

cannot be shown that he actually applied the method.³⁶ If Hegel had any influence on Clausewitz it was general and indirect. Both share a fundamentally conservative philosophy of life typical of the age they lived in.

BERNHARDI: MILITARISTIC IMPERIALISM

Friedrich von Bernhardi, German general and military author, published his *Germany and the Next War*³⁷ in 1912, two years before the outbreak of World War I. The book was an immediate sensation, was translated into various languages and seemed to prove what many feared – that Germany was intent on starting a major war to establish its hegemony on the continent, and perhaps worldwide. As it turned out, Bernhardi was right – war came and developed, in the beginning at least, as he predicted. Retrospectively, therefore, the book was for many incontrovertible evidence that Germany, and particularly the German military, wanted this war and did everything to make it happen.

Apart from its historic importance, the book represents an interesting contribution to the theory of international relations because it portrays with utmost candor a hierarchic realist worldview. War is normal, it is the central phenomenon of history and evolution, and because it is the expression of the law of the strongest it leads not to a state of balance but to a state of domination, a situation quite natural in history. The balance of power established at the Congress of Vienna and the relatively peaceful century that followed were, from this perspective, a transient and abnormal period in history. The equilibrium in Europe was artificial, possible only because Germany was weak and underdeveloped. Also, there never existed an equilibrium at the global level where the British Empire was dominant. With Germany on the rise, things were about to change.

Bernhardi was not the only German to present such arguments: his book was representative of the thinking in nationalistic, militaristic and imperialistic circles and, unfortunately, it also reflected the mood at the court of William II. Nor was Bernhardi the first German to voice such ideas. Heinrich von Treitschke expressed similar thoughts a generation earlier, and he is an authority that Bernhardi frequently quotes.³⁸ Treitschke was equally unhappy with the balance of power, but while Bismarck was chancellor the idea still enjoyed a modicum of respectability, and Treitschke did not yet openly advocate its overthrow. What unites the two authors, however, is their reckless militarism and their glorification of war.

Germany and the Next War contains fourteen chapters, but only the first five are of interest to the theoretician of international relations; the

remaining chapters deal with relatively practical matters, such as the organization of armed forces, education and training, finances and economics. It is the beginning of the book that has attracted so much attention, particularly the chapters on "The Right to Make War," "The Duty to Make War," "Germany's Historical Mission" and "World Power or Downfall."

The book opens with a critique of Kant and his *Perpetual Peace*. Ever since that tract was published, so Bernhardi complains, people regard it as an established fact "that war is the destruction of all good and the origin of all evil."³⁹ Peace movements and peace leagues have sprung up, and there are even governments proclaiming that peace is their top priority. Peace Congresses are held at The Hague, and to promote peace the American government sponsors courts of arbitration. In Bernhardi's opinion, all of these aspirations are "directly antagonistic to the great universal laws which rule all life,"⁴⁰ and these laws have their origin in war.

Bernhardi sees two justifications for war: one in material reality, in biology, the other in moral reality, in what he calls idealism.

War is a biological necessity of the first importance, a regulative element in the life of mankind which cannot be dispensed with, since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement of the race, and therefore all real civilization. 'War is the father of all things.' The sages of antiquity long before Darwin recognized this.⁴¹

War is the central phenomenon in nature and in history, its dynamics determine all life and evolution. Darwin expresses it well when he speaks of a struggle for survival and of the survival of the fittest. Bernhardi says repeatedly that "the law of the strongest holds good everywhere," among animals, individuals, groups, and nations.⁴²

A difference, however, exists between the struggle at the intra- and at the extra-societal level: at the intra-societal level the law, backed by the power of the state, stands over and above the rivalries of individuals and groups. That power is used "not merely to protect, but actively to promote, the moral and spiritual interests of society."⁴³ Beyond the states, at the extra-societal level, no agent exists to promote order and morality, so that "between states the only check on injustice is force, and in morality and civilization every nation must play its own part and promote its own ends and ideals."⁴⁴

I shall return to Bernhardi's view of the state as a moralizing agent later on. What matters for the moment is that between states, where no higher authority is effective, the laws of biological necessity work without restraint, war at that level is normal, natural, rational and necessary. And, as Bernhardi shows, the struggle has a demographic and economic dimension as well:

