

# A Manifesto for Environmental Protection: Ernst Rudorff, “On the Relationship of Modern Life to Nature” (1880)

## Abstract

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By the end of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of Germans recognized the importance of environmental issues, not least because they were trekking into the countryside in unprecedented numbers as hikers and tourists. But only a few could envision an organization that would advocate publicly for environmental protection (*Heimatschutz*). Ernst Rudorff (1840–1916) was one of them. In 1880 he published this tract, which is often taken as the first important statement of *Heimatschutz*. Rudorff’s career as a music professor helps explain the aestheticized style of this piece. Taking his cue from Heinrich Wilhelm Riehl, Rudorff opposed the idea of letting entrepreneurs and tourists shape the countryside and its future. His specific goal was to oppose a proposed funicular railway for tourists to visit the castle and the cliff known as the Drachenfels, which faced “Germany’s river,” the Rhine. Yet he did not advocate an extreme “hands-off” policy either; instead, he included practical policies that would “manage” forests and fields and natural monuments rationally, for the benefit and enjoyment of all. In this sense, the charge against both Rudorff and Riehl that they were reactionaries is unfair: the *Heimatschutz* movement was politically ambiguous.

## Source

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For some time now, newspapers have been running a notice with the following content: plans had been made to build a railway up to the Drachenfels, the most famous peak in the Rhenish Siebengebirge mountains, modeled on the Rigibahn train; the project was now getting closer to realization, preparatory work had already begun, and the undertaking hopefully would not fail to obtain permission from the authorities. Naturally, nowhere in all of this has there been the slightest hint that the praised undertaking might also have a downside.

These days there is a peculiar double-cross when it comes to nature and the historic monuments that can be considered a part of nature in a certain sense if they appear picturesque and idyllic.

On the one hand, one ignores its charms and spurns it with a cruel ruthlessness for the sake of material advantage.

In the Plauenscher Grund valley near Dresden, whose loveliness once inspired Wilhelm Müller to write his charming springtime poems, a forest of factory chimneys has risen out of the ground over the years which have long smudged any scent of poetry with their smoke and whose nasty, sky-high linearity makes a mockery of any notion of the picturesque. Through every mountain valley, no matter how beautiful and quiet, a railroad engine speeds and whistles so that we may have the shortest possible route between two distant points; or the tracks are laid so that they cut through the most wonderful rock profiles, as is the case at the “Loreley.”

Moreover, there is barely a small or mid-sized German town whose cozy character is not virtually being slapped in the face by the banality with which all sorts of modern real estate speculation crowds in on the characterful architecture of old times. Old ramparts are leveled; even in Nuremberg, which more than any other place had thus far preserved its medieval character and whose name could therefore be spoken with reverence and pride all over Germany, the mighty city walls with their gates and towers are being torn down, ostensibly to allow the air to flow more freely into the inner city (which could be

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achieved by just a few openings), in truth to clear building plots whose sale will yield significant sums of money.

The picturesque and poetic in a landscape emerges where its elements are combined freely, just as nature and the slow work of history have shaped them. The more sudden and violently an abstract theory is forced upon what has slowly grown, the more mathematical its process, the more radically it divides those elements into single categories that serve a particular practical purpose, the more certain it is to destroy all physiognomy and all charm of individual life. In North and central Germany, there are efforts to transform its colorful, graceful lands into a cartographic pattern that is as bald, shaved, and cut into regular quarters as possible for the purposes of joining parcels of land to make farming it easier. Every protruding tongue of woods is razed for the idea of the convenient straight line, every meadow extending into the woods is planted, not even inside the forests is a clearing or a glade that deer could step out into tolerated. Streams, which have the bad habit of winding their way, must get used to flowing in a straight line. The term "field path" for a footpath now naturally winding through undulating fields, now through a stretch of meadow, as need has shaped it over the course of decades and centuries, stops existing in reality. In future, Herrman and Dorothea will meet on the "paddock path," i.e. a 10-20 meters wide farm track cutting endlessly and dead straight through flat or uneven terrain, flanked reliably by its alter ego, the "paddock ditch," the modern substitute for the former meadow brook. As part of this rectangular division of properties, all hedges and individual trees or bushes that used to grow within the community boundaries will be felled by the ax. The disappearance of herds and shepherds is an immediate consequence of this division of communal land. Thus there no longer is a need for a protective enclosure for meadows and fields or a necessity to plant new hedges, and this ensures that neither the wayfarer nor the laborer will find a nice, shady spot to rest or the songbird a place where it might nest.

All of this reveals a ruthless realism that deserves to be called barbarism where sacrificing aesthetic considerations could have been prevented with a little sense and just as much good will, yet whose justification can hardly be questioned in many other cases where an urgent practical demand confronts the needs of the mind.

