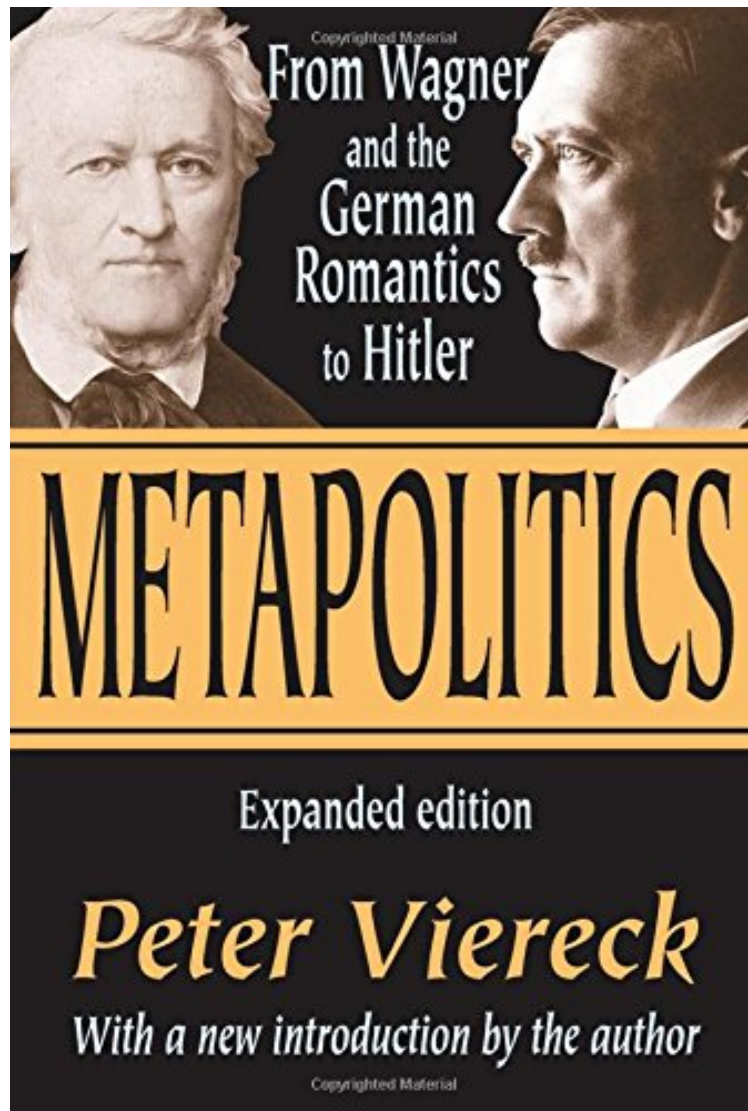


## Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler

*Peter Viereck*

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**Peter Viereck : Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting personal analysis of the origins of Jew-hate, historically ...By Professor Joseph L. McCauleyInteresting personal analysis of the origins of Jew-hate, historically, in Germany. Writers, politicians, they're all there. Stimulating of not completely convincing.2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Historical Insight and Timely TooBy April SageI have read many books about the history of ideas--

how ideas have shaped history--this is among the very best. Wagner had a profound impact on Hitler, going much further than even the most ardent of fans. Hitler not only adored Wagner's music and librettos, he implemented Wagner's political stance and became the leader that Wagner had hoped for. It is horrifying to see how much Wagner and Hitler had in common philosophically--even the rabid anti-Semitism was there. Hitler became a friend of Wagner's widow and her children, and even gained their support for his political rise. The influence is impossible to deny. The insight that can be gained about what motivated the Nazi movement would make this book invaluable. However, when you take into consideration that many of these same ideas are espoused by today's terrorist leaders, it becomes clear that this is a timely read as well. It can help us understand the attitudes and anger that fuels the most dangerous people in our own time, because these ideas are as popular today, among those who hate western civilization, as they were in the 1940s.

