The Man Who Moves Among Us: Reflections on Albert Speer

by Samuel Hux (March 2022)

A lesser attempt at this subject I made public more than 20 years ago, now out of print. The following is a vast revision and lengthy expansion of my thoughts, which I offer here for their historical and moral relevance.

The summer of 1944, some moths before he died at Dachau, Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen wrote in his *Diary of a Man in Despair*, "I must admit something about Speer: after Papen, who combines the conscience and sense of honor of a butcher's hound with stupidity so devastating it is not an excuse but a crime, and just after those new-German pseudo-Girondists and ersatz aristocrats of the type of Krupp *et al*, his is the most sickening face I know among Nazidom's second string—and he imagines himself to be the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci." Fritz Reck's view turns out to be a

lonely dissent.

For a convicted War Criminal and Criminal Against Humanity (counts three and four at the Nuremberg Trials), Albert Speer has enjoyed an extraordinarily favorable reputation—and did so long before his celebrated *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs* and *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*. He was, somehow, "not like the others." George W. Ball in his memoirs, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, recalled that when he helped interview Speer for the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey at the European war's end, "with charm and apparently spontaneous candor, he evoked in us a sympathy of which we were all secretly ashamed," and then admits having felt, albeit with apologies for an attitude "so inexcusable," that Speer was "like us." The British commandant at Kransberg Castle near Bad Neuheim, where Speer was held before Nuremberg, must have felt the same thing. As Speer recalled in his memoirs, the "commandant invited me for a drive the day we met. We drove alone, without guards, through the Taunus woods, lay down for a while under a huge fruit tree, tramped about the woods, and he told me about hunting bears in Kashmir." To one Sergeant Williams, who provided him with extra rations, "so that, he said, I would have my strength for the trial," Speer must have seemed like one of his betters.

Of course it could be argued that Ball, the British commandant, and the sergeant were all meeting Speer before the *full* public revelation of Nazi crimes (Ball notes, extenuatingly, "The full horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald made a deep impression only after the documented revelations of Nuremberg"); but Speer's reputation survived those revelations, was even augmented during the process of revelation, and did not change appreciably thereafter. The Western powers would have released him from Spandau prison long before his 20 years were up but for the resistance of the Russians (who had their own Byzantine reasons evidently having little to do with hardline justice). Among the few pleasurable

occasions of his imprisonment were the periodic messages of statesmen and private citizens of proper repute offering sympathy and, less pleasurably as the years passed, hope. It is impossible to survey the assessments of Speer and passing references in histories of the Reich and then the reviews, but I think anyone conscious of the "Speer enigma" over the years will recall, not tribute naturally, but a generality at least cautiously sympathetic or, when critical, qualified by a tone of grudging respect and hesitation to seem too Old Testament in the application of justice. And if one has my experience he or she will recall conversations—which may be more relevant than historical criticism—in much the same way. And, incidentally (is it?), will recall this as largely a Gentile habit. Speer was "not like the others." And undoubtedly, he wasn't.

Although I will in time quarrel about the extent to which the word *morally* is appropriate, H.R. Trevor-Roper's conclusion about Speer (in *The Last Days of Hitler*) bears up, even while it was one of the earlier written contributions to Speer's reputation. "Whatever the errors of judgment, and the neutrality of conscience, which enabled him to acquire and retain the personal friendship of the most bloodthirsty tyrant in modern history, it is quite clear that in Hitler's court Albert Speer was morally and intellectually alone." To be morally and intellectually alone in such company need not mean an exalted spiritual and mental state, but it's clear in context that Trevor-Roper was not speaking in merely comparative terms. But the question is, what conclusions to draw from Speer's "difference"? For some: by virtue of Speer's greater discernment than the others' and his deeper culture, he was somehow less guilty than they. For some: by virtue of same, he was guiltier than they: Trevor-Roper called him "the real criminal of Nazi Germany."

The judgment of his comparative innocence—usually only implicit, a matter of inferences—is absurd; it is devoid of

meaning save the confusion and sentimentality of Speer's audience. The judgment of his greater guilt makes sense. But it implies a moral preference mankind of late has not made a moral imperative: that there must be some connection between personal cultivation and public deed. We have instead, by default, what I call "The Gentile Problem," the curious attitude that a person's cultivation—which after all is not something he or she is born with but something society makes possible to attain—is a private matter with no obligations of behavior. I call it *The Gentile Problem* ironically, in contradistinction to the fallacious "Jewish Problem" that Nazis—and others!—prated about in such deadly fashion.

Probably the Germans more than anyone made a high aesthetic of this separation of *Geist* (mind, intellect, spirit) from moral act, and gave to that alienation the name of Culture: the cruel aestheticism of Ernst Jünger for instance. And some made a low barbarism. Heinrich Himmler, who hadn't any *Geist* of any sort, although he assuredly thought he had plenty and thought he was displaying it, could confide to SS Group Leaders with the expectation of comprehension, "Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lying together, five hundred, or a thousand. To have gone through this and yet—apart from a few exceptions, examples of human weakness—to have remained decent, this makes us hard. This is a glorious page in our history that has never been written and never shall be written." And again, "we can say that we have performed this task in love of our people. And we have suffered no damage from it in our inner self, in our soul, in our character." It's one thing to commit genocide. (What a comment the ease of that statement is.) It's another thing to talk about remaining decent!

It's not fair to judge a "Culture" alone by its elitist aesthetes or its proud psychopaths; most people can neither prance so high nor wallow so low. But in the absence of the moral necessity that cultivation and deed agree, we have,

somewhere in the middle, careers such as Speer's. One might, with a kind of nasty retributive justice, call this *die Deutschenfrage,* the German Question, except that the confusion Speer's reputation signifies suggests that the Problem, as a mental habit, belongs to no one people now.

