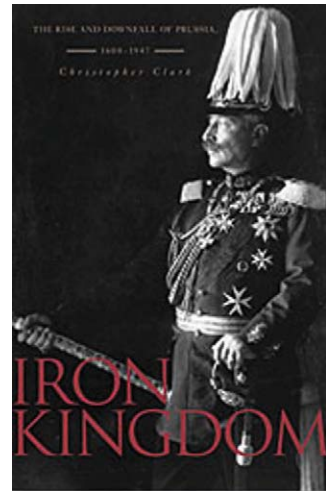

Review Essays

The Lost People: In Search of Prussia by James Kurth

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Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).



The twentieth century has often been called “the American century.” However, the era from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, particularly the 1860s-1940s, might also be called the century of the German wars—the wars of German unification from 1864 to 1871, World War I, and finally World War II, which were caused by the problems of accommodating a rising, powerful Germany into the international system. These wars ended in 1945 with Germany’s catastrophic defeat and its occupation and division by the victorious Allies. It was not until 1990 that Germany was again united, this time without any war, with East Germany being absorbed by West Germany. This represented a sort of final solution to the problem which Germany had long posed in European and international politics.

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However, long before the overall German problem was at last solved in a remarkably peaceful and benign way, a particular historical part of that problem had been solved in an extraordinarily violent and radical way. That was what many saw as the Prussian problem. Prussia had been an independent state and a great power from the early eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. It then brought about the unification of Germany under its leadership in three wars from 1864 to 1871. As a constituent state, and the largest one, within the new German Empire or Second Reich, it then dominated this new power from 1871 to 1918, and it provided the leadership for the German state and the German Army in World War I. Finally, in the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) and in Nazi Germany or the Third Reich (1933-1945), Prussians continued to provide the leadership for most of the German Army, that army which was so formidable and so terrible for so many nations during World War II.

In 1947 and through their Allied Control Council, the four victorious and occupying powers decreed the total abolition of anything that remained of the Prussian state within Germany. Even before, in 1945, the invading Soviet Army killed almost two million Prussian civilians and forced the permanent expulsion to the west of eight million more, as it murdered, raped, and looted its way through all the territories which traditionally had composed Prussia, lying from Memel and Königsberg in the east to Berlin and Magdeburg in the west.¹ The years 1945-1947, therefore, brought a definitive end to Prussia as a state, Prussia as a territory, and even the Prussians as a distinct people.

Having been extinct for more than 60 years, Prussia is now largely forgotten. Certainly this is true in the United States, a country which has always been the opposite of Prussia in so many ways. However, even though Prussia no longer shapes the destiny of Europe (and Europe no longer shapes the destiny of the world) as it once did, it still has lessons to teach us today. And, as we shall see, these lessons are not simply that everything Prussian was bad and that it was good that all this was destroyed and forgotten. For, as it turns out, there were certain features of Prussia, and particularly of the Prussian people and their values, which have reappeared in another people and which are operating to shape the international politics of our own time.

Christopher Clark, who is an historian of Australian origin but who is now teaching at Cambridge University in England, has written an exceptionally comprehensive, informative, and thoughtful history of this largely forgotten country. Readers will greatly benefit from having Clark as an

¹ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1995, especially chapter 2. The most detailed and accurate account of these Soviet actions has been given by Alfred M. deZayas in his *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Expulsion of the Germans from the East*, revised edition (Rockport, ME: Picton Press, 1998) especially chapter 3-6, and his *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

authoritative guide as they travel backward in time and eastward in space to this land which people in America, Britain, and the rest of the English-speaking world long regarded as strange, alien, and dangerous to the point of being deadly.² In this essay, we will also engage in a search for this forgotten country and its lost people.

