
Professor Rothfels' study of the German Resistance was originally written in English in 1948. A somewhat enlarged German edition appeared in 1949. It was completely revised by the author in 1957 to incorporate the results of a decade of research on the history of the Resistance undertaken by a host of scholars. Rothfels has succeeded remarkably well in turning his original pioneering survey into a classic study which is unlikely to be superseded for years to come. The value of his earlier work is confirmed by the fact that the new version is able to retain the old organization intact, and that intervening researches have generally resulted in corroboration rather than correction of Rothfels' conclusions.

The new German edition has now been made available in an excellent English translation (by Lawrence Wilson) which retains the vigor and precision of the German text. It is regrettable that the elaborate footnote apparatus (pp. 170-207) of the German edition has not been translated, for it provides an authoritative guide to the already unmanageably large body of "resistance literature." The loss is, however, not too important, for scholars will go to the German original in any case, while the publisher is rightly aiming at a broader public. The book is one of those rare scholarly works which can be read as well as studied, and anyone acquainted with human nature (including the nature of American college students) knows that the lack of footnotes may prove an incentive rather than deterrent to reading. It is to be hoped that Rothfels' book will appear, after having been out of print for several years, on many reading lists in both German and General European...
History. It is by all odds the best introduction to the problems of the German Resistance, and it is designed to shake the prejudice and pharisaism which still characterizes the attitude of many Americans towards this controversial topic.

Rothfels' original purpose in his 1948 edition was to inform an incredulous American reading public about the remarkable extent and inspiring idealism of the German opposition to Hitler. The recent revival, in the works of Shirer and Tetens, of the stereotype of the eternally wicked German, shows that Rothfels' aim is still substantially unachieved. His secondary purpose is to combat the happily insignificant band of German neo-Nazi authors who today slander—usually by innuendo rather than open accusation—the memory of the German resisters. The incredulous American and the too credulous German critics of the Resistance are, of course, miles apart in their aims and values; yet both groups join in denigrating the German resistance movement. The Americans, when once brought to accept the historic fact of widespread opposition to Hitler, attack the resisters for having been far too nationalist and traditionalist. The Germans, while tending to exaggerate the immediate impact of the resistance to promote a new “Stab-in-the-Back Legend,” accuse the resisters of “treason” to the nation and violation of such “valuable” German traditions as a “non-political army” and “respect for legitimate authority.” Rothfels shows that the American critics are usually ignorant of the facts or incapable of assessing their significance, while the German critics are afflicted with an anachronistic outlook at best, a moral blindness at worst. Rothfels sees the greatness of the Resistance in the fact that its leading members, though devoted patriots and steeped in Germany’s traditions, recognized that traditional conceptions of patriotism and obedience could not apply in the face of the demoniac phenomenon of Nazism.

Rothfels’ book is, in the first place, a compact, lucidly-written factual survey of the Resistance covering its conditions and possibilities, plans and actions, and its numerous but invariably unsuccessful attempts to secure sympathy and support from the Allied Powers. It is, however, far more than a factual survey, for the author is preoccupied with broad historical perspectives as well as ultimate religious and moral problems. He places the German opposition to Hitler in the broad historical framework of the growing modern revolt against such 19th century forces as nationalism (leading to international anarchy), liberal capitalism (leading to a mass society with neither roots nor standards) and secularism (denying God but unintentionally undermining morality and human dignity in the process). He is passionately interested in the imperative ethical decisions, inevitable internal conflicts, and inescapable responsibilities which the new and indescribably monstrous fact of Nazism imposed upon all decent and intelligent Germans. I believe that Rothfels’ deep personal involvement in these problems makes his study a moving as well as great book. He combines intimate commitment with detached scholarship, the latter dictating the sympathetic comprehension of various points of view. Rothfels knew some of the figures that later became resisters while a young professor at Königsberg during the Weimar Republic; he followed their fortunes during the Hitler period as a refugee from Nazism in England and America; finally he has been able to resume direct personal contact with the—alas! far too few—survivors of the Resistance after accepting a professorship at Tübingen in 1949. His position as “insider” and “outsider,” participant and observer, German and American, uniquely qualifies him to serve as guide to the torturous problems
raised by the Resistance—problems which are happily outside of the range of experience of Americans and hence comprehensible only with much effort, sympathy and imagination.