Strong, healthy, and flourishing nations increase in numbers. From a given moment they require a continual expansion of their frontiers, they require new territory for the accommodation of their surplus population. Since almost every part of the globe is inhabited, new territory must, as a rule, be obtained at the cost of its possessors – that is to say, by conquest, which thus becomes a law of necessity.⁴⁵

The right of conquest is universally acknowledged, and Bernhardi adds to it the right of colonization. Vast stretches of land are occupied by “uncivilized masses” that “higher civilizations” have a need for.⁴⁶ A civilized state without colonies “runs the danger not only of losing a valuable part of its population by emigration, but also of gradually falling from its supremacy in the civilized and political world through diminishing production and lessened profits.”⁴⁷ Production diminishes because industries in a civilized state depend heavily on exports, but because industrialized countries in the long run cannot buy from each other and are forced to erect tariff barriers, colonial outlets are the only alternative.

Bernhardi then turns to his idealist explanation of war. Man is not a materialistic being satisfied with consumption and production alone; man is also a moral being endeavoring to develop its spiritual and intellectual faculties. Only a strong state can promote these values. A materialistic state, such as the Anglo-Saxon state, based on egotistic individualism and conceived of as no more than “a legal and social insurance office”⁴⁸ will not do. The materialistic state is a weak state and therefore has to make the pursuit of peace its highest value. The strong state is different. It does not shy away from the necessity of going to war, and in the process it raises man to a higher level of moral and spiritual perfection:

War, from this standpoint, will be regarded as a moral necessity, if it is waged to protect the highest and most valuable interests of a nation. As human life is now constituted, it is political idealism which calls for war, while materialism – in theory, at least, repudiates it.⁴⁹

To a reader raised in the liberal tradition, these are unusual definitions of idealism, individualism and materialism. Idealism is identified with a strong and martial state “calling for war.” Liberal individualism is put on the same footing as materialism, egoism, weakness and peace. For Bernhardi, individualism is identical with the pursuit of narrow and material self-interest producing a weak state not meant to interfere with the materialistic concerns of its citizens. It is a vulgar view of Great Britain and the Anglo-Saxon world but, unfortunately, quite common in Germany at the time.

The German state is different. It has its foundation not in degenerate materialism but in stark reality, in the law of nature and in a conception of history as a state of war. All else is derived from this fact, the image of the state as well as the image of man. To survive, the state must be strong, on the inside and on the outside. It must be able to organize and mobilize the masses for war, and to fight other states. When war breaks out, all individualistic and egotistic interests must be sacrificed to the higher interest of the state, all petty conflicts between parties and groups must be put aside. To underscore the point, Bernhardi quotes Treitschke, an authority on this subject:

At the moment when the State cries out that its very life is at stake, social selfishness must cease and party hatred be hushed. The individual must forget his egoism, and feel that he is a member of the whole body. He should recognize how his own life is worth nothing in comparison with the welfare of the community. War is elevating, because the individual disappears before the great conception of the State.⁵⁰

In this passage it becomes quite evident that man, too, is merely a function of the war logic. The individual must, when necessary, completely subordinate his personality and interests to the will of the state and the necessities of war. The highest duty of man is to realize that “his personal life is worth nothing in comparison with the state.” The ultimate purpose of man is to sacrifice himself for the survival of the state. War and the state are everything, man is nothing. The cause is always war and the state (or history), man is merely the effect. Liberalism has the opposite perception of causality, of course.

It is a very skeptical image of man. Man is not self-reliant and autonomous, not able to live with other men on the basis of voluntariness and equality. He is most certainly not capable of improvement and perfection. It is the state that must promote his perfection. Bernhardi states clearly that the state is capable “of raising the intellectual and moral powers of a nation to the highest expansion,”⁵¹ and that it is also the state “which draws the individual out of the narrow circles in which he otherwise would pass his life, and makes him a worker in the great common interest of humanity.”⁵² The state provides compensation for the individual’s weaknesses. It is not the individual that is perfectible but the state, or, more precisely, the élite that guides the masses and acts on their behalf. The state élite exemplifies the *raison d'état* and the *volonté d'état*. When this group decides to go to war, man and the state achieve perfection.