Prussia as an Explanation for Germany's 'Special Path'

We will begin our excavation in search of Prussia by looking into the peculiar role that Prussia has played as an explanation for German history, i.e., as one of the major explanations for what has been called Germany's *Sonderweg* or "special path." The course of German history was so catastrophic that ever since 1945 generations of historians and political scientists have been trying to explain it. Indeed, there have been many competing explanations accounting for Germany taking the path of authoritarianism and war, of repression and aggression, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, i.e., at the same time that other European countries (such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden) were presumably taking the path of liberal democracy and peace. By now, these myriad explanations have grown into a veritable thicket of theories.

Here, we will consider only three of these theories, those which focus upon different conceptions of the scope, and depth, of the responsible actors within the broad realm—the broad territory, people and culture—that once was seen to comprise Germany. In their efforts to explain the "special path," these three theories focus respectively upon (1) the Nazi regime, (2) the German nation, and (3) Prussian militarism. It is the last of these explanations which we will particularly examine.

The Nazi regime as the principal cause

One explanation has put the blame for Germany's catastrophic path simply upon Hitler and the Nazi regime. From this perspective, Germany's journey down a really wayward path did not begin until 1933, and it was pursued by a relatively small part of the German population. This explanation is obviously quite narrow, both in time and in space.

The Nazi-regime explanation was very prominent during the first two decades of the Cold War, and one reason for this is also fairly obvious. With the United States—and more broadly the Western allies which the U.S. led – wanting to integrate West Germany into NATO and the grand alliance in order to defend Western Europe against the Soviet Union, it was very important to exonerate most Germans from being responsible for the special path.

² Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* (London: Weidenfeld and Nelson, 2006).

A narrow focus upon the uniqueness of the Nazi regime nicely served this purpose.

The German nation as the principal cause

At the opposite extreme from the Nazi-regime explanation has been the German-nation explanation, opposite particularly in the sense that this explanation reaches both back several centuries and outward to encompass most of the German people during those centuries. This explanation is thus very broad, both in time and in space. From this perspective, German culture and the German people have long—if not always—been inclined toward repression and aggression (e.g., “from Luther to Hitler”).

Not surprisingly, this explanation has been widely accepted within many of the countries which were occupied by Germany and the German Army during one or both of the two World Wars. With soldiers who came from all regions of Germany and from all sectors of German society being on their land and in their face for year after year (1914-1918 or 1939-1940 to 1944-1945), the citizens of such countries as France, the Netherlands, and Poland would naturally think that all Germans looked, and were, alike. In particular, they were not inclined to draw distinctions between the German Army and the Nazi regime, or between the different regions of Germany, e.g., between Bavaria and Prussia.

More recently, and rather oddly, this theory that the German nation as a whole was at fault for the special path has been advanced by many Germans themselves. This particularly has been the case with the “generation of ‘68”—who carried their rebellion against their parents and against all traditional institutions and values to a perverse extreme—and of the German Left (e.g., the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party, and the German universities)—who want to abolish the German nation and any distinctive German identity and to replace them with some broad and amorphous European or universalist identity.³

Prussian militarism as the principal cause

But there was a time when the principal cause for the special path was seen as longer, broader, and deeper than the brief Nazi episode, but not as much so as the entire German nation. In this explanation, a particular part or region of Germany has been identified as the culprit, and this has been Prussia. It was true that by the nineteenth century, Prussia was already the second largest state in the broadly-defined German realm (after the Austrian Empire of the Habsburgs). And after the unification of Germany in 1871 (which did not

³Uwe Siemon-Netto, “The ‘68er Regime in Germany,” *Orbis*, Fall 2004, pp. 641-656; Paul Gottfried, “How European Nations End,” *Orbis*, Summer 2005, pp. 559-569.

include the Habsburg territories), Prussia was the largest state in the new German Empire and in its successors, the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany. However, in this explanation, Prussia has been seen as very different in its history, politics, and culture than the rest of Germany. In particular, it was more authoritarian and militarist, i.e., more repressive and aggressive, and after unification under its leadership, it imposed these characteristics upon the rest of Germany, driving it straight down the catastrophic special path.⁴

The Prussian-militarism explanation was held by prominent British and American leaders—particularly Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt—during World War II. This is one of the main reasons why Prussia was abolished in 1947, immediately after that war. But Churchill and Roosevelt had formed their interpretation of the cause of Germany's pathologies not in World War II, but in World War I, when each already held important positions in their respective governments (Churchill as British First Lord of the Admiralty, and Roosevelt as U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Navy).