II

A brief survey of Rothfels’ major themes may be permitted to precede a discussion of some of the problems raised by the German Resistance. The author has a broad yet clearly demarcated conception of what constitutes resistance against a totalitarian tyranny. The Nazi state arrogantly claimed possession of the whole man; therefore the maintenance of any kind of independent non-Nazi thought and activity was eo ipso displeasing to the Nazi government. Rothfels provides an admirable discussion of the “degrees of non-conformity” (pp 27-31) that could be found in Germany from 1933 to 1945; he stresses the extreme fluidity of the lines which distinguished anti-Nazis from non-Nazis, nominal Nazis, and “real Nazis.” Only a small group was consistently either pro or anti-Nazi; most Germans fitted into different categories at different times, under different circumstances, and while engaged in different activities ranging from private contacts to public responsibilities. It is pharisaical and unimaginative to expect ordinary Germans to have acted other than they actually did—the average person, in every country, cannot be expected to show heroic or other extraordinary qualities (a fact of which the drafters of de-nazification questionnaires in 1945 were unhappily not aware).

It is too easily forgotten that there were relatively honorable (as well as totally disreputable) motives for joining the Nazi Party or keeping key offices under the Nazi regime. A good many high officials (for example Weizsäcker, Staatssekretär in the Foreign Ministry) reluctantly “stayed on the job” in order to influence affairs positively from the inside, knowing that their resignation would only lead to their replacement by total Nazi rascals. Many joined the party simply to preserve the livelihood of their families. Many young idealists entered the movement in the genuine, however misguided, belief that Hitler could do remarkable things for Germany. A good many people believed, at least until the war, that “on balance” Hitler was doing more good than harm: had he not restored political stability, cut unemployment, and eliminated the Communist danger? (This was, incidentally, a quite popular opinion abroad in the early Nazi years. See, for example, Rothfels’ remarkable quotation from a book review by James W. Gerard, Wilson’s former ambassador to Germany, on p. 18). Such people could deplore the suppression of freedom and the persecution of the Jews and yet be reckoned among the general supporters of the regime.

Rothfels rightly restricts the category of anti-Nazi resistance by the exclusion of mere grumbling, desertion in war time, or resentment felt at party racketeering, and such things. He counts as resisters only those who deliberately opposed or sabotaged major Nazi policies in the name of religious, political and moral values felt to be incompatible with the Nazi system. He discusses, for example, the well-documented fact that Nazi anti-Semitism had a distinctly limited mass appeal, and that some five thousand Jews were hidden in Berlin alone by their non-Jewish fellow-citizens often at great risk to themselves, throughout the war. (This is a small number, of course, when one thinks of the five million that were killed in the extermination camps—yet every case involved considerable heroism on the part of some German). The book includes an excellent account of the struggle of the churches to maintain Christian principles under a competently pagan regime. The main body of the
work deals, however, with the political resistance that was to culminate in the famous conspiracy of July 20, 1944. Rothfels analyzes at great length the plots of the military opposition from 1938 on and the plans for a better Germany forged by various opposition groups. He goes to special pains to refute the once popular legend that the opposition generals were nothing but a group of Junker reactionaries who cheered Hitler while he was winning and opposed him after he was losing only because they wished to keep the General Staff intact for the Third World War. General Ludwig Beck, the “soul of the military resistance,” worked vigorously to oppose war in 1938, and resigned rather than become an accomplice of Hitler’s criminal policies. He made a classic statement of the soldier’s duty to the nation as a whole, and the consequent limits of military obedience, in his great memorandum of July 16, 1938: “It reveals a lack of calibre and of understanding of his task, when at such times a soldier in the highest positions sees his duties and obligations only in the limited framework of his military tasks without realizing the high responsibilities he bears towards the whole people. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary actions” (p. 57)—a doctrine Beck sealed with his own death on July 20, 1944.

The number of Germans who engaged in direct resistance work belies the often leveled charge that resisters were a small elite without significant popular support. The fact that the Gestapo employed some 40,000 full-time officials to ferret out opposition shows that Hitler at least thought otherwise. The conditions of the totalitarian state make the accurate estimate of organized opposition elements impossible. There is evidence to show, however, that in Hessen some 10,000 ordinary people (mostly former Social Democrats) were organized in cells ready to rally to an anti-Hitler government (pp. 96-98). The Hessen situation was probably not typical, since Wilhelm Leuschner, the “shadow” Vice Chancellor of the opposition, had once been Interior Minister of Hessen and presumably kept up his contacts; it shows, however, that there was some mass basis for the anti-Nazi conspiracy.