We can remind ourselves of the Albert Speer story quickly enough:

Joins National Socialist Party in 1931. By series of coincidences becomes in 1934 Hitler's personal architectural adviser, and, gradually, in so far as Hitler could be said to have had friends, becomes one of the closest. Plans, with Hitler, the monumental Berlin that was supposed to be Hitler's greatest "aesthetic" achievement. With an obvious genius for organization, becomes upon the death of Fritz Todt in 1942 Minister of Armaments and War Production. That German war production was as efficient as it was and as long as it was, was due in large part to that genius—and also to the POW and foreign slave labor Speer utilized. In late 1944, early 1945, resists Hitler's orders that allies be met with scorched German earth and sets about countermanding and frustrating those orders—his first break from a dozen years of loyalty to the *Fuehrer.* In February even plans to assassinate Hitler by pumping poison gas into the Chancellery bunker. . . or so he later claimed. (To anyone believing this I'd like to sell a bridge in Brooklyn.) The plan aborts, so he said, because of reconstruction of the bunker air-funnel. Nonetheless, visits Hitler several times in the bunker up to the end.

After welcome capture by Americans at Flensburg in May 1945 is moved from prison to prison until Nuremberg Trials begin. While others are saying they only followed orders—or as in Ernst Kaltenbrunner's case denying his signature was his signature—Speer assumes his responsibility. Indicted for using forced labor, admits he'd had no qualms about it, and adds that forced-labor czar Fritz Sauckel was responding to his, Speer's, numerical requirements. (Sauckel hangs, by the

way.) Insists furthermore that beyond one's responsibility for one's "own sector" there is a "collective responsibility" of those "closest associates around the Chief of State" from which there can be "no attempting to withdraw" since had the war been won "the leadership would probably have raised the claim what it was collectively responsible." Receives sentence of 20 years at Spandau prison in Berlin. There writes in secret his Diaries and a draft of Memoirs. Released in 1966, publishes Memoirs in 1969 and Diaries in 1975. Dies in September 1981, after other works which contributed in no way to his established reputation.

The fortunate reputation was not based to any significant degree on Speer's claimed plan to assassinate Hitler, for the affair smacked too much of the quixotic. Speer had many more direct chances than Count von Stauffenberg of the July 20, 1944, plot, but clearly lacked Stauffenberg's courage, resolve, and conviction. The reputation was based only in part on his efforts against the scorched-earth policy, for this after all was no objection to Hitler's war crimes and crimes against humanity, but rather an objection to Hitler's intended punishment of Germany, to deny her her "biological substance" (as Speer put it) after defeat—and, perhaps, a crime against the industry that Speer himself had kept going. The reputation was based—before the Memoirs and Diaries—on Speer's "performance" at Nuremberg, a word I use to note some possibilities, at least.

It is indeed possible to see Speer at Nuremberg as a man simply trying to save his neck through adaptability (0bviously an earlier practical virtue of his). For instance, he wasn't above sending a letter to chief American prosecutor Robert H. Jackson early in the proceedings suggesting that his cooperation with the Strategic Bombing Survey in May 1945 might just perhaps have been useful against Japan. Nonetheless, G.M. Gilbert, prison psychologist at the trials, who observed Speer almost daily for over a year, was convinced

of Speer's sincerity in his testimony. A reading of Gilbert's *Nuremberg Diary* (a psychological and reportorial masterpiece) inclines one to credit Speer's recollection that Gilbert told him he did not suspect him of "expedient repentance." And Gilbert remarks more than once in his book that Speer seemed to think he was risking a death sentence by not minimizing his responsibility for Nazi crimes. (Thanks to his Austrian Jewish parents Gilbert spoke German. . . and missed nothing.)

Well, it's not quite true that there was *no* minimizing. It's more than a little embarrassing to read (in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947) Speer's suggestion that any poor treatment slave laborers suffered was a matter of "individual bad instances. . . and not the general condition." And Speer's defense on the issue of Prisoners of War—that Soviet POWs, at least, were not protected by the Geneva Convention which the USSR had not signed—sounds rather opportunistic; although he'd have had to be a fool or masochist to ignore this legal technicality the court in fact had to respect. These gestures toward minimization are perhaps balanced and more by his insistence on his part in the "collective responsibility." But I'm not sure that was unequivocally a maximizing of his guilt: it may have been a subtle way of diffusing it among numbers. In any case, some of the defendants thought *Speer* was hanging *them.* They were exceedingly foolish; their dossiers were adequate for the job.

A very large fact: Speer came closer himself to hanging than historians had assumed before Bradley F. Smith (*Reaching Judgment at Nuremberg*, 1977), equipped with the long-secret diary of chief American judge Francis Biddle, revealed that Biddle had held out with the Russian Nikitchenko for death before yielding to avoid a hung jury.

But, all in all, it's hard to avoid a certain skepticism about Speer the defendant. John Kenneth Galbraith, who interviewed

Speer with Ball and Paul Nitze at Flensburg, put the matter nicely in *A Life in Out Times: Memoirs*. "Albert Speer, forty in 1945, was tall, slender, with dark, slightly sparse hair and a mobile, sometimes amused face. In all respects, including the touch of humor, he was strikingly in contrast to the other Nazis, as he himself was fully aware. And it was evident by his behavior that he had every intention of putting the greatest additional distance between himself and the primitives, as he regarded them. Guessing rightly that, when faced with the Nazi abominations, they would plead ignorance, the guilt of others, their own inability to exercise corrective influence or even their personal righteousness, he had decided that he would accept his share of responsibility. That would accentuate the difference."

But Speer's performance aside, with its probable mixture of honesty and opportunism what of his auditors? Should Speer have inspired the tremendous respect he did, even if his difference was accentuated? The Spandau diaries contain a message Jackson sent Speer through his attorney—"Tell your client that he is the only one who has won my respect"—and an excerpt from a letter sent Speer by deputy prosecutor Robert Storey—"As you probably know, you were admired by the United States judges" (sic! There was Biddle!) "and prosecutors as the least culpable of any of the defendants." Jackson's message is comprehensible: after all, he borrowed explicitly Speer's "collective responsibility" theme for his summation. Storey's letter is really odd: "least culpable"? Given the fact that he was not among the acquitted? Storey must have been saying with other words, "we respect you more than the others"—for telling the truth, one assumes.