War is so central in the thought of Bernhardi and Treitschke that it becomes a positive good – and peace a positive evil! In times of peace, individuals and nations decay, in times of war, they flourish: “All petty and per-

sonal interests force their way to the front during a long period of peace. Selfishness and intrigue run riot, and luxury obliterates idealism."⁵³ War, on the other hand, "brings out the noblest activities of the human nature...[and] even defeat may bear a rich harvest."⁵⁴ This is realism at its purest – and at its most absurd.

To strengthen his case, Bernhardi refers to the Bible and to legal philosophy. It is all wrong, he argues, to assume that the Bible is based on nothing but brotherly love. There has never been a religion more combative than Christianity: "Christ Himself said: 'I am not come to send peace on earth, but the sword'."⁵⁵ And when it comes to law, all is either subjective or relative. For Bernhardi, law can mean two things: a consciousness of what is right and good, and a rule laid down by society or the state, either written or sanctioned by tradition. "In its first meaning it is an indefinite, purely personal conception; in its second meaning it is variable and capable of development."⁵⁶ Justice is to him an indefinite and purely personal notion, and positive or enforceable law is variable in time and place. The same applies to international law:

There never have been, and never will be, universal rights of men. Here and there particular relations can be brought under definite international laws, but the bulk of national life is absolutely outside codification.⁵⁷

This concludes the first chapter on "The Right to Make War." There is nothing that stands in the way of going to war, no biological and no moral law. All speaks in favor of war; war is the biological and moral law.

In the second chapter, Bernhardi deals with "The Duty to Make War," and his aim is to justify aggression. It is not a simple task because no lesser German than Bismarck warned against starting wars intentionally: "Prince Bismarck repeatedly declared before the German Reichstag that no one should ever take upon himself the immense responsibility of intentionally bringing about a war."⁵⁸ These words were remembered by many Germans, and the aggressive militarists had to come to terms with them if they wanted to convince their less militant countrymen that Germany should intentionally start a war.

Bernhardi advances two arguments: first, the Iron Chancellor's admonition was quoted out of context and, second, Bismarck himself did not live up to it: "It is his special claim to greatness that at the decisive moment he did not lack the boldness to begin a war on his own initiative."⁵⁹ And, as history shows, other great statesmen also started wars intentionally, especially some British prime ministers. Bernhardi is therefore able to conclude that

the appropriate and conscious employment of war as a political means has always led to happy results...[and] wars which have been deliberately provoked by far-seeing statesmen have had the happiest results.⁶⁰

With these remarks the question is dismissed. It is now clear to Bernhardi that Germany not only has a right to go to war but also, if circumstances permit, a duty to do so. His next question is whether circumstances demand such a step, whether the moment is right. To answer that question he discusses Germany's present position, then the possibility of coming to an understanding with the British and the Americans, and finally whether Germany should rise to the status of a true world power or face a downfall.

Bernhardi distinguishes between the political and the nonpolitical development of Germany. Politically, Germany is not in very good shape: on the inside she is torn by dissent, and on the outside surrounded by enemies. The nonpolitical side of the picture is brighter. Germany's scientific, economic and cultural development has in recent decades been respectable so that materially the country is in a good position to go to war. Looking at the overall situation, the balance is positive:

So stands Germany today, torn by internal dissensions, yet full of sustained strength; threatened on all sides by dangers, compressed into narrow, unnatural limits, she is filled with high aspirations, in her nationality, her intellectual development, in her science, industries, and trade.⁶¹

But what about the future? Bernhardi is convinced that merely holding on to what Germany has is not enough. The world is dynamic, the other powers are expanding, and in such an environment "we shall not be able to maintain our present position, powerful as it is, in the great competition with the other Powers, if we are contented to restrict ourselves to our present sphere of power."⁶² Germany must also expand, and on such a scale that "we no longer fear that we shall be opposed by stronger opponents whenever we take part in international politics."⁶³ Expansion will soon appear as a necessity, and because Bernhardi is convinced that it will be opposed he concludes that "what we now wish to attain must be fought for, and won, against a superior force of hostile interests and Powers."⁶⁴ These sentences are unmistakable in their intent – Germany should fight a hegemonic war.

Before drawing final conclusions, Bernhardi deals with a question on the minds of some Germans at that time: could German interests be satisfied by a grand deal with Great Britain and America, a completely new Triple Alliance allowing for a fundamental rearrangement of the spheres of influence?

