites Buch, Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), p. 46.

[6]. Some historians have made this mistake; see H. R. Trevor-Roper, an introduction to *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), and more recently such argumentation as in the less convincing Lawrence Birken, *Hitler as a Philosopher, Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport: Praeger, 1995).

[7]. Heinrich Rickert, *Die Philosophie des Lebens: Darstellung und Kritik der philosophischen Modeströmungen unserer Zeit* (Tübingen : Verlag von Mohr, 1920).

[8]. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 142.

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