Of course, anyone having to fight, and therefore to understand, Germany in World War I would naturally have been drawn to Prussia and Prussian militarism as a principal explanation, since it was Prussians who largely led the German state and the German Army. However, the British also applied their explanation for World War I to World War II, and they were not especially interested in developing a different explanation that might be more accurate and suitable for explaining the later war. For Americans, World War II was the great war of the twentieth century (and of the American century); the military casualties and civilian war effort of the United States were much greater in World War II than in World War I. For the British, however, it was World War I (originally named the Great War) which remained the really great war of the twentieth century. Indeed, in terms of military casualties, World War I was one of the greatest disasters in British history, a disaster from which British prowess and confidence (especially that of the British aristocracy) never recovered.⁵ In short, Britain was traumatized by World War I, and its particular explanation for this trauma would assume the role of its general theory for German history.

Of course, there were also particular nations to the east of Germany which had been repressed by the Prussians for centuries—and especially by the Junker agrarian class which dominated Prussia. The most prominent of these nations was Poland. Since the restoration of an independent Poland was a major project of Woodrow Wilson (and of Polish-Americans), the United States soon joined Britain in advancing the Prussian-militarism explanation.

⁴A classic statement of this argument was A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), especially chapters 1, 6 and 7.

⁵Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), especially Introduction and chapter 10.

Finally, some of the most vehement exponents of the Prussian-militarism explanation were Germans themselves, especially those in the southern and western states of Germany (and most especially, Bavaria), who had chafed under Prussian dominance in the Second Empire, especially when it was joined by Protestant repression of Catholics (e.g., Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s). One of these vehement western and Catholic critics of Prussia was Konrad Adenauer, who in 1949 became the first Chancellor of West Germany and who always thought that the western Germans were better off when they were separated from the Prussians. As the leader of West Germany during its formative years at the height of the Cold War, Adenauer certainly had good reasons to join the Americans in holding the Nazi-regime explanation. But because of his pronounced western German (Rhineland) and Catholic identity, he also had good reasons to join the British in holding the Prussian-militarism explanation.

But because the Prussian state and much of its leadership class have now been extinct for more than six decades, they have not been repressing and aggressing against anyone for a very long time, i.e., the entire lifetime of almost everyone living today. Thus, the Prussians can no longer relevantly and operationally take the role of the bad Germans. (Indeed, almost no part of today's Germany—which has gone so far down its post-war, post-military, post-national, and, in short, post-German path—can now convincingly take this role.) Consequently, the Prussian-militarism explanation is probably destined to itself eventually disappear, just as Prussia already has. However, in the case of Prussia as an explanation, it will probably just fade away, and not be abolished or killed as was Prussia as a state and as a people in the years 1945-1947.

Prussia as the Rational-Bureaucratic State

One of the most well-known features of Prussia was that it was a highly organized and effective state, i.e., a government apparatus operating pervasively, deeply, and efficiently within the people which it ruled. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Hegel famously concluded that the Prussian state represented the highest form of Reason, as it had worked itself out in history. A century later, Max Weber similarly thought that the Prussian-dominated German state represented the ideal type of the rational-bureaucratic state, which had so defined and dominated the modern era. Moreover, the modernizing state-builders in Japan, Russia, and Turkey often tried to follow the Prussian model (with Japan being especially successful). And, indeed, the Prussian reputation for a strong and effective state did largely represent the truth.