For such a union with Germany to be possible, England must have resolved to give a free course to German development side by side with her own, to allow the enlargement of our colonial power, and to offer no political hindrances to our commercial and industrial competition. She must, therefore, have renounced her traditional policy, and contemplate an entirely new grouping of the Great Powers in the world.⁶⁵

He rejects the idea as impossible: British pride and self-interest would not permit it. But in discussing the idea Bernhardi reveals his true intentions: he wants Germany to overcome its continental confines and to join Great Britain (and America) in a new club and a new class of world powers. Because he knows that Great Britain would never agree to such a change voluntarily, he is ready to go to war and to force the British out of their present position. It is bound to be a hegemonic struggle with worldwide implications. The immediate interest of Germany is to consolidate its position on the continent, but its wider interests lie in challenging the British Empire.

Bernhardi is particularly outspoken about eliminating France as the first obstacle along the road: "France must be so completely crushed that she can never again come across our path."⁶⁶ Once France is no longer a Great Power, Russia stands alone and can be dealt with separately. Germany can then proceed to form what Bernhardi calls a "Central European Federation," an enlargement of the existing Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. It means reducing France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy to the rank of second-rate powers completely at the mercy of Germany.

Bernhardi is fully aware that the scheme clashes head-on with the traditional conception of a European balance of power. In his opinion, that concept is an anachronism and must be discarded. The principle, which since the Congress of Vienna has led "an almost sacrosanct but entirely unjustifiable existence, must be entirely disregarded."⁶⁷ The concept served the purposes of Metternich and Bismarck but in the last few decades it has had the effect of paralyzing the continental powers:

It can only have the disastrous consequences of rendering the forces of the continental European States mutually ineffective, and of thus favouring the plans of the political powers which stand outside that charmed circle. It has always been England's policy to stir up enmity between the respective continental States, and to keep them at approximately the same standard of power, in order herself to remain undisturbed to conquer at once the sovereignty of the world.⁶⁸

Once more, Bernhardi's vision focuses on Great Britain and on challenging its position as the sole power with a truly global reach. He proposes setting up a new and truly global balance of power: "It is now not a question of a European State system, but of one embracing all the States of the world, in which the equilibrium is established on real factors of power."⁶⁹

Not once does Bernhardi ask whether the British would feel secure with an "imperial partner" such as Germany, a state that believes in the law of the strongest while denying human rights, a state that regards peace as evil and war as the supreme civilizing force. Logic tells us that coexistence with such a state is impossible and that sooner or later the final struggle will break out over the issue of worldwide hegemony. There are indications that Bernhardi has a cyclical conception of history, that he believes in the inevitable ups and downs of hegemonic powers. If Great Britain is at the top now, why not Germany next? Against this background his words about "establishing an equilibrium on real forces of power" sound rather hollow. Cyclical conceptions of international politics were common at that time. It was particularly fashionable to personalize the life of nations, to think of them as having been born, then reaching maturity and manhood, and finally growing old and beginning to decline. Such ideas prevailed in many countries and were not a specifically German invention.

Bernhardi's image of the state system is clear – he has a negative image of anarchy and a positive image of hierarchy. Bernhardi rejects an anarchic system based on balance not because it outlaws war, which it does not, but because it is incompatible with the dynamics of war. Equilibrium puts restraints on war and constrains the life cycle of nations, it interferes with their normal growth and decline. The most vital nation must get a chance to run the international system. The normal and rational management of the system is neither universalistic nor oligarchic – it is monistic.

One nation defines the nature of the international hierarchy, all others have to play subordinate parts. The lesser states are imperfect and weak, the hegemon is wise and strong: his superiority compensates for their inferiority. Some of the lesser states accept the restrictions imposed on their sovereignty voluntarily, others do not. Italy and Austria belong to the former category, France, Russia and Great Britain to the latter. Dependence, inequality and involuntariness are normal in the life of nations. In the prevailing state of war some powers win, some lose – zero-sum reasoning prevails.

Absolute conflict is at the core of Bernhardi's theory. War dominates all, it represents ultimate causality and the driving force of history. War is the foundation of rationality and is identical with the logic of politics; war is a process that determines structure. In contrast to Gentz, Bernhardi sees no

convergence of enlightened national interest: his theory is war-centered, not state-centered.