III

The real question to this reviewer is not why there was so little resistance to Nazism, but rather, how was it possible that there was so much? (I refer of course, only to the extent of resistance after the Nazis had consolidated their power. There is no denying the indelible disgrace of the Nazis getting into power in the first place). Consider the obstacles to resistance: Hitler’s state was utterly ruthless in crushing opposition; the Gestapo had its tentacles everywhere; resisters faced not only death but torture and reprisals against friends and members of their families. Germany was at war after 1939 so that resistance could easily—and not incorrectly—he labelled as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Resisters had to repudiate conventional conceptions of patriotism, generals were compelled to plan activities, such as blowing up their Commander-in-Chief, which were not part of the normal training of Prussian General Staff officers. There was much, moreover, in Germany’s historical traditions which needed to be overcome before men could venture upon active resistance with a confident heart. The political theory of Lutheranism—to give only one example—had stressed acquiescence in tyranny in contrast to the doctrine of tyrannicide developed by Jesuit theologians. The prevalent authoritarian political tradition included, as Rothfels puts it rather quaintly, a “lack of education in individual initiative or civic self-confidence” (p. 26). The paralyzing, cumulative weight of these and other traditions requires, in the opinion of this reviewer, a rather more forceful in-
dictment than Rothfels is willing to present. He is well aware, of course, of the "uncertainty in the traditions and the moral structure of German life" (ibid), but one suspects that his frequent confrontation with wild condemnations of Germany’s past has made him a bit too apologetic on that score. One can find, to be sure, admissions that all was not well with Germany’s traditions, as, for example, in the admirable discussion of the religious background of the opposition to Hitler (p. 39); but occasional admissions do not suffice to provide a balanced, overall picture. Rothfels is neither wrong nor dogmatic in his survey, but this reviewer feels that the proper proportions are not always maintained. I believe that his underlying thesis of the inspiring greatness of the resistance is actually strengthened rather than weakened if one takes a more critical view of German traditions than he is willing to do. It would emphasise still more poignantly the obstacles which the conspirators confronted and successfully overcame.

Who was likely to become a resister in Germany, in contrast to the many who supported, or at least collaborated with, the Nazis? Rothfels is impatient—perhaps too impatient—of any sociological answer based upon class, education or other “objective criteria.” For him the paramount factor is the individual conscience. The fundamental line of division in Germany ran between the decent and the non-decent, between those who clung to basic values like the dignity of man and those who did not. Count Moltke, one of the leaders of the “Kreisau Circle” discussed below, wrote to his English friend Lionel Curtis in 1942: “The real question which will face post-war Europe is how the picture of man can be restored in the hearts of our fellow-citizens” (p. 112). The fundamental demand of the conspirator was the “renewal of the spirit and a return to convictions of a basic kind” (ibid)—namely, the fundamental values of the Christian and humanist tradition. In the light of these considerations it was comparatively unimportant what the social origins of a conspirator were or how he envisaged the specifically political future of Germany. It is for this reason that Rothfels is unusually broad in his sympathies when dealing with the different groups within the resistance. His appreciation includes even the Communists and near-Communists of the “Red Chapel” whom other historians, for example Gerhard Ritter, have excommunicated from the “true resistance.” Rothfels insists that men like Arvid Harnack and Schulze-Boysen were fervid idealists, not party-line hacks; they also resisted for conscience’s sake.

Rothfels goes to considerable pains to minimise the differences which undoubtedly existed within the Resistance, differences which have led to several ex parte treatments favoring one section at the expense of the other. He argues that the much discussed conflicts between “anachronistic elders” and “young idealists,” between Liberals and Socialists, and between champions of an “Eastern” and a “Western” foreign policy were comparatively insignificant. This reviewer believes that a good case is here overstated, namely the remarkable agreement which was worked out between very heterogeneous elements upon the immediate program of eliminating Hitler and setting up a civilised government. It seems probable, however, that the new government would have experienced great difficulty in settling upon an agreed economic policy. Goerdeler, the shadow Chancellor, was an extreme laissez-faire Liberal and trenchant foe of Keynesianism: Rothfels defends him successfully against “social narrow-mindedness and reactionary class-consciousness” (p. 107), but has grave reservations on the feasibility of Goerdeler’s plans to restore a nineteenth century Besitzbürgergesellschaft or middle, class society in this image. Other members of the conspiracy, like the Socialists Leu-
schnier and Leber and Count Stauffenberg (the man who planted the bomb on July 20), thought in terms of a genuine social revolution. In the field of foreign policy the "Eastern orientation" of some of the young conspirators, based upon the "National Bolshevnik" traditions of the Weimar years, probably would have caused considerable difficulty: there is reason to believe that Stauffenberg had some pretty mystical ideas on the "community of suffering" between the Russian and the German people and exaggerated the independence which a future Germany, allied with a perhaps post-Communist Russia, might maintain. Most of the leaders of the Resistance were, of course, emphatically pro-Western in their outlook despite the notorious fact (to be discussed below) that they received no encouragement whatsoever from the Western democracies. We will never know how and whether these differences could have been resolved if the conspiracy had succeeded.