As Clark demonstrates in the early chapters of his book, the fundamental reason that Prussia became the model, the ideal type, of a strong and effective state lay in its peculiar geography. Many European modernizing

states (and the traditional monarchies which had preceded them) had something approximating natural defensive frontiers, e.g., the English Channel, the North Sea, the Pyrenees, the Alps, or at least the Rhine river. Even the other German states benefited from having the Alps or the Rhine or lesser mountains or rivers to serve as their natural defensive frontiers. But Prussia began as Brandenburg, which was situated on the broad, flat, featureless North European Plain. This vast Plain stretched from the Netherlands in the west all the way east to the Urals. Even after its great extension into western Germany after the Napoleonic Wars, Prussia was still largely situated on featureless territories. Without any natural defensive barriers, the Prussians would not be able to defend themselves unless they constructed man-made, artificial ones. The ultimate man-made, artificial defensive barrier was a strong state, and this was the path that the Prussians, under the leadership of their Hohenzollern kings, chose to follow. (In this respect, the Prussians were similar to the Russians. These two peoples had a lot in common; tragically, this included having each other as natural enemies without any separation by natural frontiers.)

Moreover, the territory of Prussia was bereft not only of natural frontiers, but of natural resources as well. Brandenburg and the adjacent lands which it absorbed were characterized by poor agricultural soil and few industrial minerals. This meant that the Prussian state not only had to be strong, but efficient as well, i.e., the strong state had to bear down hard upon its territory and its people to squeeze out of them the maximum possible resources with which to defend the state.

In short, when compared with almost all other European states, Prussia had fewer defense-supporting natural frontiers and fewer defense-supporting natural resources. This drove the Hohenzollern kings and the Junker class to construct a state which would compensate for its lack of natural capabilities with a surplus of artificial capabilities, i.e., a state which was stronger, more effective, and efficient than any other European state.

Originally, in the eighteenth century, the Prussian state was constructed and improved in its strength, efficacy, and efficiency by the Hohenzollern kings, and it principally served the interests of the Hohenzollern dynasty. Then, in the nineteenth century and after the great reforms in the state during the crisis years of 1807-1817 (which Clark discusses in useful detail), the Prussian state was further developed in its strength, efficacy and efficiency by a series of Junker chancellors (the most prominent being Bismarck), and it principally served the interests of the Junker class. Finally, during the brief period of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) in the twentieth century, the Prussian state was further developed by a series of Social Democratic minister-presidents (the position in the state of Prussia which was equivalent to that of the Chancellor in the German Republic as a whole), and it largely served the interests of most of the Prussian people.

However, even when the Prussian state principally served the narrow interests of the Hohenzollern dynasty (especially its power interests) and the Junker class (especially its economic interests and social privileges), that state did seek to provide for the military defense and, therefore, the security interests of the Prussian people as a whole. Since these people were fully aware that they were surrounded by other peoples who would overrun and subdue them if they were able to do so, they generally came to give their willing support to the Prussian state, thus making that state still stronger, more effective, and efficient. Even the Social Democratic Party, which actively opposed the Junker class and the Conservative Party which advanced the interests of that class, fully supported a strong, effective, and efficient Prussian state. In short, the Social Democrats and the Prussian working and middle classes were just as Prussian in their character and their values as were the Junkers and the Prussian upper classes.

At the core of these Prussian values were the values (then seen as the virtues) of loyalty and duty to the Prussian state and to other Prussian social institutions, as well as diligence, persistence, and hard work in carrying out these duties. It is probably safe to say that no people on earth have ever surpassed the Prussian people who lived from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, with respect to devotion and commitment to these particular values (and, as disagreeable as they now are to contemporary Americans, these particular virtues).

Prussia as the Organized Efficient Army

European statesmen of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries commonly remarked that “in other European countries, the state possesses an army, but in Prussia, the army possesses a state.” Many observers of Prussia thought that the Prussian army was so important and distinctive that it really defined the essence of the Prussian state and of Prussia more generally.