But why should Speer's truth-telling evoke such celebration? The court must have thought that Hjalmar Schacht, Franz von Papen, and Hans Fritzsche spoke the truth as well: they were acquitted (although the German courts then jailed the latter two). Was it that Speer seemed sincerely "sorry"? In part an

answer, no doubt. But no defendant, save one, could have seemed more contrite than Fritzsche, whose agony was, according to Gilbert, palpable. "I am drowning in filth. . . . I am choking in it." Fritzsche, however, did not belong at the *major* War Criminals' trial. (He was there evidently as a surrogate for the dead Joseph Goebbels, although, oddly, Fritzsche's superior, Otto Dietrich, was walking about free. He was there also because the Russians wanted *their* captives in the dock—the other was Admiral Erich Raeder.) That is, Fritzsche wasn't very bigtime, a radio announcer and third-string propagandist. And no one would have thought him "like us." The contrition of bigtime Hans Frank, Governor-General of occupied Poland, was dramatic. Frank converted to Catholicism, cursed Adolf Hitler to hell (too late), rebelled against Goering's insistence on a solid front, and claimed he and the others were being justly punished by God. Too extreme, I suppose, to be thought "like us." Nor did he receive the respect that cooler Speer basked in.

The pompous and arrogant Schacht, who as Minister of Economics and president of the *Reichsbank* had bankrolled the military build-up, and the criminally stupid von Papen, who had helped open the door for Hitler in 1933 so that as Vice-Chancellor he could "control" him, and who was Ambassador to Austria at the time of the *Anschluss,* were sorry for nothing except the outrageous (to them) insult of their being there. Still, if Schacht's "falling out" with Hitler in 1938 was really a matter of being forced out, and if his involvement with the July 1944 plotters was so marginal that the active word i*nvolvement* is a gift, he spent months in a concentration camp as a result of the Nazis' overestimation. But, like Papen's, his reputation stinks. The fact that one has to doubt the innocence of Schacht and Papen should be irrelevant to one's opinion of Speer. Morally it's an odd notion that confession makes one less culpable for what one's confessed than another who hesitates to confess. "Oops! Sorry" is no extenuation. But "familiarity" seems to be some sort of

retroactive mitigation.

One would like to know what Speer thought of all this. On the one hand he was grateful. On the other, , , , In reflection upon Jackson's message he comments on his "efforts to tell the truth and not to take refuge in cheap alibis," but then adds, "And then again there is the liking I arouse almost everywhere" (Diaries, 1/27/47)—which is almost amused. Certainly he thought his case not like the others': after the publication of Trevor-Roper's book he recalled that when the author interviewed him he "showed some reticence and respect for my special situation" (7/17/47). But in any case, although he was grateful for the treatment, or (who knows?) maybe because it had taught him that the proper style of confession invites the next best thing to an acquittal, in the Memoirs he rejects all possible extenuations and mitigations as "efforts at legalistic exculpation. It is true that as a favorite and later as one of Hitler's most influential ministers I was isolated. It is also true that the habit of thinking within the limits of my own field provided me. . . with many opportunities for evasion. It is true that I did not know what was really beginning on November 9, 1938 [*Kristallnacht*], and what ended in Auschwitz and Maidanek. But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasion, and the extent of my ignorance."

Even without comparing Speer's autobiographical writings with the memoirs and apologetics of others—Admiral Karl Doenitz, Papen, Schacht, Baldur von Schirach—it is hard to escape the impression, even if one is resistant to give a devil's disciple his due, that he was a formidable character in absolute terms; and it's impossible to avoid the certainty that in Hitler's court "Albert Speer was morally and intellectually alone." Does that mean, Ball rather inanely asks after recalling Trevor-Roper's judgment, that Speer "should be judged by the more rigorous code than the others"?

Of course it does!

If Speer was a man of moral and intellectual capacity (as none of those who found him very personally familiar doubted for a moment), if, that is to say, Speer was a man of cultivation, not a mere pretender bloated on Nazi *Schwarmerei*, then either one judges him by a rigorous code or one assumes there is no relation between personal culture and action. And that raises once again the problem, the question, of the "cultivated German"—whether committed Nazi or merely one of those of "realistic" disposition who know that politics, a nasty piece of business in any case don't ya' know? so often leads so unfortunately to excess.

Recall the Rilke read and Bach heard at Auschwitz—in response to which George Steiner (*Language and Silence*) judged that it's "cant" to assume a reading without comprehension or a gross ear. The famous concerts for SS at Auschwitz *may* prove any number of things, but the only thing they assuredly prove is that someone liked music no matter the condition of his ear. I've seen Joseph Goebbels referred to, in spite of all, as a cultured intellect. *Doktor* Goebbels. A reading of his diaries dispels that notion. The sheer embarrassing banality of mind swamps even the posturing cynicism he was so proud of. Although his actions and bloody achievements far outstrip, his mind approaches but does not attain, the level of Iago's. Hermann Göring's "culture" doesn't bear serious consideration—Roman togas and art "collecting." We who fortunately never met him can gain some privileged grasp through meeting "the Prime Minister" in Klaus Mann's novel *Mephisto.*

There's a curious path to understanding the "cultivated German" whether Nazi-faithful or passive-realistic through a comparison of a fascist who was not German and a German who was not a fascist: Christian de La Maziere, and Reck-Malleczewen whom I quoted at the beginning of this essay.

One wonders why a young Frenchman of that marginal "aristocracy" of a republic—"good family," nationalist traditions, cavalry-officer father—should decide, on the eve of the liberation of Paris, to join the French "Charlemagne" Division of the *Waffen SS* and plunge himself, late 1944, into the last and obviously terminal spasms of Nazi defense. Surely there were lesser ways to avoid retribution for having been a journalist of no particular renown on a collaborationist newspaper of miniscule circulation. There's no convincing answer confessed in Marcel Ophuls' film-documentary of occupied and Vichy France, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, in which Christian de La Maziere was a principal character, nor in La Maziere's memoir of war and imprisonment, *The Captive Dreamer.* The answer in the latter—through a sacrificial leap, "to be true to myself"—only begs questions.

