

## Othmar Spann and the Quest for a "True State"

The Austrian scholar and social theorist Othmar Spann (1878-1950) was a major figure in the "conservative revolution" that fired the imagination of many Central European intellectuals after World War I. Born in the Habsburg monarchy as it was disintegrating under the pressures of nationalism and industrialization, Spann seemed destined for a conventional academic career until war, revolution, and economic collapse destroyed the social and ideological foundations of the old order in 1918. A series of lectures delivered at the University of Vienna soon after the war quickly made Spann a major spokesman for the "war generation"—young men whose roughhewn idealism found few outlets in the grim world of postwar Central Europe. Published in Germany in 1921 in a volume entitled *Der wahre Staat* (The True State), the ideas which Spann had previously outlined in articles and lectures soon became major ideological weapons for rightist forces in Germany and Austria. A prolific writer and publicist as well as a gifted lecturer and teacher, Spann had by the late 1920's assembled a circle of dedicated disciples who enthusiastically spread his doctrines throughout German-speaking Central Europe. His central position in the intellectual movement known as the "conservative revolution"<sup>1</sup> makes it essential that his thoughts and actions be scrutinized in detail.

Every scholar who has written about Spann sooner or later must face a number of challenges: the difficulty of finding a great mass of source materials scattered by war and social upheaval over several countries; the fading of memories of former students and disciples of Spann; the almost impenetrable nature of Spann's philosophical vocabulary and mode of expression; and the problem of explaining Spann's motivation in supporting nazi and fascist movements in view of his avowed belief in profoundly spiritual ideals. These are only a few of the problems that inevitably will accompany full-scale investigation of Spann's life, time, and impact. Yet when all is said and done Spann the man continues to both fascinate and puzzle those who have chosen to explain him to future generations, for the simple reason that he is in many ways an archetypical German bourgeois intellectual of the first third of this century.

<sup>1</sup>Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932. Ein Handbuch* (2nd rev'd. ed., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), pp. 413-415.

Spann grew to intellectual maturity in an age when the growth of mass society was leading to a severe downgrading of the traditional role of the intellectual in German-speaking Europe. Fritz Ringer has given us an idea of the "decline of the German mandarins" in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, emphasizing the traumatic consequences of a rather sudden loss of status for a social and cultural elite that owed its social position primarily to educational qualifications rather than inherited wealth or power.<sup>2</sup> Spann was not unique in lamenting the loss of idealism and spiritual values in German culture. Neither was he the only German-speaking intellectual to praise the life-giving forces of the romanticist tradition as an antidote to western liberal and rationalistic values. He was probably unique, however, in that he spent several decades thinking through a comprehensive metaphysical system of ideas—"universalism"—that claimed to answer all of the fundamental questions plaguing the German nation. He was also the only intellectual in the German cultural tradition in this century to create a circle of like-minded individuals who were bent on one day playing a leading role in academic, economic, and political life by means of a slow process of infiltration of existing institutions. More than any other intellectual of the "conservative revolution" Spann was able to create a specific mechanism for implementing his ideas in the real world.

Spann's conservative view of society can be traced back to the ideas of the early nineteenth-century German and Austrian political romanticists who viewed man and his social destiny in essentially aesthetic and organic categories. The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw European intellectuals ever more convinced that their civilization was in the grips of a profound social, political, and moral crisis. Thinkers of prophetic vision, Friedrich Nietzsche foremost among them, viewed their own era with the deepest misgivings. For these critical intellectuals, democracy and mass society provided clear evidence that a deep-seated process of degeneration was underway throughout the western world. In their view the rise of the urban industrial culture of the late nineteenth century had exacted an incalculable cost in terms of human suffering and psychic rootlessness. The two conquering forces of the epoch, capitalism and socialism, held centuries-old social patterns in contempt and called for the creation of new epochs of human history in which free and rational individuals would determine the course of their lives unen-

<sup>2</sup>Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 1-13 and *passim*.

cumbered by traditional religions or beliefs. In such an unstable environment, a growing number of ideologists sought to find a way out of their world's growing disorder.<sup>3</sup>

In Central Europe the quest for order in the years around 1900 increasingly drew nourishment from the rich legacy of German romanticism. Appalled by the excesses of the French revolution, German romanticist intellectuals in the early years of the nineteenth century came to believe that the German spirit had reached its highest development during the middle ages, when feudal society and the Roman Catholic faith had both been able to bind man to eternal truths. For romanticist social theorists such as Adam Heinrich Müller (1779-1829), only a corporative state (*Ständestaat*) would be able to fuse all human activities into a harmonious totality of belief and action. Strong believers in diversity, the romanticists were convinced that just as ideas arrange themselves naturally into hierarchical categories of perfection, so too it was natural for the elements of society to be arranged into higher and lower orders. In other words, the only genuinely "organic" social order was one based on non-egalitarian, hierarchical principles.<sup>4</sup>

Austria, throughout much of the nineteenth century, was highly receptive to romanticist political thought. Adam Müller, born a Prussian and a Protestant, became a loyal subject of the Habsburg sovereign and an enthusiastic spokesman for the neo-feudal ideology and wrote the single most important book of political romanticism: *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*.<sup>5</sup> With Müller's death, a number of Catholic writers continued to denounce democracy, individualism, and the social-contract theory of state and society. The most important of these was another North German convert to the Catholic faith and the Austrian nationality, Baron Karl von Vogelsang (1818-1890). Much of Vogelsang's thought was formulated during the profoundly unsettled years after the Viennese stock-market crash of 1873. Vogelsang viewed capitalism as the economic manifestation of

<sup>3</sup>Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1963), pp. xi-xxx. See also Gerhard Masur, *Prophets of Yesterday: Studies in European Culture 1890-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>Gisela von Busse, *Die Lehre vom Staate als Organismus. Kritische Untersuchungen zur Staatsphilosophie Adam Müllers* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1928), p. 40; Reinhold Aris, *Die Staatslehre Adam Müllers in ihrem Verhältnis zur deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1929), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>First published in Berlin in 1809, Müller's magnum opus was reprinted under the auspices of Othmar Spann under the title *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*, edited by Jakob Baxa. In *Die Herdflamme*, Vol. I (2 vols., Vienna: Wiener Literarische Anstalt, 1922).

a corrosive liberal conception of human nature. Consequently he totally rejected the standard liberal notion that the free individual needed the state only to the extent of acting as an umpire to direct his competitive activities vis-à-vis other individuals. Baron Vogelsang insisted that the state was innate in man; it bound him to other human beings in a network of relationships that ultimately were part of a morality deriving from a divine plan.<sup>6</sup>

Capitalism and the competitive ethic it thrived upon were vigorously criticized by Vogelsang. As he saw it, by divorcing economics from ethics and eternal standards of justice, the liberals had created an empty, materialistic world in which man was little more than a plaything at the mercy of anonymous market forces. Vogelsang ardently desired that Austria and all of German-speaking Central Europe would be spared the fate of England, which, he was convinced, had industrialized to the point that virtually all of its traditional institutions were in an advanced state of decay. For this reason he looked to the state as the institution that would impose a standard of social justice transcending blind economic energies.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, he hoped that the territorial system of political representation would be supplanted by an occupational system of representation. Each delegate to an economic parliament would represent a particular trade or profession and thus be thoroughly familiar with his constituency's problems and aspirations. Vogelsang was convinced that his proposed system was far superior to the superficiality and demagoguery that almost invariably accompanied democratic politics.<sup>8</sup>

With the death of Vogelsang in 1890 the ideas of political romanticism and of the corporative state rapidly waned. Political Catholicism and social conservatism in Austria came under the control of men like Karl Lueger, the brilliant mayor of Vienna. Lueger was a pragmatist par excellence, and talk of harmonious corporative societies emanating from learned circles scarcely interested him, for the simple reason that such ideas did not attract votes at election time.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Schwalber, *Vogelsang und die moderne christlichsoziale Politik* (Munich: Leoheaus, 1927), pp. 22-43; Paul Jostock, *Der deutsche Katholizismus und die Überwindung des Kapitalismus. Eine ideengeschichtliche Skizze* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1932), pp. 131-143.