Bernhardi's image of the state is a function of the international system. Given the international state of war and the primacy of foreign policy, state structures have to adapt themselves – states must be of the hard variety. Conservative and authoritarian states are better adapted than liberal and democratic states, and the most successfully adapted state is the hegemon itself. It represents the system; it and the system are inseparable. The two cause each other: the nature of the system determines the nature of the hegemon, and, conversely, the nature of the hegemon determines the nature of the system.

In Bernhardi's theory the average state does not count, and neither does man. Man is a pawn of history, a means to other ends. Within the overall system it fulfills a given role and function. The ultimate causes of human success or failure lie outside man. Only a handful of individuals can escape this fate – they are the true leaders of mankind. They are "world historical personalities" embodying the *Zeitgeist*, as Hegel would say. But even these supermen are unable to stop the rise and decline of empires.

Bernhardi's theory of international relations is a mixture of Hegelianism, Social Darwinism and raw Hobbesian power politics.⁷⁰ The various "laws of nature" determine the development of all life, of human history and of each individual. The theory contains a highly deterministic conception of science, a conception not necessarily shared by other realists. Gentz's balance of power theory, for instance, is built on a much less compelling vision of social science. In that world states have a choice between being (conservatively) rational or irrational but in Bernhardi's world there is no room for choice. The imperialist logic imposes itself with great inevitability and necessity.

The theory fits neatly into the hierarchic realist worldview. Conflict among nations is normal, even central. If Gentz's theory is state-centered, Bernhardi's is war-centered. The law of the strongest dominates all and provides the generalization on which a highly compelling and deterministic logic is based: it determines the (contextual) definition of nations; it defines rationality, the relation of wholes to parts, systems to functions, ends to means and causes to effects; it allows for rigorous if-then statements, for predictions and prescriptions. It is also a transformational theory of international relations because balance of power politics has to give way to imperialist politics. Finally, the theory will be tested in history. Bernhardi's theory of militarist imperialism is fully developed and inherently consistent.

KANT: PERPETUAL PEACE

Kant's *Perpetual Peace*⁷¹ appeared in 1795, at a time when the Wars of the French Revolution had not yet spread across the face of Europe and when Bonaparte was not yet in charge. It was a time when there was still hope that with the advent of the French Revolution, and with the American Revolution completed only a few years earlier, permanent peace might finally become possible among the more enlightened nations. It would mean the end of frivolous wars started by absolutist monarchs over what were mostly dynastic issues.

Kant's treatise sold well, it was in harmony with the spirit of the times. What made it attractive, however, was not its content alone but also the concise and clear manner in which it was written. While some of Kant's other works are philosophically much more important they are also ponderous and difficult to read. *Perpetual Peace* covers all of 90 pages, and the core of the argument is contained on no more than 30 pages. Small wonder that it has become by far the most widely read Kantian tract.

The plan is presented as a treaty consisting of nine articles with a supplement and an annex. The articles are extremely short: most of the 90 pages are taken up by commentary. At first sight, therefore, the booklet gives the impression of a legal treatise, but it is not. It cannot be compared to Abbé de Saint Pierre's *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe*, published in 1713.⁷² Saint Pierre drafted a complete charter for an international organization, which was one of the reasons why the proposal was so much ridiculed. Furthermore, Saint Pierre's project is highly conservative, of dubious origin and meant to serve the narrow dynastic interests of France. Kant's plan is different in every respect.

It was not submitted to a ruler, not meant to serve the purposes of any one power, and did not even aim at abolishing war immediately. But it does contain some of the most progressive and enlightened ideas published at that time in Prussia. Kant stands unambiguously for peace, something that distinguishes him so remarkably from other Germans, from contemporaries like Hegel or from successors like Treitschke.⁷³

Kant is optimistic about the ultimate fate of man but does not expect to change the world overnight; he is no revolutionary. He believes in progress but his conception of change is measured and evolutionary. He does not expect nations to adopt all articles at once but, as he explains in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, statesmen and ordinary citizens alike have the ability and the duty to act morally.⁷⁴ If enough of them take his suggestions to heart, some progress can be made.