In August 1944 La Maziere with a colleague was approached by Allied agents looking for French rightists close enough to German movements to be useful and opportunistic enough to know the score, to take up preventive arms to forestall any German *Gotterdammerung* or Parisian *soviet.* Paradoxically (schizophrenically?), La Maziere did some minor liaison work and then took off , as he had already planned to, for Germany and enlistment in the Charlemagne at Wildflecken. Instead of a position in the *Propagandakommando,* offered him as a journalist, he opted for a commission in an anti-tank unit. Such was his insistence on the real thing, immersion in the *Kameradschaft* of the combat arm of the *SS.* But not totally: La Maziere, in a moment of cunning and foresight, avoided the tell-tale *SS* tattoo just before temporary transfer to Czechoslovakia for elite training.

Returning to his unit by way of Sigmaringen, temporary seat of Vichy-in-exile, and an unsuccessful request for an audience with Petain or Laval, he caught up with the already decimated Charlemagne on the Eastern front in Pomerania in February 1945 and fought, retreated, starved, froze, and finally surrendered

a month later to a Polish contingent with the half-dozen survivors of his command. This was prelude to a series of other close survivals that punctuate a memoir of imprisonment in various disguises: *by* the Russians as a journalist attached to the *Waffen SS* (no tattoo remember), and then *in* Russia with a group of French conscripts from a German labor battalion; repatriation to France, where his identity was rediscovered, and incarceration in Fresnes prison in Paris; then (after trial in 1946 as a collaborationist journalist, but not as an *SS* officer, La Maziere successfully claiming to have been in the *Propagandakommando*), Clairvaux prison until 1948.

La Maziere is justly proud of his wits, but he does not fail to credit his fantastic good luck. Surrendering to Poles, not Russians, he could speak sufficient Polish to explain who he was and avoid being shot: La Maziere's father, a career army officer, ex-vice-commandant of the French cavalry school at Saumur, was a minor hero in Poland, having fought with Pilsudski against the Russians in 1920 and having later taught at the Polish war academy. (La Maziere recalls when he was five wandering down from his bedroom in Warsaw, nightdress, ringlets of hair, into a gala embassy reception and being introduced, amid the sentimental approbation of guests, to the great pianist Paderewski.) He was lucky in his French judges, both for their leniency and either their gullibility or their interested readiness to credit his story. And perhaps he was lucky to have "his Jew." In 1943 La Maziere had done a friend a favor by securing false identity papers for the friend's tailor, one Grundstein, and settling him outside the official occupation zone. But, in truth, one does not get the impression that this act was any overriding consideration in the court's decision.

There was yet another moment of luck that would make some of the dead bitter. The Russian political commissar who interrogated him doubted his claims to be a correspondent and at first preferred to have him shot—standard procedure with *SS*

officers—but then warmed to La Maziere and even offered Russian residence to someone "retrievable." The turning point was La Maziere's refusal to deny his fascism, indeed his insistence on it. No capitalist lackey, he! "Oh no, for me Fascism offered a revolutionary alternative."

La Maziere's emotional and ideological commitment was not to the obese bourgeois reaction of Petain, but to national *socialism.* He had drifted from the royalist *Action Française* to the fascism of the ex-communist Jacques Doriot, for whom fascism was the "real" Left; or better yet the *socialism fasciste* of the poets Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Robert Brasillach. La Maziere thought to find a virile egalitarianism, beyond the *Fuehrerprinzip*—in the *Waffen SS* with its *Kameradschaft,* common mess halls, and "revolutionary" mission. It is, finally, not so surprising that La Maziere, at the moment of fascist collapse, sought the "socialism of the trenches," Drieu's "power a man receives from being bound to other men." He need never have heard, evidently did not, the call of the Belgian fascist Leon Degrelle, himself an *SS* hero: "You must get going, you must let yourself be swept away by the torrent. . . you must act."

One misses the point if he accuses La Maziere of complacency. "Now I can smile at this fervor. But I do not repudiate it. It is, above all it *was*, a part of my truth." His ponderous, melancholy explanations, crippled metaphysics, are, in a way, moving. What he did was join the most bestial order in Europe, but he was no beast himself. Consequently, his motives must have been *wonder-full*! He devotes a book-length recollection to pursuit of reasons proportionate to the act. But it is hard to tell a man that his narrative dramatizes an appalling triviality; as it is impossible for him to accept the banal passivity of his extraordinary choice. For the profounder question is not "Why did he do it?" but rather "Why not?" It provides a sharper focus, if outrageous, to realize that there was really no reason for him not to.

Fascism, revolutionary though it can be, is an ideology of negatives, which is why it often appeared merely a heated rhetoric and hardly an ideology at all. It's a socialism of sorts, but motivated less by a vision of the future than hatred of the bourgeois present, less anger at economic inequality than aesthetic contempt for capitalism. Hence its easy betrayals of its radicalism: contempt is an ephemeral political attitude, generally of the "haves." Even its affirmations are only apparent ones: the economic double talk of "Workers of all classes, unite!" (Degrelle) is absent of meaning. La Maziere's extraordinary choice, like his politics, resounds like a hollow echo in a chasm. A hole filled up his life because there was nothing there.