<sup>7</sup>Wiard von Kloppe, *Die sozialen Lehren des Freiherrn Karl von Vogelsang* (2nd rev'd. ed., Vienna: Reinhold, 1938), pp. 245-248.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 238-265; Johann C. Allmayer-Beck, *Vogelsang. Vom Feudalismus zur Volksbewegung* (Vienna: Herold, 1952), pp. 35-40.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Lueger's career and ideas are badly in need of a scholarly study. The most intelligent and probing study to date is Kurt Skalnik, *Dr. Karl Lueger. Der Mann zwischen den Zeiten*. In *Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte des christlichen Österreich* (Vienna: Herold, 1954).

And yet it was in the years that Lueger governed Vienna, when conservative ideologies were seemingly defunct in Austria, that Spann, the most influential conservative ideologist in modern Austrian history, was painstakingly creating the foundations of what would in time become a full-scale *Weltanschauung*.

Spann brought to fruition the theories of Müller and Vogelsang. Concepts and yearnings that had barely been outlined by Müller and Vogelsang were delineated in rich detail by Spann, a man quite conscious of being the heir and leading champion of the romanticist ideology in an age overwhelmingly hostile to its ideas. He came of age in the profoundly troubled world Vogelsang knew so well: the great depression of the 1880's and 1890's. His father owned a small artisan shop which succumbed to the pressures of large-scale industry, and the young Spann grew up in the shadow of social forces that seemed concerned only with the growth of profits, not with the satisfaction of human needs.<sup>10</sup> The rapidly declining status of the traditional artisans' estate (*Handwerkerstand*), which Spann saw every day in his own life, most likely drew him to social and economic themes when he embarked on his higher education.<sup>11</sup> Unease about a world seemingly out of control made him seek out scholars who could perhaps supply convincing answers to these most pressing issues of the day. Because of his marginally bourgeois background he was attracted to those large systems of thought that attempted in the closing decades of the nineteenth century to grasp the essence of social reality and in so doing to help create a more stable society.<sup>12</sup> His elitist bias sprang from the belief, firmly held since his earliest years, in the necessity of a hierarchy of values. On account of his interest in philosophy and broad social theory, Spann gradually began to think of himself as a social philosopher.<sup>13</sup>

Spann studied under some of the best-known scholars of the day. In Vienna he attended the classes taught by Carl Menger (1849-

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Dr. Raphael Spann at Vienna on May 10, 1968.

<sup>11</sup>Martin Schneller, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus. Der Beitrag Othmar Spanns zum Konservatismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1970), p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Klaus-Jörg Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus. Das Gesellschaftsbild Othmar Spanns. Zur politischen Funktion seiner Gesellschaftslehre und Ständestaatskonzeption* (Vienna: Europa, 1974), pp. 19-49. Marxist in conception and a model of research and writing, Siegfried's study is the best investigation of Othmar Spann's ideas and politics to date.

<sup>13</sup>Spann's earliest ideological loyalties were to positivism; from philosophy and a type of systems theory (non-mathematical) he was able to create his philosophy of universalism. On this complex and fascinating subject see Arnulf Rieber, *Vom Positivismus zum Universalismus. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung und Kritik des Ganzheitsbegriffs von Othmar Spann*. In *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sozialwissenschaften*, No. 2 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971).

1921), an economic theorist of great originality, who insisted that knowledge in economics could only derive from an examination of the specific actions of individuals engaged in economic pursuits (*wirtschaftende Menschen*). This was a radically individualistic, atomistic conception of economic life. Menger believed that the general process of economics in any society could only be understood by intensive study of the behavior of individuals.<sup>14</sup> At the University of Zürich the young Austrian intellectual studied under Heinrich Herkner (1863-1932), a social reformer and expert on the alienation of the working class from the rest of bourgeois society. Herkner was a member of the Verein für Sozialpolitik, an organization of German professors advocating piecemeal reforms within the existing social order.<sup>15</sup> In the practical realm, these scholars hoped to weaken the appeals of the Social Democratic Party. Feeling that the Verein was built on shaky ideological foundations, Spann rejected Menger's methodology of individualism and Herkner's often cautious reformism. The only lasting influence on Spann from these years was that of his mentor Albert Schäffle (1831-1903), who had taught at Tübingen for many years and who as a former Austrian cabinet minister was well known for his advocacy of a corporative society capable of luring the proletariat away from the blandishments of Marxism. Schäffle first brought to the young Spann's attention the idea that social theory was not divorced from broad philosophical themes; in fact, Spann thrived so under the aegis of the elderly sociologist that Schäffle once cautioned his impetuous student against always "wanting to be a field marshal rather than a sergeant."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Karl Menger, *Untersuchungen über die Methode der Socialwissenschaften, und die politische Ökonomie insbesondere* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1883), pp. 82-88. One of Menger's ideas, namely his call for a renewal of theoretical studies of economic and social relationships—as opposed to detailed historical analyses—undoubtedly appealed to the young Othmar Spann. See especially Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, p. 28. A number of Spann's writings were found in Menger's library at his death, indicating that he thought highly of Spann. Spann sought to interest the doyen of Austrian economics in his ideas. The books are listed in the *Katalog der Carl Menger-Bibliothek in der Handels-Universität Tokio* (Tokyo: Bibliothek der Handels-Universität, 1926). See cols. 97, 361-362, and 740 in the edition reprinted in New York in 1969 by Burt Franklin.

<sup>15</sup>Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, p. 20. The ideology of the Verein für Sozialpolitik is ably discussed in Frank H. Lennox, Jr., "Socialism of the Chair in the 1870's: A Study of the Theory and Practice of Social Reform in Germany" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1972).

<sup>16</sup>Letter to the author from Frau Dr. Ilse Zuther-Roloff, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, September 29, 1972. Ilse Roloff, as she was known at the time, helped edit Spann's journal *Ständisches Leben* in the 1930's.

It was during these years that Spann flirted with liberal, scientific, and even Marxist ideas.<sup>17</sup> As he was to admit later, for a while he was extremely sympathetic to socialism.<sup>18</sup> As had Müller over a century earlier, Spann went through a radical democratic phase in which human rationality and social progress seemed not only highly desirable goals but appeared to be on the threshold of realization. But soon new currents of thought began to intrigue Spann. Working as a statistician at a social-welfare center in Frankfurt am Main from 1903 through 1906, he came to believe that behind the dry statistics he was gathering there existed something deeper and more profound, namely, human values based on man's innate sociability.<sup>19</sup> It was during these busy years that the social philosopher in Spann triumphed over the dry-as-dust, methodical statistician. Convinced that he had made a discovery of fundamental importance to social theory, the young Austrian scholar began to assert that social phenomena could be understood only in one of two ways. The first way was to examine things genetically, that is, according to their origins; the other, the functional approach, was to look on all events from the point of view of their social consequences. For Spann, the genetic approach was a purely causal explanation of social reality. In his eyes, a causal methodology amounted to little more than a superficial recounting of surface events; it failed to penetrate into the real, hidden reasons why things occur and to explain what impact these events had on human beings.<sup>20</sup> The functional approach became for Spann the essence of genuine sociology because it enabled a person to grasp the larger relationships of the social organism, always remembering that society is a collective unity, an ultimate totality.