It was true that in Prussia the army loomed larger than it did in other great powers. But this was largely because of the same two reasons that the state loomed large: the lack of natural barriers and the lack of natural resources. It was the army that provided the most obvious artificial defensive barrier to compensate for the lack of natural ones. To carry out its central purpose, the strong and efficient Prussian state had to have a strong and efficient Prussian army.

The lack of natural resources also enhanced the role of the army. Because of this lack, the Prussian state had very few impressive instruments to deploy in its statecraft, other than the army. Since the natural resources of Prussia were not enough to sustain a prosperous agriculture or industry, the Prussian state could not use the same economic instruments, e.g., the same mercantilist trading policies, that other powers used.

Moreover, at least in the eighteenth century, Prussia and Berlin could not compete with the other great powers and their capitals which were enriched by commerce and wealth (especially London, Paris, and Vienna), with respect to cultural offerings in the arts, architecture, music, and literature (the “soft power” of the day).

Bereft of economic and cultural instruments, the Prussian state could rely only on the military one. But it was the state that made the army its instrument, not the reverse. For example, in the entire history of Prussia, there was nothing that even resembled a military coup, an overthrow of the civilian authorities. The failed coup of July 20, 1944, in which Prussian officers in the German army joined in an attempt to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Nazi regime, is the exception that proves the rule. The coup failed in part because Prussian army officers had had absolutely no experience in executing one.

The relationship between the Prussian state and the Prussian army is best seen as a symbiotic one, perhaps like fraternal twins. The Prussian state, which in order to be strong had to be organized and efficient, shaped the Prussian army in its own image. Indeed, after the army reforms of the early nineteenth century, the Prussian army became the most highly organized and efficient army on earth. The Prussian innovations which made it thus included (1) the creation of a General Staff, which could squeeze the maximum efficacy and efficiency out of the officers and soldiers under it and (2) the creation of a professional war college, the *Kriegsakademie*, which would teach officers military doctrine which was innovative and encouraged officer initiative but which was also standardized across the army so that officers could coordinate and operate as an effective and efficient whole.⁶

Other great powers later emulated Prussia in these institutional innovations, but the Prussians and then, under their leadership, the Germans continued to set the standard and be the model. Commanders in other armies often acknowledged that it was the German army units that, on average, operated with the greatest efficacy and efficiency. (British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery is reputed to have said, “He who has not fought the Germans does not know war.”) Indeed, after World War II, professional U.S. military studies concluded that the average efficiency of the German soldier was about 20 percent greater than that of their American and British counterparts, i.e., one German soldier was the equivalent of 1.20 American or British soldiers.⁷

The Prussian army and the later Prussian-shaped German army therefore were superb at the levels of military operations and tactics. They did exceedingly well, in a highly organized, effective, and efficient way, what military professionals are supposed to do. However, they were much less

⁶ General Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), pp. 47-61, 92-106; also Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006), pp. 120-124.

⁷ Boot, *War Made New*, p. 238.

accomplished at the higher and broader level of military strategy. That is because an effective and efficient military strategy actually requires an acute understanding of political, economic, and diplomatic factors, as well as military ones. As Clausewitz pointed out, this was more the domain of the civilian authorities, of the state rather than of the army. The fact that the Prussian army was so clearly supposed to be an instrument of the Prussian state meant that Prussian officers often neglected these factors, which they, in an oversimplification of Clausewitz, attributed to the civilian authorities alone.⁸ This made for military strategies which were sometimes strangely inappropriate to fundamental realities. The most fatal of these was the Schlieffen Plan used for the invasion of Belgium and France in 1914.

In contrast, the American army, while generally inferior to the German army with respect to operations and tactics, was often superb at the level of both strategy and logistics. The German army does not seem to have produced high commanders with the strategic vision and wisdom of, for example, George Marshall or even Dwight Eisenhower. (The best German commanders were more like Douglas MacArthur or George Patton, i.e., U.S. commanders who were more limited in their strategic wisdom, but more innovative in their operational imagination.)