While Rothfels does justice to all resistance groups, his favorite is undoubtedly the already mentioned "Kreisau Circle"—a number of people, drawn from various resistance centers, who met several times at Kreisau, the Silesian estate of Count Moltke to draw up plans for the future of Germany and Europe (pp. 108-24). Their diagnosis of the roots of Germany's troubles and their prescriptions for the future are obviously after Rothfel's heart. They were conservative without being either doctrinaire, reactionary, or motivated by any narrow class interest.

Their view of Nazism was that it represented the culmination of the secularised mass society which had been inaugurated by the French Revolution. They saw Nazism not so much as a reaction against liberal democracy but as a further stage in its development. This theory is still quite unfamiliar to most Americans but obviously contains a good deal of truth. The modern "mass man," the product of a century and a half of industrialisation, urbanisation, liberalism, popular sovereignty, secularism and materialism, tends to be an up-rooted, lonely, discontented individual yearning for security, strong leadership and what Erich Fromm calls "escape from freedom"—all tendencies which modern totalitarianism seeks to satisfy. The modern democratic movement has been—at least in the "old societies" of Continental Europe—primarily a "destructive movement" levelling the old hierarchic order without putting anything that is positive in its place.

If one views Nazism from these perspectives it is natural to place a high value upon pre-democratic institutions, if not for their own sakes then at least because they provided barriers against the democratic tide sweeping towards totalitarianism. This explains the high value which many Kreisauers—and Rothfels—attached to the old Prussian tradition. It also explains the remarkably favorable judgment which Rothfels passes upon the so-called "Conservative Revolution" of the 1920s, including such intolerably fuzzy thinkers as Ernst Niekisch (pp. 49-51). It explains why he wastes no tears on the Weimar Republic and fully shares Countess' Dönhoff's view that the German opposition presented "much more than merely the opposite poles to Hitler and his baneful system. Besides its significance for the events of our time, its battle was on a higher plane an attempt to overcome spiritually the nineteenth century" (p. 160).

How was the nineteenth century to be overcome? First and primarily, by a revival of Christianity and the humanist tradition going back to antiquity. How were the young to be inoculated against the materialist-secularist poison of the modern age? By preserving the classical tradition of the German Gymnasium "against the assault of mere pragmatism and behaviorism" (p. 114) and maintaining the traditional char-
acter of German state schools as “Christian schools with religious instruction of both Confessions as an obligatory subject, and this instruction was as far as possible to be given by churchmen themselves.” (ibid). One may doubt, however, the efficacy of this traditionalism in educational matters when one remembers that neither classical gymnasia nor Christian schools had proved of much value against the Nazi tide in the early 1930s. One can easily go further and argue that six years of Greek are not necessarily the best preparation for the modern world, and that the educated elite of a country like Germany—whose notorious failure to cope successfully with modern problems has caused such untold sufferings to herself and the world—could easily benefit from learning more civics and history (especially the history of the last fifty years) and less Xenophon and Herodotus.

The political program of the Kreisau Circle was notable for its opposition to “a uniform and formal democratic structure and the French concept of the ‘one and indivisible nation’ or the dogma of the sovereignty of the people” (p. 120). It was concerned not with realizing democracy but with establishing a series of counterweights against it in the form of decentralisation, indirect elections to a national parliament, “fancy franchises” like extra votes for fathers of families, a non-elective Upper House composed of ex officio and appointive members, and a Reichspräsident elected by the Reichstag for a term of 12 years. There was at best a grudging acceptance of the parliamentary system, with little thought being given to how to make it viable by associating the people with it (which an artificial system of indirect elections makes impossible) and developing pragmatic, heterogeneously composed parties trained in the arts of compromise. I believe that the political ideas of the Kreisau Circle had little to teach to post-war Germans, and that the democratic-parliamentary system of the Federal Republic has functioned very well while disregarding the Kreisau legacy.