Around 1908 Spann coined the word "universalism" to describe his new conception of social science.<sup>21</sup> Universalism, which Spann also referred to as "*Ganzheitslehre*," was at first presented as no

<sup>17</sup>John T. Blackmore, *Ernst Mach: His Work, Life, and Influence* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 182-183.

<sup>18</sup>Othmar Spann, *Die Irrungen des Marxismus. Eine Darstellung und Prüfung seiner Wirtschaftslehre* (2nd rev'd. ed., Graz: Verlag des Steirischen Heimatschutzverbandes, 1929), pp. 23-24.

<sup>19</sup>Hans Räber, *Othmar Spanns Philosophie des Universalismus. Darstellung und Kritik* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1937), pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup>Othmar Spann, "Zur Logik der sozialwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung," in *Festgaben für Friedrich Julius Neumann zur siebenzigsten Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1905), pp. 161-178. Spann went on to define these terms in greater detail in his *Kategorienlehre*. In *Ergänzungsbände zur Sammlung Herdflamme*, Vol. I (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1924).

<sup>21</sup>Rieber, *Vom Positivismus zum Universalismus*, pp. 85-87.

more and no less than a concept of academic social science methodology. Within a decade, however, Spann and his concept of universalism (*Ganzheit*) moved from the realm of scholarship to that of ideological activism, from the quiet professional environment to the world of political prophecy and national rebirth. Several events brought about this dramatic transformation. One was Spann's marriage in 1906 to the poetess Erika Spann-Rheinsch (1880-1967). His bride, a direct descendant of Martin Luther,<sup>22</sup> was enthusiastic about virtually all forms of artistic activity, whether in literature, music, or the fine arts. What was to be a singularly happy union with an unusual woman heightened Spann's aesthetic interests, particularly his belief that politics and art could never be compartmentalized.<sup>23</sup> Husband and wife collaborated in writing several volumes of poetry, at least one of which appeared in print.<sup>24</sup>

Probably more important than his artistic interests for the development of his ideology was Spann's serendipitous discovery of Müller's book *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* in an antiquarian book shop in Heidelberg in 1907.<sup>25</sup> Although he was not the first intellectual to be impressed by Müller's writings in an age of industrialism, democracy, and class struggles, Spann was undoubtedly the first to see the possibility of reviving the ideas of the long-dead apologist of the Metternich regime. Tired of teaching statistics and traditional economic theory at the Technological College at Brünn, Spann was spiritually refreshed by the romanticist concepts he found in Müller's work. Not only Müller's concepts, but the very words

<sup>22</sup>Wilhelm Kosch, *Deutsches Literatur-Lexikon* (2nd rev'd. ed., 4 vols., Bern: Francke Verlag, 1949-58), Vol. III, p. 2,757; *Degeners Wer ist's?* (10th ed., Berlin: Verlag Hermann Degener, 1935), p. 1,520.

<sup>23</sup>This was a typical romantic ideal. Müller rejected the separation of the arts from the other serious concerns of life. See Friedrich Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, translated by Robert B. Kimber (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 97. Spann said much the same thing when he declared that "one should not separate life and art; this is the greatest error of our time!" As quoted in Willi Kadletz, "Gehört die Kunst dem Volke? Die Tätigkeit des 'Dopolavoro' in Italien," *Ständisches Leben*, Vol. III, No. 7 (1933), p. 397.

<sup>24</sup>Othmar Rheinsch [pseud. for Othmar Spann] and Erika Rheinsch, *Die Motive aus dem Ring Richard Wagners. Lyrische Nachdichtungen* (Vienna: Gerlach & Wiedling, 1906). At least one other collaborative work of poetry was completed by Spann and his bride, but it was never published. Erika Spann-Rheinsch to Carl Busse, Rosenheim Kaiserbad, May, 1907, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung (Berlin-Dahlem), *Nachlaß Busse*.

<sup>25</sup>Othmar Spann, *Die Haupttheorien der Volkswirtschaftslehre auf lehrgeschichtlicher Grundlage* (18th rev'd. ed., Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1928), p. v; Othmar Spann in a review of Adam Müller, *Schriften zur Staatsphilosophie*, edited by Rudolf Kohler (Munich: Theatinerverlag, 1924), in *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft und Sozialpolitik*, new ser., Vol. IV, No. 4-6 (1924), p. 396.



themselves seemed to lift Spann from the humdrum of ordinary bourgeois life.<sup>26</sup> From this point on, Spann's theory of universalism was to be profoundly influenced by Müller's ideas.

Spann hated the individualism of the early twentieth century as much as Müller had despised egalitarianism in his day. Individualism was the primary target of Spann's *Zeitkritik* and was set up as the polar opposite of universalism. As Spann depicted it, individualism was an unsound theory of human nature because of its belief that the egotistic individual could draw from his own inner self all of the resources needed for an autonomous moral and spiritual existence.<sup>27</sup> Spann was convinced that individualism was so wedded to the notion of atomistic self-sufficiency for each and every person that it effectively regarded society as no more than a fiction, a phantom.<sup>28</sup> By its very nature, individualism could not create a genuine society; notions of self-sufficiency produced only a collection or summing up of disparate beings, a mere accumulation of spiritually unrelated things ("nur als Summierung, als Haufen der Einzelnen").<sup>29</sup> Since the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, but particularly since the French Revolution, western thinkers had uncritically accepted the idea of the free individual. For Spann this glorification of freedom was the cardinal error of modern times; it had wrenched western man away from the true life-giving forces of culture: nature and the rich experience of untold previous generations. Instead of binding people to a profound historical continuum, a "freedom" based on individualism was sure to lead to frustration and bitter disappointment, for the simple reason that it kept men in isolation from each other, incapable of achieving any kind of spiritual community.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to World War I Spann's definition and usage of universalism remained vague and seemingly quite unsuited to practical concerns. His criticism of the vulgar, competitive society of his day was general enough for him to be acceptable in racist (*völkisch*) and nationalist and even in certain socialist circles. He was able to cultivate a solid friendship with Hans Kelsen, who, as a bourgeois

<sup>26</sup>Räber, *Othmar Spanns Philosophie des Universalismus*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>27</sup>Othmar Spann, *Der wahre Staat. Vorlesungen über Abbruch und Neubau der Gesellschaft, gehalten im Sommersemester 1920 an der Universität Wien* (2nd rev'd. ed., Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1923), pp. 102-115. The first edition of *Der wahre Staat* was published in 1921; third and fourth editions appeared in 1931 and 1938.

<sup>28</sup>Othmar Spann, "Soziologie," *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* (4th rev'd. ed., 9 vols., Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1923-29), Vol. VII (1926), p. 656.

<sup>29</sup>Othmar Spann, "Universalismus," *ibid.*, Vol. VIII (1928), pp. 454-455.

<sup>30</sup>Spann, *Der wahre Staat*, pp. 68-70.

liberal and a Jew, was a member of minorities increasingly used as scapegoats in a culture of crisis.<sup>31</sup> In short, Spann seemingly could move in several directions with his ideas. Even the war that broke out in August, 1914, did not cause him to close out all ideological options. He served at the front a short time, was slightly wounded, and returned to Vienna in 1915 to serve out the remainder of the war at a desk in the war ministry.<sup>32</sup> It was not until 1919, after he had been expelled from Brünn by an anti-German Czech mob<sup>33</sup> and after he had been appointed to a chair at the University of Vienna, that Spann emerged from obscurity to raise high the standard of Austrian neo-conservatism.