23 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Hitler's folk song army

By Earth that Was Tom Lehrer a few decades back satirically warned us about the march of 'the Folk Song Army'. He was lampooning the social radicals of America in the early 1960s. Maybe his warning came too late for Germany which had its own folk song army to deal with. Recently deceased Peter Viereck is something of an interesting character. His father, George Sylvester Viereck, possibly the Kaiser's illegitimate grandson, argued the pro-German case in America during Woodrow Wilson's run up to war. By all accounts his Great War oppositionism was both principled and loyal to America. After Versailles however GSV became more radical in his pro-Germanism and was eventually imprisoned as a German agent during World War Two. He also broke with his two sons around this time, both of whom served in the US Army with one dying in the Anzio landings, and the other, Peter, working for the Army Psychological Warfare Division. Peter Viereck sees Germany as uniquely torn between two souls, in short, a western looking, European and Christian civilisation soul and a northern looking Volkish Kultur soul. Goethe versus Wagner. Considering his family history perhaps the conflict struck home. Peter Viereck wrote "Metapolitics" whilst a Harvard undergraduate. Not bad work for a twenty four year old! He went on to an academic career and earned the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. A life long political conservative he was an ardent critic of McCarthyism in the 1950s. The term 'metapolitics' is derived from Wagner, similar to 'geopolitics', it refers to the German nationalists' metaphysical vision as it approached cultural and spiritual issues, where 'geopolitics' looked at the intersection of geography and politics. The book was one of the first in English to explore the Wagnerian roots of Nazism. Wagner was not only a great composer but something of a radical political pamphleteer. Despite having Jewish promoters and agents Wagner blamed a Jewish conspiracy for his works not being as popular as he imagined. Viereck explores not only the cultural roots of Nazism but the appeal of Nazism to what he calls Germany's "Greenwich Village Warriors", alienated bohemians in exile in their own hometown. And then there is the unusual number of 'failed' artists drawn to the Nazi movement. Viereck's analysis starts with Ludwig Jahn, who Viereck recognises as a pioneer German "Volkish" nationalist, a forerunner of Nazism but perhaps one who would be appalled by the later developments of his thought. It proceeds via Wagner, the Wagnerians and moves on to Hitler's "official philosopher" Rosenberg. He speculates Wagner may also be appalled at how his ideas were used but in Wagner's case, he was truly a proto-Nazi, there is a stronger chain of responsibility than in Jahn's case, despite some minor retreat from full bore Volkism towards the end of his career. In any case, the first generation of 'Wagnerites', including family members (for example, the in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain) were not just proto-Nazis but the real thing, indeed taking Hitler into their circle as "Uncle Wolf" to the children. Viereck explores the development of Volkish German romanticism, and he doesn't condemn all threads of romanticism, in laying a popular and intellectual foundation for the later growth of Nazism. He also explores the role of Rosenberg and the "Realpolitik" pioneers, Fichte, Hegel and Treitschke in the development of Nazi ideas. Viereck notes the attempts by the Nazis to appropriate Nietzsche, something some of the philosopher's family promoted, but highlights Nietzsche's prescient warnings against the rise of antisemitic German nationalism. Viereck's analysis helps get us beyond the simplistic and misleading Versailles / inflation / depression analyses of the origins of Nazism. Much of Rosenberg's "Myth of the Twentieth Century" was written before Versailles and the worst of the Great Depression did not hit Germany until after the Nazis had already emerged as Germany's biggest political party. Viereck provides some unfortunately brief debunking of economic determinist explanations of Nazism, focusing mainly on the how Hitler double crossed and ultimately expropriated his former sponsor, the industrialist Thyssen. To his credit he does recognise that the allies were not guiltless in feeding the bear, besides the well known condemnations of Chamberlainian appeasement, there was the British Hunger blockade in World War 1 and the French occupation of the Rhineland, all of which undermined the liberal west's claim to moral leadership, at least in the eyes of the German public, when dealing with Hitler. Viereck devotes about a chapter or so to another idea that needs more exposure. He says we tend to overestimate the otherwise rootless Weimar Republic. Its very foundation may have been something of a stratagem by Germany's military leaders to avoid popular responsibility for defeat, obtain a softer peace and pave the way for a militarist renewal down the track. Certainly the artifice of circumventing Versailles armament restrictions was well practiced before Hitler assumed power. And his assumption of power was aided by old school militarists who retained pivotal positions in the army and bureaucracy throughout the Weimar period where they behaved like a government-in-exile at home. Still the core of Viereck's book is in analysing the 'spiritual' dimension of Nazism. This can be easily forgotten, for example, Nazi racism, although it did attract a corps of racial scientists, their