The economic ideas of Kreisau show an open-mindedness towards the most diverse ideas which is intellectually laudable but deprives them of much pedagogic value. The Kreisauers “supported ‘an ordered system of competitive production’ combined with a high degree of economic self-government. In this program were included: a ‘disentanglement’ of monopolistic cartels and combines for the sake of general interests, a land reform, the nationalisation of mines and key industries, the development of cooperative organizations between employers and employees with the participation of the latter in management and in ‘the products of industry, particularly increment value’. It was further intended to set up a single ‘German trade union’” (p. 115). It is clear that this program cannot be attacked—as has sometimes been done—for being reactionary or an expression of the interests of the “upper class”; it is vulnerable, however, for its miscellaneous character and failure to concentrate upon a few major points. The desirable essentials of a successful modern economy—vigorou production and full employment and the economic security of our population—can be achieved without nationalisation, institutionalized cooperation between employers and employees (often leading in practice to collusion against the consumer), and other steps suggested by the Kreisau Circle. Its members engaged in searching and open-minded reflection under conditions of exceptional difficulty, but it is self-defeating “over-selling” to credit them with a wisdom which we today can ignore only at our peril.

In summary it may be said that the spirit of the Kreisau Circle—and indeed the Resistance as a whole—must evoke intense admiration. Its stress upon the primacy of religious and moral values is a standing
reproach to our secularist and materialist civilisation. The specific constitutional and economic programs elaborated by Kreisau have, however, tended to be overrated because of the personal nobility of their authors. The underlying diagnosis of German and European history believed by its authors—that Nazism is but the culmination of mass democracy—is at best only a half truth. It can easily lead to a too positive evaluation of the Bismarckian tradition, forgetting that Bismarck’s adamant hostility to the parliamentary system brought German constitutional life into a cul-de-sac which multiplied frictions and resentments; also a too negative evaluation of the Weimar Republic, whose life might easily have been prolonged if the too much lauded theorists of the “Conservative Revolution” had not systematically discredited it with Germany’s upper classes. Even if it was too much a mere “prolongation of the nineteenth century” this reviewer would gladly settle for so attractive an anachronism. The prescriptions developed by Kreisau for overcoming the admitted evils of mass democracy cannot be considered very helpful. A broad revival of Christianity, however desirable, is most improbable in the modern world—the problem is rather one of making society function decently in the (irrevocable) absence of its traditional religious foundations. Parliamentary democracy is the inevitable form of polity in modern communities—at least those that do not have a deeply rooted presidential system; the problem is to make it function by buttressing it with the right kind of parties and the right kind of popular attitudes, neither of which are provided by the artificial counterpoises advocated by the Kreisauers. A modern, relatively “free economy” can best function when not encumbered with too much nationalisation and artificial schemes of worker-management partnership. It may be added that our problems are not particularly helped by sterile polemics against the nineteenth century whose paternity we cannot escape and for whose legacy parricide is no solution.

IV

It is time to turn to the foreign policy conceptions and problems of the German Resistance. This is a melancholy task, for it leads inevitably to a discussion of the thoroughly misguided policies of President Roosevelt towards Russia and Germany during the Second World War. The plain fact is that the United States gave no encouragement whatsoever to the German Opposition, at a time when its leaders were heroically risking their necks against Hitler, and success of their efforts might well have significantly shortened the war. The official policy was to pretend that the Resistance did not exist.

The Resistance leaders twice attempted to establish direct contact with the White House in 1939 and 1942. Adam Trott zu Solz, a former Rhodes scholar, visited Roosevelt in December 1939. The President “at first showed interest in the appeal to support the German underground, but soon, apparently on the advice of men close to him, discouraged further contacts. Von Trott was even denounced as a Nazi agent which is bitterly ironical in view of the sequel” (p. 132)—he was hanged after the failure of the conspiracy of July 20, 1944.

The German Underground gave Louis P. Lochner, a distinguished journalist who had headed the Berlin A.P. office for twenty years, a message for the President when he returned to America in 1942. Lochner ran into a stone wall when he got to Washington. The President refused to receive him—though Roosevelt was rightly famous for his accessibility. Lochner “repeated his request in writing and gave precise reasons why he desired a personal
interview. The answer he received was negative: he was asked to abandon his request because of its “most embarrassing nature” (p. 134). The dominant figures in the Roosevelt administration were dedicated to the proposition that Germany and Nazism were identical, and like most prejudiced men wanted to shelter themselves from facts which did not square with their a priori opinions. Their ignorance of history made them believe that Germany was responsible for all the troubles which had afflicted Europe, whether past or present, and from this premise drew the not illogical conclusion that the elimination of German power would in and of itself guarantee an untroubled European future. From this point of view it was, indeed, embarrassing that “good Germans” might overthrow the evil Nazi regime and present themselves for negotiations with the request for a reasonable peace settlement which would keep some kind of German state intact. Two things must be undertaken to prevent this truly calamitous outcome: first, to deny that there were “good Germans,” and if they persisted in their existence they must, at least, receive no encouragement; second, to proclaim a program of “unconditional surrender” which must kill all hopes of a negotiated peace settlement in the bud.