In the summer semester of 1920 Spann gave a series of lectures at the University of Vienna that catapulted him to fame as a major counterrevolutionary ideologist in the German-speaking world. Entitled *Der wahre Staat* (The True State), Spann's lectures came at a time when the revolutionary mood of 1918 and 1919 was ebbing fast and a new, aggressive conservatism was ascending.<sup>34</sup> Spann regarded his lectures, and the books based on them, as nothing less than a full-scale declaration of war on all the varieties of that pernicious enemy of the German nation: individualism. Now, in 1920, Spann finally took sides in the great political turmoil of the day and savagely attacked Marxism. Marxian Socialism was for Spann a hideous child of individualism. Karl Marx, by concentrating almost exclusively on materialistic concerns, had so twisted his German idealistic heritage that only a parody of it remained in his writings.<sup>35</sup> Marxism emphasized the rational, free individual rather than the organic community (*Gemeinschaft*), and for this reason it had to be rejected as an utterly "un-German" ideology,<sup>36</sup> Spann insisted.

Emphasizing spirituality (*Geist*) and qualitative elements over force of numbers and democratic majorities, Spann's *Der wahre Staat* was a slashing criticism of democracy. Youthful and impetuous, many of them war veterans, Spann's students at the University of Vienna were carried away by the rhetorical boldness of the slight, handsome professor with the burning eyes of a true believer.<sup>37</sup> The

<sup>31</sup>Rudolf Aladár Métall, *Hans Kelsen. Leben und Werk* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1969), pp. 32 and 97.

<sup>32</sup>Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup>Letter to the author from Hans Neuwirth, Munich, April 22, 1968.

<sup>34</sup>This thesis is developed skillfully and in great detail by Francis Ludwig Carsten in his *Revolution in Central Europe, 1918-1919* (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

<sup>35</sup>Othmar Spann, "Adam Müller and Karl Marx," *Aus deutschen Gauen*, Vol. II (1922), p. 178; Spann, *Der wahre Staat*, pp. 172-175.

<sup>36</sup>Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>37</sup>Letter to the author from Prof. P. N. Rosenstein-Rodan, Cambridge, Mass.,

fact that the "true state" was as much an emotional yearning as a realizable political goal troubled them little. It was a time when reality was so impoverished, cruel, and seemingly without hope that dreams of Utopias—even arch-reactionary Utopias—were infinitely more pleasant than a world of defeat, inflation, and gnawing hunger.<sup>38</sup> Living conditions were so grim in Vienna in the early 1920's that for a time the university was forced to close down due to a lack of coal for heating.<sup>39</sup>

Spann's "true state" was a frankly authoritarian polity. It would not be led by a democratically chosen parliament or executive, for these only reflected the basic ignorance and crude materialism Spann held to be characteristic of the great masses of people.<sup>40</sup> Spann's elitist social order was hierarchically organized as a corporative state (*Ständestaat*) in which "spiritual" attainments would determine one's social and political status. Occupational guilds rather than political parties would represent the legitimate interests of the groups comprising society. Spann's conservative order was frankly committed to the ideal of inequality. Universalism demanded that inequality be "organically" organized within the overall structure of a moral totality (*Ganzheit*) that in the final analysis derived its strength from the unique cultural spirit of Germanism.<sup>41</sup> True to his Austrian Catholic origins, Spann noted that the new morality of a corporative society of the future was not grounded in individual self-interest but rather in the forces of "total spirituality" (*das Gesamtegeistige*) that permeated every nook and cranny of such a radically renewed world. In the final analysis, divine principles alone could serve as the basis for all social and political life.<sup>42</sup>

Spann was fully convinced that his ideas could be put into practice in his own generation. Quite aware of the failure of his intellectual predecessors to implement their ideas in the real world, he was determined that the same fate would not befall him. Above all, he believed that his own education prepared him to formulate a

September 28, 1970. To this day, after forty or even fifty years, many of those individuals who personally met Spann have mentioned to this writer the brilliance of his eyes, his animated nature, and the charm and warmth of personality he was able to generate.

<sup>38</sup>One writer has called the Vienna of the years after 1918 a "huge city of starving and freezing beggars." See Julius Braunthal, *The Tragedy of Austria* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), p. 43.

<sup>39</sup>"Die Wiener Universität ohne Heizmaterial," *Neue Freie Presse* (Morgenblatt), February 12, 1922, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup>Spann, *Der wahre Staat* (1921 ed.), pp. 187-190.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.

full-scale ideology of neo-romanticist conservatism. Neither a journalist nor a dilettante, Spann was a solidly trained social theorist, and this encouraged him to proceed in his grand plan of presenting the elite of the German nation with the ideas essential for its salvation. Starting in 1921, he began to edit *Die Herdflamme*, a series of sourcebooks designed to acquaint the future leaders of the "true state" with all of the great thoughts conceived within an idealistic, hierarchical, and organic framework since the days of classical antiquity. Significantly enough, the first volume in the *Herdflamme* series was Müller's magnum opus: *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*.<sup>43</sup>

The University of Vienna was the physical and spiritual home of the ideology of universalism. By the mid-1920's Spann had given up all pretense of being an objective scholar, instead using his academic status as a means of spreading the gospel of universalism. The lectures published as *Der wahre Staat* were a declaration of war against democracy, liberalism, and, above all else, Marxian Socialism.<sup>44</sup> In effect, *Der wahre Staat* became the bible of universalism.

Spann's ideas harmonized with the prejudices of the great majority of students in Vienna, who were traditionally radical-right enemies of all liberal, democratic, and socialist tendencies. They packed Spann's lecture hall to cheer the professor as he proclaimed the start of a new age.<sup>45</sup> Here, once and for all, was a scholar with passion, a man not drowning in detail and eternal qualifications. The narrow pettiness of the typical Central European academician contrasted sharply with the characteristics of Spann, who painted on a large canvas with brilliant colors.<sup>46</sup> Some of the more enthusiastic students hailed Spann as the new Fichte.<sup>47</sup> As had Müller before him, Spann energetically combatted all of the hostile ideologies around him. These included—and the list is not exhaustive—"individualism,

<sup>43</sup>The complete *Herdflamme* series is listed in Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>44</sup>By the mid-1920's Spann had become known as the most courageous academic foe of Marxism, liberalism, and democracy, largely on account of the success of *Der wahre Staat*. See Georg von Below, "Othmar Spann," *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, Vol. VIII, No. 10 (October, 1924), pp. 605-611.

<sup>45</sup>Just as his students cheered his lectures, those who disagreed with him shuffled their feet and made other noises as a sign of disapproval. Letter to the author from Prof. Bartholomew Landheer, The Hague, May 3, 1967.

<sup>46</sup>Many students of the time were attracted to Spann's ideas because they seemed to reject the narrowness of scientific and professional specialization. Letter to the author from Prof. Erich Maschke, Ziegelhausen bei Heidelberg, May 6, 1971.

<sup>47</sup>Letter to the author from Prof. Alfred Verdross, Vienna, April 25, 1968.

atomism, psychologism, Marxism, and other dead sciences."<sup>48</sup> In more practical terms, Spann's "war" against these anti-organic ideas involved allying himself with political forces on the right that could slowly but surely move Austria and Germany toward the true, universalistic era.