The Prussian army reinforced all of the Prussian values and virtues which we have encountered in discussing the Prussian state: loyalty and duty, as well as diligence, persistence, and hard work in carrying out these duties. In addition, the army naturally placed great emphasis on such military virtues as honor, courage, sacrifice, spirit, and group commitment (as in *esprit de corps*). Again, it is probably safe to say that no army on earth ever surpassed the Prussian army and its successor, the Prussian-shaped German army, with respect to devotion and commitment to these values and virtues. They certainly contributed to make these armies as effective and efficient as they were.

Prussia as an Abortive Nation

One of the anomalies about Prussia was that the Prussians as a people had never become a clear and distinct *nation* in the conventional, European sense. The principal reason for this was that there never was a distinct *Prussian* language (although other Germans certainly thought that they could recognize a distinct Prussian dialect or accent). The language of Prussia was the language of Germany as a whole, and this fact was of great consequence in the nineteenth century, when a distinct language was widely held to be the fundamental basis for a distinct nation (and nation-state).

And so, the Prussian people—and any potential for Prussia becoming a distinct nation—were submerged within the *German* nation during the era of

⁸Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), especially pp. 30-34, 89.

German nationalism, which culminated in the wars of German unification led and won by the Prussian state. Ironically, it was the Prussian state which thus aborted any remaining Prussian national identity and greatly enhanced the alternative, German national identity.

Still, as Clark discusses in detail in chapter 16, Prussia did remain as a distinct, and dominant, state within the new German Empire (with the German Emperor remaining as the King of Prussia). And after the collapse of that empire in 1918, Prussia continued as a distinct, but no longer dominant, state within the new Weimar Republic. Indeed, under its Social-Democratic governments, Prussia became an especially liberal state within Weimar Germany. But, however distinct the Prussian state and Prussian politics were within the German nation, this clearly was not enough to make for a distinct Prussian nation.

Then, after the collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1933, the new National Socialist regime, with its extreme centralizing program, brought an end to any independent policy or action by the Prussian state. The legal form of the state of Prussia remained, but the real substance of that state was effectively abolished. Later, as World War II was nearing its end, Prussian military officers and members of the Junker class were prominent in the July 20, 1944, coup attempt. When the plot failed, the regime brutally retaliated, executing hundreds of Prussians and effectively decimating the Junker class.

Thus, by a peculiar irony, when the Allies formally and finally abolished the state of Prussia in 1947, they were in a sense merely completing the substantive abolition of that state, which had been carried out by the Nazis after 1933. Similarly, when the Soviet Army destroyed the Junker class during the conquest of Prussian lands in 1945, it was in a sense completing the substantial decimation of that class, which had been carried out by the Nazis in 1944. In brief, during the era of united Germany lasting from the mid-1860s to the mid-1940s, the Prussians first disappeared as a nation under the German Empire, then disappeared as a substantive state and prominent class under the Nazis, and then finally disappeared as a merely formal state under the occupying Allies. Prussia ceased to exist not in one dramatic event, in one big bang, but in a series of distinct stages leading to its final end, which resembled something more like a whimper.

Prussia as a People Distinguished by Particular Values and Virtues

Although Prussia never became a nation, it can be seen as a people, one with a distinct character defined by their particular values and virtues. As we have seen, these were the civil virtues of loyalty, duty, diligence, persistence, and hard work. And for Prussians who had served in the army or who emulated it in some way, there were also the military virtues of honor, courage, sacrifice, spirit, and group commitment. Together, this ensemble of ten or so

interrelated values formed a distinct popular character, one which was found in Prussians of all social classes and which was widely-reputed to the Prussians by other peoples in Germany and in Europe more generally, some of whom successfully emulated the Prussians with respect to some of these values.

As we have also seen, the distinct character of the Prussians was the product of the peculiar geography of Prussia, particularly of the heightened insecurity that came from the lack of natural defenses and natural resources. But other peoples in similar geographical conditions (e.g., the Poles and the Russians) did not develop an ensemble of values and a popular character like the Prussian one. They indisputably had their admirable virtues, but they were different ones.