The effects of this “unconditional surrender” policy were clearly unfortunate, though the precise damage done to American interests is difficult to calculate because too many imponderables are involved in answering the question: “How would the European War have ended if Franklin Roosevelt had pursued a different policy?” It is certain that the unconditional surrender policy made the task of the German conspirators more difficult. The core of the conspiracy, being motivated by deeply ethical purposes, was determined to strike a blow against Hitler regardless of whether or not it received encouragement from the Allies. This ethically motivated group was, however, forced to seek collaborators among generals who were not uninfluenced by considerations of political expediency. The conspirators were frequently confronted by the question, “Do you have any assurance that the Western Allies will grant us a tolerable peace after we overthrow Hitler?”, and were forced to reply in the negative. It is a matter of record that several generals refused to participate in the conspiracy for this reason. With some this may have been an excuse covering other reasons for inactivity, but with others it was no doubt the real reason.

It is possible (more should not be asserted) that the non-participation of these generals made the difference between success and failure of the plot. It is tantalizing to imagine the course of developments if the conspiracy of July 20, 1944 had succeeded and Germany had received a Beck-Goerdeler-Leuschner government. Assuming a sensible Allied policy towards such a “good” German government—a very big assumption indeed—the consequences would have been as follows: (1) an immediate termination of the European War, say on the basis of Germany’s 1937 frontiers (i.e. before Hitler began his program of territorial expansion): this would have saved millions of lives and billions of dollars; (2) the possibility of preventing Russian domination of Central Eastern Europe in the post-war era, by avoiding the “power vacuum” where Russian bayonets established Communist satellite regimes after 1945. Can anyone deny that this outcome would have proved far more in accordance with American interests (not to speak of those of Europe) than what actually happened after 1945: the long travail of Western Europe, where Communism was only with difficulty contained; the continued partition of Germany, plus Berlin as a permanent focus of crisis; and the long-
term oppression of all the proud, old nationalities of Eastern Europe as Russian satellites?

It is fruitless to linger over the attractive possibilities outlined above, impossible to make dogmatic assertions concerning the future condition of Europe had President Roosevelt pursued a policy more flexible than unconditional surrender. It suffices for the indictment of Roosevelt's statesmanship to note that he did not see the elements in the European situation in the general terms here presented. Roosevelt clearly suffered from invincible ignorance and incorrigible prejudice when dealing with German affairs, though one hastens to add that his deplorable attitude is made intelligible by the monstrous fact that Nazism had triumphed in a supposedly civilised country in 1933 against only minimal opposition. What is nearly unintelligible, however, is Roosevelt's total disregard of the danger which Russian Communism presented for the post-war era. The President was so totally absorbed in the war he was fighting that he lacked the time to think rationally about the future situation which was being shaped by his own war-time diplomacy and planning of military operations. It is probable that there was a close connection between Roosevelt's Germanophobia and his blindness to the Communist menace. A clear understanding of the latter would have indicated to a real statesman that total elimination of German power was by no means in the American national interest. It was obvious, of course, that a negotiated peace settlement with the Hitler government was utterly impossible; all the more reason for encouraging Germans to overthrow that government! The success of the German opposition in overthrowing Nazism, followed by a negotiated peace before the Russians had penetrated Central Europe, was the deus ex machina which would have best served all American interests in the tangled situation of the years 1942-45.

It would be foolish to assert dogmatically that such a happy outcome could have been easily attained; it is not, however, asking too much of Roosevelt that its attainment ought at least to have been sought. A sensible U.S. policy would have had the double aim: (1) of eliminating Nazism and restoring Germany to the Western community of nations, (2) of achieving this goal without opening Central Europe to Communism. The appropriate means would have been as follows: (1) to conduct vigorous military operations against Germany, but always with an eye to the post-war military situation vis-à-vis Russia. This indicated, for example, an invasion in the Balkans rather than in Normandy, even if a Balkan campaign would have demanded greater sacrifices; (2) to encourage the German opposition against Hitler in the hope that the European war could be terminated by political rather than military means. This indicated, for example, applying the principles of the Atlantic Charter to Germany, guaranteeing the frontiers of 1937, and offering Germany a chance to return to the Western Community once she had purged herself of Nazism and agreed to pay extensive reparations to her European neighbors including Russia. It is clear, of course, that a policy so flexible, intelligent and far-sighted would have encountered considerable obstacles in American public opinion, and would have been castigated by Left wing American elements as a base betrayal of our "noble Russian ally." To this argument—the last resort of Roosevelt's last-ditch defenders—the following may be answered. Roosevelt showed, in his brilliant conduct of foreign policy in 1940-41, that he was quite capable of hoodwinking, manipulating, and if necessary disregarding large strata of American public opinion when he believed it to be wrong. The pro-Russian public opinion of the years 1941-
45 was, moreover, neither autonomous nor inevitable: it was, in fact, systematically promoted by all the propaganda resources at the command of the White House. Who will deny that a different White House policy, playing upon the deep-rooted anti-Communism of the American people, could have created a somewhat different climate of opinion? A further factor allowing flexibility in our European policy was the fact that many Americans viewed the Far Eastern War as primary, the European War as an undesirable side show: a diplomatic settlement in Europe could have been “sold” to public opinion by the need of “getting on” with the Japanese War.