While La Maziere paraded at Wildflecken in October 1944, a minor German aristocrat, a Bavarian landowner of Prussian ancestry and training, a sometime man of letters, Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen, was arrested by the *Gestapo* for refusing induction into the military. During La Maziere's baptism of fire in Pomerania in February 1945, Fritz Reck was soon to die at Dachau. While it is true that Reck was a middle-aged man who "knew things" and La Maziere was barely twenty-five; there was a kind of balance struck: Reck was asked to wear the uniform of his *own* nation, and in the *Volkssturm* (home guard), not the *SS.*

No fascist could have detested the "bourgeois" 20th century more than Reck, as is clear from his posthumous testament of moral and aesthetic outrage, *Diary if a Man in Despair*—a journal of reflections from May 1936 to the time of his arrest. Observations of Hitler: "the offal-compounded, repressed drives of a deeply miscarried human being. . . sprung out of a Strindbergian excremental hell." Shudderings at a nationalism and a nation of "wage-earners, sergeants-gone-berserk, and virgin-typists." Apocalyptic certainties that it all means something: "The Devil is loose, and it is God who has loosed him. 'And the Lord will give him great

power.’” But for Reck, fascism was not the revolution against the sordid present; it was precisely the epitome of the present to be hated, the political manifestation of materialistic technology that rapes values. At the same time, his politics was the sort which often finds fascist ideology perfectly congenial: a kind of aristocratic populism—workers, peasants, aristocrats against the middle class, William Butler Yeats’s “Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.”

It would have made no more sense to tell Reck than La Maziere that politics should mean less fevered dreaming and more accounting, that there is a drab dignity in boring republican administration. Louts!—they would have answered—men of no soul, no vision! One need not expect such individuals to moderate their lofty passions into, say, social democracy, to become. . . liberal, or pragmatically conservative. What can one expect? Of young La Maziere—what he did. Of Reck—what *he* did. What is the fundamental difference between them, deeper than age, which is not equatable with vision? What keeps Yeats *human* in spite of his arrogance and juvenile political inanities?

When Yeats, who abhorred his time—“Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed”—recalled his friends, he despaired that modernity had no place for them, “that time may bring / Approved patterns of women and of men / But not that self-same excellence again.” Fritz Reck in a darker time despaired that two friends of similar attainment were terminally ill. “I am going to lose both of them. They were my companions and my friends. . . . Far-seeing men, men of the world; large-hearted, great-spirited friends of all that is human.” We can be moved by such grand emotions even while smiling with moderating but respectful irony. But one is moved a different way when La Maziere recalls a friend: “One of the things I would like to do before I am too old to be present at one of his classes, because, if he, who must have burned with enthusiasm to keep Algeria French, has

debates in them, it must be amusing." Hearty good chumminess. Or La Maziere recalling his commanding officer: "We were in the process of becoming model Waffen SS, while he, on his side, was learning something from us." Wonderful: the free exchange of ideas between Prof and Sigma Chi. Such a poverty of those human relationships that run deep, justly inspire exaggeration, and are akin to something else of which there is no suggestion in La Maziere's musings.

Yeats looks about him in reverie (but not in literal wealth): "Beloved books that famous hands have bound. / Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere; / Great rooms where travelled men and children found content and joy." And Reck in melancholy and extremity: "I look at these things I have brought together here, and cherish, the library, the medieval statuettes, the candelabra. . . . the drawings, *and it seems to me often now that these thigs have a strangeness about them, and I want to cry*" (italics mine). Can one imagine Göring moved by his gains of museum-theft? (The loss of their cash value aside.) Would they take on the coloration of strangeness for him in adversity, his adversity or *theirs*? I'm not speaking of classy elegance, art as property, possession; but of culture as a way of perceiving, personal relationships profound as art, and art as natural to one as friendship. Friends and things and thoughts composing a rich space, not an emptiness, in which one defines oneself; oneself in turn partial fabric of the space in which another defines him- or herself. Personal relationships and art-and-thought in a unity of perception that *is* the possession of culture.

Cultivation, so perceived, is a complex and demanding recognition of the power of both ambitious patterns of intellect and single objects of its creation to steady one, even to console one. . . . even as a friend might. It is also a discipline of risk, an acceptance of the power of culture to move one in uncomfortable ways, to violate one so to speak: great works of art, as Franz Kafka said and Aristotle before

him, can hurt one, inflict pain. . . even as a friend might. It is also a respect for the fact that culture, for all its necessity and power, all that for which Tragedy celebrates it, is, because human-made, *fragile*—the recognition behind Reck's words.

I don't wish to idealize. Fritz Reck is often hard to take. And somehow one rather likes La Maziere, the nihilistic boy-scout. One wonders why, given his story. Perhaps because he is, though not quite the way Speer is, so *familiar.* Culture, as I have characterized it, was not his possession. He was so normal: the man who moves among us.

Has all this anything to do with Speer? (If not I've been wasting my time.) In large but imperfect part, yes. Speer *was* a cultivated man—*after a fashion*. It isn't, God knows, his architectural career that convinces me of his culture. And not the simple fact that so many of his Diary entries are remembrances and speculations of a properly elevated sort—recollections from age seven of Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans,* the memory of an aria, a sentence from Goethe or Turgenev, thoughts for a history of the window, *und so weiter.* Speer is so clearly not the cultural arriviste parading his blotchy polish (as in Göring's idiotic self-advertisement, "I am the last of the Renaissance men"); nor is he yet the pitiful posturer La Maziere, with whom nonetheless and paradoxically he shares much much more than with Fritz Reck.

There is a naturalness and ease of association between daily event, mood, and speculation which suggests an integration the arriviste is without and which La Maziere would be incapable of grasping. Counterpart to the ease and naturalness there is an urgency and necessity to make meaning of things with all the aid he can get. Speer is thinking, as so often, of Hitler: did he suffer at all for the ruin he wrought? He recalls a sentence from Oscar Wilde: "There is no error more common than that of thinking that those who are the causes or

occasions of great tragedies share in the feelings suitable to the tragic mood" (6/4/65). Two days later he *must* find a passage from Schiller; he finds it, copies it out, with the absence of comment that guarantees a private recognition. "But the moment alone has born them. / Of their lives the terrible traces / Vanish in the sand, lost; / Devastation alone recalls them." His culture is a source of clarity, however belated; and also a source of pain.

How was it so easy for Speer to be, not just a Nazi, not just a high functionary of the state, but an associate, a protégé, an intimate of Hitler? Why did his culture not make it at least difficult?