From 1920 on, Spann worked assiduously to mold a circle of like-minded individuals (*Kreis*) from his very best students. Once graduated, these young men<sup>49</sup> would move out into the world of industry, academic life, and politics and build a network of contacts with other "*Spannianer*." More importantly, perhaps, these enthusiasts of the Spann-Kreis could win over a large number of professional colleagues to universalism as they progressed in their various careers. In time, Spann hoped, one or more of his disciples would be found in almost every important institution of public life in German-speaking Europe. By the late 1920's the first signs of this development were starting to take place. In Germany a number of industrialists, including Fritz Thyssen, were becoming interested in Spann's corporative schemes. In the Sudetenland the youth movement and the gymnastic clubs were increasingly led by Spann's former students.<sup>50</sup> Finally, in Austria the leadership of the Heimwehr, a bourgeois militia hostile to parliamentary government, desperately seeking an ideology for their war against the Social Democrats and democracy in general, suddenly became interested in universalism and the corporate state.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the 1920's Spann had carefully avoided taking a definite political stance. While he was known to all as an enemy of democratic society and Marxism, his specific political loyalties were carefully hidden. Thus, while Spann praised the Hitler putsch of November, 1923, as an admirable expression of Germanic idealism, he did not join the Nazi movement even though his name often appeared in publications of both the Austrian and German branches

<sup>48</sup>Othmar Spann, *Tote und lebendige Wissenschaft. Abhandlungen zur Auseinandersetzung mit Individualismus und Marxismus* (2nd rev'd. ed., Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1925), p. xiv.

<sup>49</sup>On rare occasions a woman would be permitted to join the Spann circle. The best known were Helene Lieser in the 1920's and Ilse Roloff in the 1930's.

<sup>50</sup>They formed an influential semi-secret organization known as the Kameradschaftsbund. For an outline of its rise and fall see John Haag, "'Knights of the Spirit': The Kameradschaftsbund," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (July, 1973), pp. 133-153.

<sup>51</sup>John Haag, "Othmar Spann and the Politics of 'Totality': Corporatism in Theory and Practice" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rice University, 1969), pp. 103-111; Clifton Earl Edmondson, "The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics, 1918-1934" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1966), pp. 122-215.

of the NSDAP.<sup>52</sup> What Spann hoped to do was to interest any and all of the potential leaders of an authoritarian future state in his ideas. Thus he could speak to the parliamentary delegates of both the Pan-Germans and the Christian Socials<sup>53</sup> and later lend his name to the Nazi-front organization Kampfband für deutsche Kultur.<sup>54</sup> Having grown up in the Austrian tradition of *packeln* (associating with various political factions in order to be prepared for all eventualities), Spann saw nothing wrong with preparing for the day when his ideas would become reality in a more organic world.<sup>55</sup>

Even Spann must sometimes have been astonished at the success of his circle. By the early 1930's scores of his former students were busily establishing themselves in positions of growing importance. Equally important, he had popularized ideas that only two decades earlier were seen as antiquated beyond redemption as subjects of respectable conversation and debate. A case in point is the reputation of Adam Müller. Spann's initial praise of Müller appeared in 1911 in the first edition of his textbook on the history of economic thought: *Die Haupttheorien der Volkswirtschaftslehre*. At that time the long-dead counterrevolutionary jack-of-all-trades was scarcely known in scholarly circles. By the early 1920's, when Spann's *Haupttheorien* had become the standard text on economic thought, Müller's notions were at least superficially known to thousands of students from Königsberg to Graz.<sup>56</sup>

The exhumation of Müller was one of the most important projects of the Spann circle. One of Spann's closest personal friends,

<sup>52</sup>Letter to the author from Viktor Matejka, Vienna, August 18, 1972; "Arminius und die Hitler-Partei," *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* (Vienna), Vol. IV, No. 7-8 (October-November, 1927), p. 72; *Völkischer Beobachter* (Bayernausgabe), February 13-14, 1927, *ibid.* (Reichsausgabe), April 2, 1927; Gottfried Feder, "Othmar Spann, zu seinem 50. Geburtstag," *ibid.* (Bayernausgabe), October 3, 1928.

<sup>53</sup>Letter to the author from Hofrat Raimund Poukar, Vienna, March 2, 1972. Poukar, a *Grossdeutsch* ideologist in the 1920's, rejected Spann's corporative ideas as leading to more social conflict grounded in naked class self-interest. See Rudolf Gustav Ardel, *Zwischen Demokratie und Faschismus. Deutschnationales Gedanken- gut in Österreich 1919-1930* (Vienna: Geyer-Edition, 1972), pp. 160-161.

<sup>54</sup>"Die Kulturkrise der Gegenwart. Vortrag von Professor Dr. Othmar Spann in München," *Völkischer Beobachter* (Bayernausgabe), February 27, 1929; John Haag, "The Spann Circle and the Jewish Question," *Year Book XVIII of the Leo Baeck Institute* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), pp. 102-105.

<sup>55</sup>Herman Lebovics, *Social Conservatism and the Middle Classes in Germany, 1914-1933* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 112-114.

<sup>56</sup>Spann's *Haupttheorien der Volkswirtschaftslehre* appealed to students "cramming" for examinations because it was simply written and well organized; it became the most read academic textbook in German-speaking Europe during the interwar period. See the highly favorable review in *Akademische Blätter* (Berlin), Vol. XXVI (1911), pp. 162-163. The book became a best seller in the early 1920's. The fifth edition appeared in 1920, and by 1922 an eleventh edition was in print.

Jakob Baxa, born in 1895, was entrusted with rescuing Müller's writings from oblivion. A gentle and rather retiring man who had to struggle with the handicap of severe deafness incurred during his military service, Baxa worked tirelessly to collect and edit the writings not only of Müller but of all the German romanticists.<sup>57</sup> Slowly but surely, these writings, some of them appearing in the *Herdflamme* series and others in scholarly and popular journals as well as newspapers, made an impact. Intellectuals and other enthusiastic supporters of a perfect, stratified society began to feel that a corporative way of life could, in fact, be reconstituted on European soil even in the profoundly disordered twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> While most German *völkisch* intellectuals regarded the Müller-Spann fusion as merely an emanation of a sincere but rather musty *Grenzer* mentality,<sup>59</sup> other rightist Germans, particularly Catholics disillusioned over the democratic and liberal tendencies of the Center Party, enthusiastically greeted these reactionary ideas. A group of German Catholic intellectuals, led by the priest Franz Xaver Landmesser and centering around the journal *Der Katholische Gedanke*, viewed Müller's corporative theories in the new garb given them by Spann as the only hope for crushing the twin evils of religious modernism and mass democracy.<sup>60</sup> In Austria, Adam Müller came back to life as various intellectual circles, both Catholic-conservative and *völkisch*-radical, discussed his ideas. On the centenary of his death in January, 1929, both the Catholic newspaper, the *Reichspost*, and the Nazi students of the University of Vienna paid homage to Müller.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Letters to the author from Dr. Jakob Baxa, Maria Enzersdorf bei Wien, July 12, 1967, and July 2, 1970.

<sup>58</sup>See, for example, the highly laudatory review article on *Die Herdflamme* series and several other books of the Spann circle by the noted scholar Professor Georg von Below in *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Vol. XIX (1926), pp. 296-298.

<sup>59</sup>As did the north German ideologist Wilhelm Stapel in his review entitled "Othmar Spanns Schrift vom Wesen des Volkstums," *Deutsches Volkstum*, Vol. XXV, No. 3 (March, 1923), pp. 119-120.