It seems to be contradictory to this that it must be admitted on the other hand that there has never been as much talk in the world of enjoying nature, of travel in any form and to any possible destination as there is in our time. The term of the "tourist" is in fact a modern one. Yet the fact that we have such a term, that we invent a collective name for a type of people whose common characteristic feature consists only in their visiting and inspecting all the world's possible beauties and peculiarities for their amusement: this fatal smack of business in enjoyment which is inherent to the term sufficiently indicates what to make of this supposedly greater spread and increase of aesthetic sensibility. To be sure, romanticism is offered in every newspaper, in hundreds of thousands of books with red binding, but one forgets that the beauty offered publicly in the street has already lost its true value. One celebrates nature, but one celebrates it by prostituting it.

A much-mentioned impresario notorious for his virtuosity in advertising repeatedly urged one of our most noble artists to join his business. When he eventually tried to brush him off by confessing his distaste for any noisy advertising, this man sought to appease him by assuring him that he treated everyone entirely according to their individuality: of him he would only speak as "the noble, the modest, the reserved one" in his announcements. It amounts to much the same thing when one advertises the "idyllic" or the "romantic."

A veritable mania to destroy nature in its very essence under the pretense of seeking to make it accessible for enjoyment has taken hold of the world: a mania similar to the foolishness of children who seek to truly enjoy their toys by breaking them.

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In order that the romanticism of Heidelberg's castle ruins may fully be conveniently appreciated at any time of day or night one builds a giant hotel with a direct view of this glory in addition to all the existing restaurants. As if it wasn't bad enough that a hotel desecrates this site by its very existence alone: the specimen in question also shares with most of its kind the most select sobriety, the most hollow ostentation of style. Never, not even once it has itself become a ruin, will it present a bearable sight; this is ensured by the meagerness and monotony of its basic design and the unsoundness of its materials. Thus there is only one certainty, namely that in its tastelessness it will always spread out wide enough to not be missed.

The wild solitude of the Bode valley in the Harz mountains is supposed to be "enjoyed," and so that this may be achieved more easily, one builds colossal guest houses in the upper and lower valley, turns the old stony footpath that used to lead through boulders to the bottom of the valley into a clean, zigzagging promenade path with a surface of yellow pebbles on which anyone can comfortably amble up and down, replaces the former wobbly pedestrian bridges across the narrow, rapid stream with heavy, bulky bridges with high railings whose light brown oil paint shines from a distance and whose solidity cannot be doubted even by the most fearful girl, and then one has the satisfaction that as long as there is good weather, Magdeburgers, Leipzigers, Berliners, etc. are carted here in cheap special trains in their hundreds, often thousands in order to roll up the narrow valley like a second stream.

The plan that one is currently spreading propaganda for, as I reported at the outset, belongs in the same category of nature cult. One seeks to gift the Drachenfels, which can already be comfortably climbed in a short amount of time on foot, on horseback, by donkey and by carriage, with a railway as well so that even the last bit of poetry that formerly surrounded the mountain and the ruin will finally be suffocated and silenced among the general turmoil.

It is obvious: the two seemingly opposing tendencies of our time, the entirely indifferent sacrificing of beauty to the pressures of practical efforts on the one hand and the tourism industry's system of exploitation and exhaustion on the other, are as close to one another in their results as in their root cause, a progressively exclusive predominance of a realistic view of life, whose natural counterpart must be increasing crudeness and dullness in the area of ideals.

The waiter on Mount Rigi asks: "What is your order? First supper and then sunset or the other way around? We are prepared for all eventualities." Next to lobster salad and champagne, billiards and conversation, the sunset ranges as one of the various articles intended to help people kill time in an amusing way. The sublime picture of the alpine range must provide the framework for the elegant goings-on; it is relegated to mere decoration. In the end, it hardly matters anymore whether the effect is produced by nature or artificially created with the help of cardboard, pots of paint and all sorts of lighting equipment.

Switzerland is the paradigm for the business of enjoying nature. Not only does it lead with regard to the number and magnificence of its hotels, the refinement of their interior decoration, and the exploitation of any individual, somewhat striking natural phenomenon for the purpose of making extra money, it also has ensured the prompt connection of all transportation from one place to the next, the filling out and saving of minutes in the most extensive measure and with the most skillful calculations, so that it has won the glory of having built the first railway that runs up a high mountain in a straight line by means of a construction especially invented for this purpose. Due to the railway, which in the summer carts whole flocks of tourists of every nationality, class, gender and age up the mountain day after day, Mount Rigi has become a gathering place for European society to an even greater extent than it already was. If a glance out the window in the evening did not remind one to which altitude one has climbed, one might just as well believe oneself to be in one of the major hotels of Berlin, Paris or any other metropolis. One might be glad that this railway has made it possible for the weak, the elderly, and the sick to breathe alpine air (albeit in the immediate vicinity of salon perfume and railway steam); one may further admit

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that even under such difficult circumstances, an especially starved mind will still find a small spot, a moment where it can indulge in the powerful impression of the panorama undisturbed: overall it remains true though that you have to avoid Mt. Rigi if you want nature. Here one has truly succeeded in making so many preparations for the enjoyment of nature that there remains hardly a chance of enjoying “nature” in the true sense of the word.