There is a common answer that Trevor-Roper suggested. Speer "represented that fatal philosophy which has made havoc of Germany and nearly shipwrecked the world. . . . Supposing politics to be irrelevant, he turned aside, and built roads and bridges and factories, while the logical consequences of government by madmen emerged." Speer latched on to this view in the Memoirs and even made its consequences a theme: the last pages are a warning of the dangers of the technocratic mentality.

There is another suggestion which makes much of some obvious considerations: young architect not yet thirty and of no particularly impressive credentials becomes the chosen of the chief of state, himself obsessed with architecture, then is promised the opportunity to rebuild the nation's capital, then. . . . Indeed it must have been intoxicating. But Speer's case is more complex than this suggests, and therefore puts greater strain on the question above: why didn't his culture make his path difficult?

As late as January 30, 1964 (anniversary of Hitler's ascension to power) Speer is still reflecting on his relationship with Hitler. Was Hitler the "great destructive force" of his life, or does Speer owe him "all the surges of vitality, dynamism,

and imagination"? Did Hitler really take away his "good name"? "Would I have had any name at all but for him?" Had he a second chance would he prefer not to be "thrust into history" so, or would he choose "the fame and guilt, the world capital and Spandau, together with the feeling of a life gone awry"? He cannot, he says, answer. But this is an obligatory mode of thought: would I have done anything differently? *Nothing* in the Diaries leads one to believe that given that mythical second chance Speer would make the same choices—although nothing suggest he would easily avoid an open path to fame and power.

The story of Speer's visits to the *Fuehrerbunker* in the last days has always presented problems of interpretation. Especially the visit during which Hitler places such value on Speer's believing the war is not lost. Speer after twenty-four hours of hesitation pretends to believe, and Hitler's "eyes filled with tears. . . . 'Then all is well,' he said" (Memoirs). And more especially the last visit, when Speer comes to Berlin at insane risk (both from Russian bombardment and Hitler's expected wrath) to say goodbye, one way or another, and to confess that he has been obstructing the scorched-earth order. "For a moment [Hitler's] eyes filled with tears. But he did not react" (Memoirs). There have been many explanations offered for this behavior, both Hitler's and Speer's. But the least compelling for me is the idea of Speer's compulsive fascination with Hitler's *person*—even if Speer dwells on that fascination dozens of times in multiple contexts.

There is a Diary entry for 11/18/49 which the bunker story oddly reminds me of. Speer has been reading the diary *Memorial* by the playwright Gunter Weisenborn, who was imprisoned by the Nazis for espionage. Weisenborn recalls observing Hitler and entourage in the Munich *Kunstlerhaus* before the war. Speer quotes him:

> *The person whom they called the Führer was this evening*

> *playing the good fellow with a look of kindly wonderment in his eyes. When this person spoke a few words, all the paladins sitting around him leaned forward obsequiously, all toward this small point: the despot's mouth with a smudge of mustache above it. It was as though a warm wind of humility had silently bent those proud stalks, so that I could no longer see anything but the fold of blubber at the necks of our country's leaders. . . .*
>
> *Fat-faced Hitler received this wave of servility. He in turn leaned discreetly toward Speer, who sat to his right and occasionally spoke a few politely bored words. The homage that billowed toward Hitler he transmitted to Speer; it was like a relay race of devotion. Speer seemed to be somehow admired, beloved; and it was he who raked in the tributes as if they were so much small change.*

Speer reflects: "Strange to read such observations in this cell. They remind me of the remark my associate Karl Maria Hettlage made after Hitler had paid an evening visit to my studio, that I was Hitler's unrequited love." I find this remarkable. And the more so that Speer then mutters protests that he wasn't proud, that he could never express his feelings freely, etc., missing the point. He might have spared himself a lot of searching over the years. But maybe it was more acceptable to think he'd been intoxicated by the person of the *Fuehrer*, like so many others, like a nation, than to consider seriously other possibilities. . . .

People more psychoanalytically bent than I can pursue the obvious, knowing what we think we know of Hitler's ambiguous sexuality, and questioning Speer's apparently normal heterosexuality. But such is frankly not my point. Rather:

We ought to revise or complicate the image of the young Speer drunk with fantastic architectural possibilities and with access to power. Ponder instead the young architect so inebriated, yes; but beyond that, fascinated by the fact that

he is himself an object of fascination, of homage, for the most powerful figure he can imagine in the world. And beyond that: enjoying his position from a discreet distance which generates even more subtle veneration. Then Speer's questions about his failure to perceive Hitler make a lot of sense, really. For instance (11/30.46), "Once again I am obsessed by the thought of Hitler's two faces, and that for so long a time I did not see the second face behind the first. [Later] I suddenly discovered how ugly, how repellant and ill-proportioned, Hitler's face was. How could I have overlooked that for so many years? Mysterious!" It makes sense that Speer can recall (2/19/64) that Hitler's "racial ideas always seemed to me a crotchet." And it also makes sense that one of the most interesting and potentially revealing entries in the Diaries (6/6/60) turns safely into a disquisition on Hitler's absurd respect for that "German" Zane Grey–Karl May–as a military strategist: "if I had to find a phrase to fit [Hitler], sum him up aptly and succinctly, I would say that he was a genius of dilettantism. He also had a profound sympathy for all dilettantes; and although I am on somewhat shaky grounds here, I am inclined to believe that there was something extremely dilettantish about Richard Wagner. Then there were those nonacademic scholars such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Walter Darré, not to speak of [Alfred] Rosenberg–they were all dilettantes. And so was probably the greatest dilettante of all–Karl May."

What of the architect Albert Speer?

That is, Hitler's corruption of soul, triteness of mind, and superficiality of taste were not to be recognized. . . because to do so was to cast doubt upon the admirer and elector and render the veneration and election Speer enjoyed meaningless and grotesque. Speer was intoxicated not with the *person*, but with the homage emanating *from* the person. Think of it and those visits to the bunker were risks worth taking: give the venerator a chance for "nobility" before one closes

the career with him. "Would I have had any name at all but for him?"—quoted some paragraphs back—says more than its surface meaning, even if only accidentally.

But, again, why did Speer's culture not make his career more difficult? Well, in fact, it made it *easier*—and hence the difficulty of my speculations. It all turns upon Speer's very *particular* relationship to his very real culture.