<sup>60</sup>Schneller, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus*, pp. 133-138; "Der Katholische Akademikerverband. Leitheft des Chefs des Sicherheitshauptamtes des Reichsführers SS, Februar 1938," in Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944*. In *Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte bei der Katholischen Akademie in Bayern*, Ser. A: *Quellen*, Vol. XII (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1971), pp. 279-293.

<sup>61</sup>Alfred Missong, "Dem Andenken eines politischen Romantikers. Zum 100. Todestag Adam Heinrich Müllers am 17. Jänner," *Reichspost*, January 17, 1929; "Nationalsozialistischer deutscher Studentenbund. Unser Kampf," *Der österreichische Nationalsozialist*, Vol. III, No. 6 (February 8, 1929), p. 5.

In Austria, the corporative idea, as first formulated by Müller and Vogelsang and finally restated by Spann, showed remarkable life throughout the 1920's. Some conservative intellectuals went so far as to speak of a "resurrection" of the political theory of romanticism.<sup>62</sup> Others, young scholars working in Spann's shadow, claimed that no other people were as fortunate as the Germans in possessing in their greatest hour of need a book as profound in fundamental ideas as Müller's *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*.<sup>63</sup> As outlandish as these words of praise may seem from the perspective of fifty or more years, the atmosphere of social, economic, and intellectual crisis of the years immediately after the collapse of 1918 set the scene for such chiliaristic hopes. These thinkers hoped against hope and looked upon every favorable sign as a clear signal that a new moral world, *der wahre Staat*, was about to dawn.

Only Spann's utter political naïveté, combined with his intense desire to see his ideas come to fruition in the world of political reality, can adequately explain the remarkably complex political maneuvering of the Spann circle in the 1930's. Without examining the idea in depth, Spann simply assumed that the new German state soon to rise on the ruins of individualistic liberal democracy and materialistic Marxism would be based on some kind of profound *Weltanschauung*. Spann was thoroughly convinced that only his own ideology of universalism was genuinely suited to guide this new anti-democratic society in its formative years. A vexing problem for the Spann circle, starting in 1930, was that while they fully expected some type of anti-parliamentary regime to come to power soon in both Germany and Austria, it was clearly impossible to predict which of several authoritarian tendencies would dominate the scene at the time of the final collapse. Consequently, since Spann's students were to be found in a large number of right-wing political parties as well as in public and private institutions, it was decided to proselytize all of them to be prepared for the inevitable takeover of political power.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Benno Imendörffer, "Die Auferstehung der romantischen Staatslehre," *Deutsche Zeit* (Vienna), May 4, 1923.

<sup>63</sup>Richard Kerschagl in a review of Adam Müller's *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (2 vols., Vienna: Wiener Literarische Anstalt, 1922), in *Deutschösterreichische Tageszeitung*, June 18, 1922.

<sup>64</sup>In later years Spann's Nazi foes described the actions of his circle as thoroughly unprincipled and opportunistic—a very unusual charge from disciples of Adolf Hitler. See the secret Sicherheitsdienst report prepared for Hitler entitled "Der Spannkreis. Gefahren und Auswirkungen" (May-June, 1936), in the Archive of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte at Munich, Doc. No. 413/52, pp. 10-12.



The already vague idea of universalism became even less well-defined when it became clear that democratic society in Central Europe was *in extremis*. For one thing, there appeared to be a fundamental contradiction in universalistic thinking regarding the power and competence of the state. As a corporative ideology, universalism called for the widest possible degree of corporative autonomy (*ständische Selbstverwaltung*). Each social estate was to regulate its own affairs and to be represented in an economic parliament.<sup>65</sup> All of this seemed to suggest that Spann advocated a dismantling of the strong, modern leviathan state based on centralized bureaucratic administration. Yet at the same time the Spann school insisted that corporative decentralization had to be reconciled with enhanced powers for the highest social estate, the *Höchststand*—which in effect was the machinery of government itself. At all times the *Höchststand* had to be accepted as the undisputed authoritarian “leader and judge of all the other estates.”<sup>66</sup>

Ideological wavering was paralleled by political maneuvering of the most exquisite intricacy. Spann and his disciples managed to convince Nazi “intellectuals” that universalism was perfectly suited for the soon-to-emerge Third Reich. The official Nazi party program praised Spann, and numerous articles in the official Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, strongly suggested that Spann and his circle would play a major role in any Hitlerite state.<sup>67</sup> Yet, at the same time, Spann was careful to stay in the good graces of Catholic intellectuals, who were at best highly suspicious of the Nazis. But even before 1933 Spann's fate was sealed. Power and demagoguery rather than professorial wills-o'-the-wisp would dominate the scene as the liberal world collapsed. Despite his maneuvering, Spann was to suffer the same fate as Müller and Vogelsang.

The people who really determined events, whether it was the hungry and desperate masses of the early 1930's or the industrial barons or the street agitators who had a hold on a desperate

<sup>65</sup>Othmar Spann, *Hauptpunkte der universalistischen Staatsauffassung*. In *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, No. 3 (Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931), p. 26; Walter Heinrich, *Das Ständewesen, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Selbstverwaltung der Wirtschaft* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1932), pp. 166-190.

<sup>66</sup>Spann, *Hauptpunkte der universalistischen Staatsauffassung*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup>Gottfried Feder, *Das Programm der N. S. D. A. P. und seine weltanschaulichen Grundgedanken* (25th-40th ed., Munich: Franz Eher, 1931), p. 17; review of Spann's journal *Ständisches Leben* in *Völkischer Beobachter* (Reichsausgabe), March 14, 1931; Beiblatt: *Wirtschafts-Beobachter*; “Werke aus unserer Parteibuchhandlung!” *Völkischer Beobachter* (Reichsausgabe), July 30, 1931, Supplement 2; *Deutsche Bücher* (Berlin: NSDAP, Zeugmeisterei, Zweigstelle Ost, 1931), pp. 13 and 16.

populace, all ignored the intellectuals' dreams of a static, perfectly balanced corporate state. Although Hitler and Spann had met on at least one, and possibly on several, occasions,<sup>68</sup> the two men were so totally different in personality that a collaborative relationship never developed. Hitler once told Hermann Rauschnig of his contempt for "these professors and *Stubenhocker* [stay-at-homes]" who, "like this Professor Spann," proposed to come to grips with the revolutionary events of the day by presenting to men of action like himself pasted-together constitutions devoid of any sense of reality.<sup>69</sup> Spann had also antagonized Alfred Rosenberg, the official ideologist of the Nazi Party, and a jealous man who never stopped plotting against the Viennese philosopher and his pupils.<sup>70</sup> Finally, except for Thyssen and a handful of other industrialists, the leaders of German and Austrian heavy industry generally abandoned their support of corporative ideas even before Hitler came to power. By 1932 industrial spokesmen were saying that a German *Ständestaat* would mean a formalistic system of planning and restraints ultimately harmful to the national economy.<sup>71</sup>

Undeterred by storm clouds on the horizon, Spann remained supremely optimistic about his ultimate prospects when Hitler took power in Germany in the first months of 1933. The Viennese scholar was in fact present in Berlin a few days before the Reichstag fire.<sup>72</sup> Throughout 1933 Spann tried to meet personally with Hitler to talk to him about the plans for the "true state."<sup>73</sup> On one occasion, in May, 1933, Hitler refused to enter a conference room in which

<sup>68</sup>Spann first met Hitler in Munich in February, 1929. See "Othmar Spann und Hitler," *Die neue Welt* (Vienna), March 8, 1929, p. 6. In the early 1930's there were unconfirmed rumors that Spann was secretly tutoring Hitler. See Karl Dietrich Bracher et al., *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung. Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34* (2nd rev'd. ed., Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1962), pp. 399-400.