role, however repulsive, was more opportunist and parasitic to the whole enterprise. Nazi racialism, as expounded by Rosenberg was not even a corrupted version of darwinism, it was essentially a romantic attachment to 'blood'. Readers should check the various editions of *Metapolitics* available. I have the 1941 edition which comes with excellent appendices that include correspondence with Wagner scholar Thomas Mann as well as some reviews from the period. I understand the later editions include more supplementary material. Also readers should hunt online for Peter Viereck's 2004 essay entitled "*Metapolitics Revisited*" which provides some additional insights and further developments that I am sure readers of the original volume would appreciate.

More than half a century after the fall of the Third Reich, Nazism, its roots and its essential nature, remain a central and unresolved enigma of the twentieth century. During the period of Hitler's ascendancy, most attempts at explaining this unprecedented phenomenon were framed in "economic," often Marxist, sociological terms and concepts. Peter Viereck's *Metapolitics*, initially published in 1941, broke with this convention by indicting Hitler in terms of the Judaic-Christian ethical tradition and locating certain elements of the Nazi worldview in German romantic poetry, music, and social thought. Newly expanded, *Metapolitics* remains a key work in the cultural interpretation of Nazism and totalitarianism and in the psychological interpretation of Hitler as a Wagnerite and failed artist. The term "metapolitics," a coinage from Richard Wagner's nationalist circle, signifies an ideology resulting from five distinct strands: romanticism (embodied chiefly in the Wagnerian ethos), the pseudo-science of race, Fuehrer worship, vague economic socialism, and the alleged supernatural and unconscious force of the Volk collectivity. Together, those elements engendered an emphasis on irrationalism and hysteria and belief in a special German mission to direct the course of the world's history. Viereck analyzes nineteenth-century German thought's conflicting attitudes toward political procedures and social arrangements rooted in classical, rational, legalistic, and Christian traditions. This edition includes an appreciation by Thomas Mann and an exchange with Jacques Barzun debating Viereck's criticism of German romanticism. Viereck's essays on the case of Albert Speer, on Claus von Stauffenberg (the German officer who led the army conspiracy to assassinate Hitler), and on the poets Stefan George and Georg Heym appear here for the first time in book form.

"Extraordinarily meritorious... a profound historical and psychological insight." Thomas Mann "Viereck has given us a book that is as unconventional as it is pertinent, as courageous as it is brisk, as scholarly as it is streamlined..." Boris Erich Nelson, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* The best account of the intellectual origins of Nazism. Crane Brinton An important and original work. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. This is an extremely important book. Joseph Harsch, *Christian Science Monitor* About the Author Peter Viereck (1916-2006) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, critic, and historian. He held the Kenan Chair in History at Mount Holyoke College and was known as one of America's early leaders of conservatism. He was the recipient of Guggenheim fellowships both in history and poetry. In addition to his contributions to *Poetry Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, his many books include *Inner Liberty: The Stubborn Grit in the Machine*; *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler*; and *Conservative Thinkers: From John Adams to Winston Churchill*. Peter Viereck (1916-2006) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, critic, and historian. He held the Kenan Chair in History at Mount Holyoke College and was known as one of America's early leaders of conservatism. He was the recipient of Guggenheim fellowships both in history and poetry. In addition to his contributions to *Poetry Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, his many books include *Inner Liberty: The Stubborn Grit in the Machine*; *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler*; and *Conservative Thinkers: From John Adams to Winston Churchill*.