That Speer was a god-awful architect may be irrelevant, but not the reason. Whatever respect he imbibed as student for moderation and cleanliness of design and craftsmanship, he easily threw it up when offered the opportunity to pursue the opposite. His designs for the Nuremberg rallies, his monumentally monstrous buildings and plans for others, all suggest a conception of culture as *Power*—of one sort or another. Culture is always giving something to Speer: consolation, comprehension of self occasionally and too late, freedom for a while from isolation—all more modest forms of power. But it's hard to imagine Speer feeling, like Fritz Reck, that beloved objects have taken on a sad and strange coloration. There is no sense of the *fragility* of culture, and hence no protective solicitude for it: culture is alive only to the degree it is helping *him.* In some sense, even its rape is empowering. Because of an incident at Spandau (a Russian guard should not read a book banned in the USSR), Speer reflects, "Strangely enough, it only now occurs to me, as I write this, that I felt no sense of infringement when authors and books were banned in the Third Reich: Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, Stefan Zweig, and many others. Quite the contrary, accepting such prescriptions actually gave many Germans a feeling of elitist specialness."

It's interesting that Speer shifts from first person to "many Germans" and then further depersonalizes the insight with a distanced reflection on political psychology and an assumption, sound enough about *another* German: "An element of that attitude of renunciation that underlies all morality is

certainly operative. One major secret of dictatorship, from Stalin to Hitler, lies in their ability to provide moralistic dressing for coercion and so transform it into a satisfying experience. It may be assumed that Goebbels, lover of modernity in literature, felt no real sense of loss when he obeyed the regime's policy toward the arts and renounced his former gods. He gave up literary pleasure in return for the charms of moral vigor." I assume it's clear that in this context *morality* and *moral* do not mean what we ordinarily mean by them; indeed, they mean something close to the opposite: the active absence of substantive morality dressed up in passion of morality. And it's a telling fact that it's hard to know whether that's just Goebbels' view or whether Speer is subscribing. Why, again, did his cultivation not make his path more difficult; why did it make it easier?

Cultivation and a personal sense of morality are clearly not the same thing. Were they then every moral person would have to be cultivated, which is not the case. But this does not argue a lack of connection. First, cultivation in the large collective sense of civilization—as when we say not "He's a cultivated person" but "That's a civilized society"—appears to include moral imperatives. When we say "civilized society" we're not sure whether we mean, primarily, that mind and art are honored there, or that ethical decency prevails among people. But this uncertainty obscures an evolution of values, just as our language obscures some discriminations. *Culture* or *civilization* we often use interchangeably with *society.* But I abjure that usage. *Culture* and *civilization* should suggest a level of refinement, shape, and creativity that a society might attain, and *culture* as well a level an individual might attain. In any case, in what follows I mean by *civilization* that expanded intellectual and aesthetic consciousness of human society, not human society itself.

Civilization, the collective premium on curiosity, beauty, order, is the parent of moral obligation. (Some might reverse

the precedence, those who assume, as I do not, that disinterested moral virtue is a primitive possession only undermined by intellectual and aesthetic discriminations, quasi-Rousseauvian nonsense.) Civilization, the preference for shape and order fixes upon that primitive ethical code of self-interest—"Don't hurt me, I won't hurt you"—without which there is no society in the first place, and creates from it a public sense of moral obligation that is broader than scattered and private pacts between immediate and random individuals, and more elegant and binding than that protective quid pro quo of wise fear. At the same time, that sense of public moral obligation once set in process, tempers, one might even say humanizes and personalizes, civilization.

The relationship between the individual's cultivation and the individual's sense of morality (assuming them both) is a kind of connective analogy—or, they are twin capacities directed toward different realms of experience. They are both talents for *appreciative responsibility.*

First: A person may appreciate what *others* do for him or her in the small and particular; and that appreciation, since it's a recognition of others, is potentially moral. But unless one feels obligated to others beyond the small and particular (even if they've done nothin' for ya' lately, so no quid pro quo), one is only a *half-moral* person—inchoate, undeveloped.

Second: A person may appreciate what *culture* does for him or her; and that appreciation, since it's a recognition of culture, is potentially cultivated. But unless one feels obligated to *culture itself* (even if it's done nothin' for ya' lately), one is only a *half-cultivated* person—or cultivated "after-a-fashion" as I put it earlier.

Now, for all his appreciation of the various ways culture assisted him, I do not see in Speer any sense of responsibility toward culture and respect for its fragility. I am not surprised that his sense of morality was equally

warped. And since I assume it's clear that I take Speer to be a representative figure of a great part of a nation at a critical moment in its history, and his failures to be those—only more historically dramatic—of that good part, there is more to be said here.

The phrase *the educated classes* rings false in American English. Our middle classes are not, by and large, characterized by any remark-worthy cultural attainment, no matter how well trained professionally. Our schools are neither *lycées* nor *Gymnasia.* Our universities, save a few, become more every year like training camps for a white-collar labor exchange, with the most perfunctory liberal arts requirements. We tend to have scattered cultivated people, but not classes. But *das Bildungsbürgertum* does mean something in German, conforms to a social reality. The cultural ease of an Albert Speer is not a singular achievement, but an easily attained disposition or style that comes with his station. I'm suggesting a German, or perhaps continental, phenomenon of large consequence: that cultivation (after a fashion at least) is a sort of birthright if one is of a certain station. But: people don't necessarily cherish what is their birthright. Culture is not necessarily something *discovered, earned,* and therefore all the more *treasured*; one need feel no protective solicitude for it. I have no wise thing to say; I simply note one of the potential costs of early and easy familiarity, a certain taking-for-granted of an enormous gift.