<sup>69</sup>Hermann Rauschnig, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (New York: Europa, 1940), pp. 45-46.

<sup>70</sup>Spann told his student, the novelist and political adventurer Ernst von Salomon, that Rosenberg's writings were "rubbish." See Ernst von Salomon, *Fragebogen (The Questionnaire)*, translated by Constantine FitzGibbon (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. 99. Rosenberg unequivocally condemned universalism as a theocratic, neo-scholastic philosophy unsuited for a genuinely *völkisch* state. Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (3rd ed., Munich: Hoheneichen, 1932), pp. 325 and 679-681.

<sup>71</sup>Heinrich August Winkler, "Unternehmerverbände zwischen Ständeideologie und Nationalsozialismus," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (October, 1969), pp. 348-350; Manfred Ohlsen, "'Ständischer Aufbau' und Monopole 1933/34," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Vol. XXII, No. 1 (1974), pp. 28-46.

<sup>72</sup>"Vordringen des ständischen Gedankens," *Die junge Front*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (April, 1933), p. 127.

<sup>73</sup>Sicherheitsdienst report on "Der Spannkreis," pp. 16-17.

Spann was present.<sup>74</sup> In countless instances, Spann attempted to influence the course of events. He published articles in his journal *Ständisches Leben* "proving" how Hitler, the leader, and Spann, the scholar, could together build the new "idealistic" German state, the Third Reich.<sup>75</sup> Financed by Thyssen, Spann had his most dynamic students and supporters establish a training school for corporative leaders, the Institut für Ständewesen, in Düsseldorf in the summer of 1933. However, as soon as Robert Ley, the head of the Nazi puppet organization, the Deutsche Arbeiterfront, discovered these machinations, increasing pressures began to restrict the day-to-day functioning of the Institut.<sup>76</sup>

By late 1935 Spann's plans to infiltrate the Third Reich from within were in shambles. His Austrian disciples had been expelled from Germany, and those who were still in the Nazi state were subject to innumerable forms of harassment. In Austria, Spann found himself in political limbo because of the pro-*Anschluß* line he had chosen when the governments of Dollfuß and Schuschnigg were desperately attempting to maintain independence in the face of Hitler's desire to absorb his homeland.<sup>77</sup> An example of Spann's political naïveté was his secret joining of the Austrian Nazi Party on May 1, 1933.<sup>78</sup> His was hardly a unique action; Spann was doing what literally tens of thousands of other morally weak or politically opportunistic individuals had decided to do in the spring of 1933: to jump on the Nazi bandwagon at the last minute in order to derive some benefits from the "national revolution." The "old fighters" of the NSDAP, the battle-scarred roughnecks who had been with Hitler through thick and thin, looked upon these latecomers with contempt and castigated them with epithets such as "men of Sep-

<sup>74</sup>Letter to the author from Max Frauendorfer, Tutzing, Bavaria, September 4, 1967. In 1933 Frauendorfer was director of the Nazi Party's Amt für ständisches Aufbau.

<sup>75</sup>Ilse Roloff, "Adolf Hitlers *Mein Kampf* im Lichte der Gesellschaftswissenschaft," *Ständisches Leben*, Vol. III, No. 11 (1933), pp. 608-616; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, pp. 197-199; Schneller, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>76</sup>Sicherheitsdienst report on "Der Spannkreis," pp. 16-17 and 38-39; "Der Sieg der Vernunft," *Der Deutsche*, January 3, 1935.

<sup>77</sup>For Spann's pro-*Anschluß* sentiments, see *Ständisches Leben*, Vol. III, No. 9 (1933), p. 518. Spann called Dollfuß "Tollfuss" (crazy-foot) and ridiculed his corporative constitution of May, 1934, as a "weird carnival joke." See Sicherheitsdienst report on "Der Spannkreis," p. 22. Ironically, Dollfuß had attended Spann's lectures and thought highly of his corporative theories. Gerhard Jagschitz, *Der Putsch. Die Nationalsozialisten 1934 in Österreich* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1976), pp. 15-16.

<sup>78</sup>*Gau-Gericht, Gauleitung Steiermark*, court report dated Graz, January 20, 1939, Berlin Document Center, *Personal File of Othmar Spann*, No. D2181-A670/38.

tember" (*Septemberlinge*) in September, 1930, "April rabbits" (*Aprilhasen*) in April, 1932, and "March casualties" (*Märzgefallenen*) in March, 1933.<sup>79</sup>

Spann, who had always been an outsider before 1933, was rudely reminded of his exclusion after the Nazi "seizure of power." After 1933 Hitler's total indifference to abstract theories became even more evident. No clear ideas, or at least no consistent ideas, lay at the heart of the Third *Reich*. Hitler kept his enemies off balance by constantly shifting his promises and by keeping his ultimate goals as vague as possible. In such an unstable ideological environment, the idea of a corporative state and society was doomed, for although it was an extremely reactionary goal, it *was* a goal. A demagogue and opportunist par excellence, Hitler did not wish to provide any potential opposing faction with ideas that could be either defended or attacked; ideological chaos allowed the *Führer* to rule by dividing and conquering his real or potential enemies.<sup>80</sup>

Spann and his circle vanished in the storm clouds that Nazism conjured up in the late 1930's. In a sense, these men made a conscious choice to serve as midwives at the birth of the Third *Reich*.<sup>81</sup> In so doing they helped bring into the world evil forces that would create immense suffering. Even though this elitist circle of intellectuals was politically insignificant by 1935, Nazi fanatics could not forget old grudges. Rosenberg, Ley, and, most ominously, Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich all showed a strong interest in the "Spann case." It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that when the *Anschluß* came Spann and several charter members of his circle disappeared into concentration camps, to emerge many months later broken in body if not in spirit.<sup>82</sup> After World War II, the Spann circle, now older and certainly wiser, slowly and cautiously reconstituted itself in both Austria and Germany. Firmly committed to political discretion, if not necessarily to democracy,

<sup>79</sup>Carl Gottfried Gok, "Rede auf dem Alldeutschen Verbandstag 1934," in Hans Adolf Jacobsen and Werner Jochmann (eds.), *Ausgewählte Dokumente zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (2 vols., Bielefeld: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1960), Vol. I, Pt. C, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup>It was for political, rather than ideological, considerations that Hitler gave his satraps considerable autonomy in running their little empires. See the stimulating essay on this phenomenon by Robert Koehl, "Feudal Aspects of National Socialism," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LIV, No. 4 (December, 1960), pp. 921-933.

<sup>81</sup>Letter to the author from Prof. Albert Lauterbach, Santiago, Chile, January 19, 1970.

<sup>82</sup>The arrest, detention, interrogation, and release of Spann, his son Raphael, and his star student Walter Heinrich are documented in great detail in the letters and documents preserved in the Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), *Akten der Neuen Reichskanzlei*, File R43 II/399.

the members of the post-1945 Spann circle were infinitely more subtle than previously in their advocacy of organic thinking.<sup>83</sup> Spann himself died in semi-exile at his Burgenland estate in 1950—a full decade before the partial rehabilitation of his circle after the cooling off of the passions of a decade earlier.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, neo-romanticism did not achieve a major comeback in Austria. The *Schwärmerei* of the post-1918 years increasingly came to be considered a unique period that was unlikely to be repeated.