The purpose of these observations is only to suggest that Roosevelt’s German and Russian policies were not as “inevitable” as is often claimed: they were largely shaped by Roosevelt’s emotional and intellectual limitations, more specifically his indiscriminate Germanophobia and undiscerning trust in Stalin’s good intentions. The “unconditional surrender policy” was the natural culmination of these two un-statesmanlike attitudes.

It may be useful to examine briefly the specific defences which have been offered for this policy. Granting that it served as a morale-booster at home, yet this function was scarcely of major importance in the winter of 1942-43. There are, so far as I can see, three arguments which can be seriously presented.

(1). Unconditional surrender helped cement the unity of the anti-Nazi coalition by assuring the Russians that the Western Allies would not deal separately with Germany. The Russians were constantly charging the Western Democracies (unhappily, as we have seen, without the slightest justification) with planning to make a separate peace with the Germans, of delaying the Second Front until the Russians were bled white, etc. It is said that the Russians were reassured by the unconditional surrender policy, an assertion which probably underestimates the extent of Russian suspiciousness. It is further argued that this reassurance prevented the Russians from doing what they constantly accused the Western Allies of planning to do, namely to negotiate a separate peace with Germany. Yet a moment’s reflection will show that the much-bruited possibility of a Russo-German separate peace was nothing but a skillfully exploited Russian scarecrow. The German armies stood deeply in Russian territory well into 1944. The Russians could not possibly negotiate for less that the status quo ante of 1941. Could the Germans, however, possibly trust the Russians sufficiently to withdraw their troops to that line? Would the Russians not simply use the territory gained by negotiation as a springboard for a more effective continuation of the war? Put briefly, neither the objective circumstances nor the minimum personal trust existed between Stalin and Hitler to allow an agreement; therefore the unconditional surrender policy was not necessary to prevent such an agreement.

(2). The Allied Powers had had bad experiences with the “pre-armistice contract” which had terminated hostilities with Germany in the First World War. The German attack upon the Allied breach of this contract in the Versailles Treaty had been a factor in Hitler’s rise to power. Therefore, the argument ran, we must avoid a second Hitler by avoiding a second pre-armistice contract through insistence upon unconditional surrender. This argument is a classic example of the dangerous consequences which can easily flow from misleading historical analogies; for men will learn from history what they wish to learn. The pre-armistice contract of 1918 was the culmination of President Wilson’s brilliantly successful effort to drive a wedge between the German people and its “autocratic and mil-
itary masters,” an effort which probably substantially shortened the war. The fact that the pre-armistice contract was dishonorably broken—Keynes, with some exaggeration, compared the violation with the German violation of Belgian neutrality—and that the violation was subsequently exploited by German leaders, does not prove that negotiating the pre-armistice contract was a mistake; it suggests, rather, that breaking it was the mistake to be avoided next time. The problem of preventing a second Hitler was in any case remote; the need to maintain a German state—of course, one purged of Nazism—against the Russian danger ought to have been clear and present. The importance attached to the negotiated character of the 1918 armistice was completely out of balance in the general context of affairs, and suggests that it was only a rationalisation for deeply rooted attitudes of non-rational character.