Solicitude for culture; awareness of its fragility. I grant there's something imprecise and quasi-metaphysical about the notion—since I'm obviously not talking about contributions to the local library fund. Culture in its public structured form of civilization, that which corresponds to what is best in us severally and binds us together, obviously seems a formidable thing, but just as surely is fragile—what the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare wrote about, what history recounts, and what Speer and his colleagues demonstrated. It may be hard to love

culture, taking it so for granted as many do, and feeling superior to it as more than a few do. It may be hard to love its discreet components—a book, a painting, a fugue, a dance, a metaphysical proposition—as opposed to liking what they may do for one. But it's requisite nonetheless: a kind of necessary sense that they cannot safely exist and survive without our passion for them.

In Western history there is of a certainty one people who not only preached the good that may accrue to one from human culture but *consistently* preached and practiced a protective obligation to culture in the large and in its parts, an absolute imperative that one cherish and revere the "book"—that is, the *Jews*. This is of course no idle or accidental example. There is a terrible irony here. There is a criminal logic in the history of the 20th century!

The biggest delusion in Speer's speculations is the most obvious. If he had only known that what began on *Kristallnacht* in 1938 would lead to Auschwitz and Maidanek. . . . But why '38? The Nuremberg Laws were promulgated in 1935, and practiced in various degrees for two years before that, and promised well before Hitler's ascendency. One cannot say that although Speer was overly patient of governmental discrimination he was moved to reconsideration by a pogrom, since the "Night of Broken Glass" did not so move him. One cannot judge him as one of those German citizens of ambivalent opinions who thought or hoped the anti-Semitism a passing rhetorical vulgarity.

Speer was convicted for the forced labor program. There was no question of responsibility for the death camps. But he knew how history should try him: as he sometimes tried himself. "Perhaps I can forgive myself for everything else. . . . But I have absolutely nothing to say for myself when a name like Eichmann's is mentioned. I shall never be able to get over having served in a leading position a regime whose true

energies were devoted to an extermination program" (8/24/60).

I'm sure he never did get over it. But he managed to say quite a few things for himself over the years. Still, there is, I agree, a certain doggedness in some of the self-confrontations, as in a sequence of painful Diary entries in November and December 1946.

"Hitler tended to cut down on his antisemitic remarks in my presence, but of course I was aware that he shared the world of Streicher in a dark, obsessive way. . ." (11/30/46).

"Recently I thought I remembered that in my presence he had been rather reticent about expressing his hatred for the Jews. But he said a good deal [more] than I recalled in my state of repression. . ." (12/19/46).

"Again the central problem. Everything comes down to this: Hitler always hated the Jews; he made no secret of that at any time. By 1939 at the latest I might have foreseen their fate; after 1942 I ought to have been certain of it. . . . 'It's lucky that as an Austrian I know the Jews so well. If we lose, they will destroy us. Why should I have pity on them?' That was how he used to talk. . ." (12/20/46).

"And then this beastly way of talking! How was it I never felt revolted by it, never flared up when Hitler—as he did almost all the time in the last few years—spoke of 'annihilation' and 'extermination'" (12/21/46)?

An admirable willingness to let possible extenuations *unravel.*

But that sequence actually begins thus: "Even in the light of the strictest examination, I must say that I was not an antisemite. Not even incipiently. That whole world of Julius Streicher always struck me as morbid, twisted." One braces to hear of "some best friends," and, disappointingly, is not disappointed. In the Memoirs Speer reveals in 1931 "Even

after joining the party I continued to associate with Jewish acquaintances, who for their part did not break relations with me although they knew or suspected that I belonged to this antisemitic organization. At that time I was no more an anti-Semite than I became in the following years. In none of my speeches, letters, or actions is there any trace of anti-Semitic feelings or phraseology." About his words, at least, that seems to be true. So what?

There's no suspicion that Speer shared the mentality of a Streicher. And had he been offered, say, Himmler's job, one can doubt absolutely he'd have taken it. But that doesn't matter in the least. A Democrat may serve in a Republican administration, a Republican in a Democratic. Socialists and Christian Democrats may come to a parliamentary understanding. But an anti-Semitic regime is not a coalition and allows no complimentary portfolios. I don't expect Speer to have said, "I was after all—note my actions, my considered associations—an anti-Semite." And I appreciate he could not have remained silent about the matter; knowing how loudly that would speak. I know there was nothing for him to say but what he said. And I assume he even believed it.

But I wonder if the question enters the calculations of those who found/find Speer "like us"—whether that leads to thinking him less or more culpable than "the others." If so, I suspect the answer is the same as Speer's. For, in fact, Speer's implicit definition of anti-Semitism is more or less the world's: Anti-Semitism is an *attitude*; its absence, when one chances to think of something absent, is *an attitude.* Consequently, of recent memory, one may have membership in the *Judenrein* (to call a spade a spade) Athletic Club and, with a proper attitude, be no anti-Semite. One may support a "liberation" movement committed to the liberation of Israelis (Jews!) from a place in the community of nations and, with a proper attitude, be no anti-Semite. One may serve, by choice, in a high cabinet position, an anti-Semitic regime and, with a

proper attitude, be no anti-Semite.

My guess is that by the time his Spandau time was up, or long before, Speer probably was no anti-Semite. I prefer at any rate to believe the disease is curable. But in the days of which he speaks, he was. Should anyone be surprised that this cultivated Nazi *had, embraced*, The Gentile Problem? Anti-Semitism is an "attitude" only to those who can dissociate moral sense from action, cultivation from public deed. That included Speer; but also those who found him, all things considered and extenuations, harrumph, extended, so tragically compelling a figure. In that respect they were right to say or think, "He's like us." At a more compelling level than the banal La Maziere's perhaps, he was the man who moves among us.

If I have seemed short on compassion for one whom so many have thought excessively punished, I would only lie now to hem and haw an apology. And I said "short on," not "without." Speer's suffering is real enough to me. But I think we are more spendthrift of mercy sometimes than the dead would let us know we have a right to be. But I have to admit that one reason I'm only short on compassion, not without, is that Albert Speer's story is so dramatic and so interesting, and contemplating him is so morally demanding and intellectually compelling because there's so much to learn there. But there are less dramatic lives, less compelling, the contemplation of which is just as instructive if less obviously so. But that's another essay. . . .

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