The failure of Spann to gain major influence was caused not so much by personality flaws as by the inexorable collapse of his system of ideas when it came face-to-face with the reality of the modern world. Spann was one of the last spokesmen of an intellectual counterrevolution against liberal and democratic ideas. In Central Europe, this “war against the West”<sup>85</sup> mercilessly attacked all aspects of the idea of human rationality and the autonomy of the individual, holding that these concepts were incompatible with the achievement of a spiritually perfect German *Reich*. In his struggle against the liberal state, Spann attacked the values of humane bourgeois individualism, holding that because these notions were relativistic and atomistic they could not possibly serve as a moral foundation for the soon-to-appear “true state.” Having rejected these rationalistic values, Spann placed great emphasis on a rebirth of those deeply-rooted, subterranean energies that the industrial era had almost totally destroyed. He desired a world of myth and beauty in which state and society, art and political life were all fused into one overwhelming aesthetic experience. In brief, Spann was irrationalist, frankly admitting in 1931—two years before the crea-

<sup>83</sup>In July, 1956, the Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung was founded in Vienna. Largely staffed by students of Spann, this organization aimed to disseminate Spann's intellectual legacy in Austria and Germany. See Schneller, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus*, pp. 36-38.

<sup>84</sup>By 1950, when a *Festschrift* in honor of Spann entitled *Die Ganzheit in Philosophie und Wissenschaft. Othmar Spann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1950) was published under the editorship of Walter Heinrich, the Spann circle had been effectively reconstituted. By 1950 some Austrian conservatives were beginning openly to praise at least some of Spann's ideas. See, for example, the *Kleine Zeitung* (Graz) of December 21, 1949, which characterized Spann as “without doubt the most significant contemporary Austrian philosopher.”

<sup>85</sup>See Aurel Kolnai, *The War against the West* (New York: Viking, 1938); and Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1962). The standard scholarly study is still Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism. Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

tion of the Third *Reich*—that universalism could only function in a de-rationalized era.<sup>86</sup>

As the last major political theorist of romanticism, Spann yearned for the unattainable. As Henri Brunschwig noted in his study of the origins of the romanticist mentality, a headlong flight from an unsatisfying and frustrating reality underlies this type of thought process. Whether this desire for escape leads into the future or into the past matters little, for it is always based on "the mentality of the miraculous."<sup>87</sup> Spann's "reactionary utopia"<sup>88</sup> could not be based on human reason alone, for humanity was for Spann too fallible when removed from the life-sustaining forces of tradition and hierarchical authority. The reassertion of an elitist cultural tradition and the building up of a political system based on the leadership principle, Spann believed, would restore the primacy of spiritual values in European civilization.

To the end of his life Spann never shed his illusions.<sup>89</sup> Virtually up to the day of his arrest in March, 1938, he looked upon himself as a man who could build bridges between genuinely conservative traditions and the upstart ideology of National Socialism. As an idealist, Spann could never grasp the fact that the Nazis had used both his ideology and his circle to provide much-needed respectability for a gutter movement devoid of either ideas or social status. Sharing their illusions, Spann acted as many other misguided German and Austrian conservatives did. They assisted Hitler in the belief that doing so would allow them to exercise a measure of control over Nazism. Spann and his disciples believed that, despite its crudities, Nazism could somehow be "spiritualized" or "tamed."<sup>90</sup> They were convinced that as intellectuals they would soon play a major role advising Hitler in his decisions of state. Furthermore, Spann and his circle were utterly certain that the theory of univer-

<sup>86</sup>Spann, *Der wahre Staat* (3rd rev'd. ed., 1931), p. 73.

<sup>87</sup>Henri Brunschwig, *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth-Century Prussia*, translated by Frank Jellinek (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. ix and *passim*.

<sup>88</sup>"Reaktionärer Utopismus. (Eine Kritik von Othmar Spanns *Der wahre Staat*)," *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Mittagsblatt), February 20, 1922, pp. 1-2. Friedrich Hertz was probably the author of this hard-hitting socialist critique of Spann's theories. Letter to the author from Prof. Julius Braunthal, Teddington, Middlesex (U. K.), May 16, 1971.

<sup>89</sup>Up to the time of his death Spann could not believe that his ideas had been anything other than beneficial in the intellectual and political life of the years 1918-1938. Letter to the author from Prof. Klemens von Klemperer, Northampton, Mass., May 10, 1967.

<sup>90</sup>Letter to the author from Dr. Bruno Brehm, Alt-Aussee, Steiermark, December 11, 1970.

salism was not merely their own view of reality but in fact represented the objective truth. In this belief they followed in a hallowed tradition of arch-conservative and anti-democratic "political professors" who had since the days of Heinrich von Treitschke uncritically accepted and propagated the idea that "all idealist aspirations [are] good and superior per se to materialist ones."<sup>91</sup>

Spann's "true state" was the culmination of deeply-embedded traditions of Central European thought. Until the 1930's German and Austrian intellectual development revealed a profound aversion to the real world of conflict and competition. Both capitalism and socialism were seen as enemies of the German spirit because of their emphasis on tension and struggle. Ralf Dahrendorf has summed up this yearning in the phrase, "nostalgia for synthesis,"<sup>92</sup> suggesting that most if not all of this mode of thought is based on a desire to return to a highly idealized past. The intensity of Spann's yearning for a past that never existed, amounting as it did to an obsession in his ceaseless quest for totality, clearly marks him as a reactionary rather than a conservative. A conservative retains at least some ability to function in the real world of compromise and imperfection, while a reactionary curses the present and dreams of a truly ideal world free of conflict and evil. Spann was such a dreamer, a man who lived on the outer limits of the world of reason and reality, harboring within his inner being desires totally unattainable.

Spann may be viewed as a "marginal man,"<sup>93</sup> an intellectual in an age of demagogic dictators, a dreamer in a frightening epoch dominated by those men Jacob Burckhardt had prophesied would be the "terrible simplifiers."<sup>94</sup> Until 1933 the Nazis cynically exploited Spann's prestige and influence when it was to their advantage to do

<sup>91</sup>Andreas Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 302.

<sup>92</sup>Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 188-203. The uniquely Austrian aspects of these yearnings are outlined in Anton Burghardt, "Catholic Social Thought in Austria," *Social Research*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2 (Summer, 1967), pp. 369-382.

<sup>93</sup>Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. xv-xvii and 74-76. Stonequist's definition of a marginal man as one whom "fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different, but antagonistic cultures" is a clear description of Spann's desperate situation and of his attempts to bridge the gap in his theory between the old, vanished feudal world and the power-state of the new industrial society.

<sup>94</sup>Burckhardt had foreseen the dilemmas of reconciling spirit and power in an age of mass passions, noting that the intellectual contradictions of the emerging twentieth century could only culminate in a "kingdom of illusions." See *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), p. 170.

so; once Hitler was securely in power, however, this fragile alliance dissolved and "national idealists" such as Spann's circle were no longer needed. Consistent in his utter cynicism, Hitler now brutally discarded those naïve intellectuals who to the very end clung to the illusion that National Socialism could be transformed into a conservative and responsible ideology.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>A few weeks before the *Anschluß*, Spann confided to Rudolf Hoyos, a close friend of Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg, that even at that late date Austria could still avoid being conquered by the Third *Reich* by being "spiritually prepared to such an extent that Hitler will lose the desire to swallow us up." Copy of the letter from Rudolf Hoyos, Vienna, February 28, 1938, to Kurt von Schuschnigg, enclosed in a letter from Reinhard Heydrich, Berlin, June 1, 1938, to Generalfeldmarschall Hermann Göring, International Military Tribunal Nuremberg, Office of U. S. Chief of Counsel, in the Archive of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte at Munich, unpublished document No. 3580-PS.