The Allied attitudes just discussed raise a further consideration of truly tragic import. Suppose the conspiracy of July 20, 1944 had succeeded and a Beck-Goerdeler-Leuschner government had been formed; suppose further that such a government had immediately dissolved the concentration camps, punished Nazi crimes, withdrawn German troops to the 1937 frontiers, and requested a negotiated peace based upon reasonable terms. There can be little doubt that President Roosevelt would have categorically refused to deal with such a government on any terms short of unconditional surrender to the three Allied Powers. Then one of two things would have happened: either the new German government would have surrendered, or else it would have proclaimed a hopeless national rally to prevent—temporarily—an unconditional surrender. The final result would have been exactly what happened in 1945: the occupation of East Germany by Russian forces imposing Communism and of West Germany by the Anglo-American forces imbued (at least temporarily) by the vindictive spirit symbolized by Unconditional Surrender and the Morgenthau Plan. Can one conceive a situation more damaging to the future development of German democracy, more calculated to promote the re-
vival of Nazism based upon a new Stab-in-the-Back Legend? The German man in the street was far from convinced in July, 1944, that the war was irrevocably lost; the danger of Hitler entering popular legend as a martyr, not criminal, would have been very great indeed. The successful conspirators would have appeared as victims of the illusion that the Allied Powers were fighting Nazism rather than Germany. The obvious fact that Germany’s true interests required defeat rather than victory in the Second World War—today a commonplace, though naturally not one stressed in public, with the political elite of the Federal Republic—would have been obliterated by justifiable resentment of the fact that the Western Allies refused to end the war on reasonable terms.

These considerations lead to the tragic conclusion that, from the point of view of Germany’s subsequent political development, it was probably desirable that the conspiracy of July 20, 1944, should fail. The enormity of this conclusion can only be measured by contemplating the consequences which followed failure—including the prolongation of the war by nine months and the massacre of Germany’s anti-Nazi elite at a time when Nazism was already in its death agony. Could there be a more striking commentary on the mistaken character—to use no stronger term—of Roosevelt’s German policy?

To say that, in view of the unfortunate character of American policy, it was probably best that the conspiracy should fail, is not to say that it ought not to have been attempted. On the contrary: it was absolutely imperative that Germans make the attempt to clean their own house instead of waiting passively for military government to do the job for them. It was imperative, and this the Resistance leaders clearly saw, to strike a blow irrespective of the chances of success and irrespective of the political consequences which would subsequently arise—because the elimination of Nazism was a moral imperative which Germans must attempt themselves to restore the good name of Germany among nations. Only German resistance to Nazism, whether successful or unsuccessful—indeed, tragically, probably most if unsuccessful—could create the heroic background needed to build viable democratic institutions on the ashes of Nazism. The inglorious end of the Weimar Republic in 1933, when the democratic parties did not even attempt real resistance against Nazism, was a terrible handicap for the future revival of democracy. A viable democracy, like the Christian Church, can only be built on the blood of martyrs and with the invocation of “heroic legends”—the tragic events of July 20 provided a plentiful crop of both. (The above noted fact that many of the conspirators were not democrats is happily irrelevant in this context. The Federal Republic is proud to trace its genealogy to the Resistance, and we are dealing here with the constructive power of legends, not their historical accuracy).

Over and above this positive political result of the Resistance stands, however, the inspiring personal example of the sisters themselves. They showed that Germany, while producing the vilest scoundrels known in recorded history, could simultaneously produce a rare galaxy of noble and devoted individuals who unflinchingly clung to high ethical principles under conditions of exceptional difficulty. They risked not only death but torture at the hands of the Gestapo, and—unlike the Resistance in other countries—could not take comfort in the fact that their heroic efforts were shared and supported by most of their countrymen and civilised world opinion. They were thrown upon those ultimate resources of the human soul where men must rely upon inner convictions rather than the
approbation of their environment, risking obloquy and misunderstanding as they pursue their narrow—and, alas! often crooked—path of duty.

It is an indelible fact of German history—a fact not to be weighed against, but placed beside the equally indelible fact of Auschwitz—that thousands of Germans followed the ethical imperative at whatever cost to themselves. Major-General Henning von Tresckow, one of the most attractive of the military conspirators, stated the spirit and significance of their conduct just before taking his own life after the failure of July 20: “Now the whole world will fall upon us and load us with abuse. But I am still firmly convinced that we did right. I consider Hitler to be not only the arch-enemy of Germany, but of the world. When I appear before God’s Judgement Seat in a few hours time to account for my actions and omissions, I believe I can stand up with a good conscience for what I have done in the battle against Hitler. Just as God once promised Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom if ten just men could be found there, so I hope that for our sake God will not destroy Germany” (p. 80). To the spirit of men like Tresckow, speaking for the “other Germany” which is still too little known in this country, Hans Rothfels has dedicated his book with its exemplary combination of personal commitment, heartfelt tribute, and critical scholarship. Its value is in no way impaired by the fact that others—including this reviewer—will dissent from many of his judgments on Germany’s traditions, the ideas of the Kreisau Circle, and the desirability of success for the anti-Hitler conspiracy.