The distinct Prussian character was, therefore, the product of additional factors. The most important of these was probably religion, which Clark illuminates very well in chapters 5 and 12. The religion—be it a real faith or merely a formal ascription—of most Prussians was Lutheran, while the religion of the Hohenzollern dynasty was a form of Calvinism. A substantial number of Prussians, particularly civil servants, adhered to an especially austere version of Protestantism, which was Pietism. Whatever their differences, these variations on the Protestant theme were all characterized by an emphasis on such Biblical (especially New Testament or Christian Scripture) virtues as obedience to the powers that be, diligence and persistence in carrying out one's calling and work, courage in the face of persecution and adversity, and willingness to sacrifice one's own interests for the good of the community of fellow believers. These religious virtues of Prussian Protestants, when secularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, readily became the civil virtues of Prussian citizens and the military virtues of Prussian soldiers.

The Prussian people and their values, therefore, were the product of a unique combination of geography and religion, of material and spiritual factors. That particular combination of factors did not exist anywhere else, and it does not exist anywhere today. The world that shaped the Prussians is now long ago and far away, and that makes them and their values very difficult for us to understand. It is natural, therefore, that they are lost and forgotten.

Where Are the Prussians Today?

Certainly, the world of the Prussians is impossible for Americans to understand. When it comes to such geographical factors as natural defenses and natural resources, America, at least until the late twentieth century, has always been the very opposite of Prussia. And when it comes to religious factors, although evangelical Protestants still play a large role in American politics and society, the individualistic American Protestantism of today is certainly very different than the austere Protestantism of Prussia. (The original Puritanism of New England was a good deal more similar.)

Still, if one looks closely enough, one can see a place within America where something like the military virtues of Prussia—honor, courage, sacrifice, spirit, and group commitment—are very much in evidence. That is the U.S. Marine Corps. Perhaps that is one reason why the Marines remain so effective in meeting difficult challenges. A particularly impressive recent example has been the Marine counterinsurgency operations and tactics in Anbar province in Iraq.

As for the civil virtues of Prussia—loyalty, duty, diligence, persistence, and hard work—these are more difficult to find among contemporary Americans, at least at the group level. However, there is one place where they can be seen at the individual—or, more accurately the family—level, and that is among recent immigrants to the United States, i.e., among those who aspire to become Americans but who still hold many traditional values, rather than among most of the actual Americans themselves.

Finally, in all the world, there is probably only one nation that still presents a first approximation to the Prussian ensemble of military and civil values. It is a nation that has no extensive natural defenses and almost no natural resources. Indeed, it is actually tiny, and it is surrounded by hostile enemies. It is also a nation whose people are largely secular, but whose values and virtues have their origins in the Bible (in this case, the Old Testament or Hebrew scriptures) and in an intense religious community. That nation, of course, is Israel. The Israeli army has been exceptional in its emphasis on the military values of courage, sacrifice, spirit, and group commitment. Although somewhat less impressive, the Israeli people have also been exceptional in their emphasis on the civil values of diligence, persistence, and hard work.

And so, by the cunning of history (a concept articulated by the Prussian philosopher, Hegel), at the very moment, 1945-1947, that the original Prussia was being definitively destroyed, a new Prussia was being born in the form of the state of Israel. As it happened, many of the new Israelis had actually been born and reared within parts of Germany shaped by Prussian values, but it was the peculiar geographical and religious conditions of the Israelis that made them what they would be for decades after the establishment of their state in 1948. Of course, for obvious and tragic reasons, it is impossible for the Israelis and their supporters among Americans to perceive this similarity. But if one looks behind the outer appearance to the inner character, one can see that the spirit that now prevails on the warm, dry hills of Israel is very much like the ghost that haunts those cold, wet flatlands far to the north, on the shores of the Baltic and on the North German Plain.