Yet Switzerland is large and even though things look no better at most of its world famous spots in Interlaken, at the Gießbach, on the Wengernalp, in the Chamounix valley, etc., the dimensions of the Alps are so enormous and the freshness of its alpine landscape so profound that it seems difficult to really exhaust them. Our small mountains in central Germany are worse off by comparison. Here the spoilage is more radical and noticeable once it takes place because individual spots grow closer together since one cannot sidestep them to the left or right as one can in the Alps. Thus certain outstanding parts of the Harz, Saxon Switzerland, the Thuringian woods, and the Rhine region have long been spoiled to benefit tourists and summer guests; their native character has been destroyed to the last; and the rest of what has been somewhat spared grows smaller from one year to the next.

And what does humanity get out of this practice overall? – Have we grown more poetic, more idealistic since mass travel has become fashionable? One would have to be blind or deliberately turn one’s back on the truth in order to deny that the exact opposite is the case. The majority of all classes of society is and remains trivial. When these people travel, they essentially want nothing but a change in restaurants to then go out and continue the same business they have left behind at home. Whoever refuses to believe this should observe the clientele that the holiday and special Sunday trains transport to the Harz, for example. There certainly will be exceptions. However, in most cases it is just a pub crawl in a different form which may also serve to satisfy one’s curiosity. Here and there they have the same banalities in their heads and on their tongues, the same trash of vanity, flippancy, silliness, purely superficial addiction to pleasure; all this has traveled with them and spreads all the more disgustingly in open air. Is it nice and appropriate that a place like the Roßtrappen valley is made banal for the benefit of these people, for whom a brilliant outdoors café outside the city with colorful lanterns, good cooking, good drinks and music for dancing would be the truly suitable destination? All the preparations needed to please such a clientele, all the traces it leaves behind, wipe out the original character of a place so completely and brand it so clearly as desecrated and spent that a finer sensibility will hardly be able to preserve some receptivity for that which could not be destroyed under the spell of these impressions. – Another type prattles and acts delighted at the idyll of simple, rural circumstances, and yet they are so incapable of actually surrendering to the refreshing healthfulness of such impressions that instead of restraining their own spoiling, they demand to remain surrounded by the entire apparatus which the satisfaction of refined living demands until they have happily succeeded in either completely destroying or somewhat hypocritically continuing the original simplicity thanks to all their imported provisions.

Certainly, in the past a traveling journeyman or a student traveling the world on foot as far as his tent and wallet would allow him learned more about the land and its people than one of today’s tourists, who, by arrangement of Stange’s travel agency, has let himself be pushed to the boundaries of Libya. For one’s health the effects of modern travel methods are usually not too great either; half of it is consumed by the hurry en route and the remaining relaxation is ground down in the wheelwork of urban hustle and bustle all too soon. And – last not least – despite the money suddenly flowing in from outside, the local population of all those towns and districts that fall for large-scale tourism essentially does not profit but suffers from it. The new kind of making a living that emerges here is in part too insecure and in part too easy; it resembles a gambling win. Increasingly, social development thus takes a lazy, unhealthy direction. Naturally, there is no beneficial intellectual influence shared by the guests with the rural population either. The countryman is not in the habit of being consciously poetic although the magic of nature that surrounds him captivates him with a thousand threads while he does not necessarily account for it. Yet one would be strongly mistaken in thinking that the tourist enthusiasts with their admiration of

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nature brought him the aesthetic enlightenment he lacked and thus made his home dearer to him. On the contrary: the strangers estrange him from the familiar. True love is over when the object of this love has become a paramour who gives herself to anyone who is interested in gazing at her to see her charms. The inane ways of the pleasure-seekers will at first appear partly incomprehensible and partly contemptible to the people; then they gradually become ensnared themselves, and thus to the unsoundness of their material existence is added a second fruit, namely moral corruption.

On the proper way in which nature can and should be perceived in the landscape, in the monuments of the past, etc. Schiller has given a few hints in his essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," which may find their place here as truly golden words. He says: "There are moments in our lives when we extend a kind of love and tender respect toward nature in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as to human nature in children, in the customs of country folk and the primitive world. We do this, not because it makes us feel good and not even because it satisfies our intellect or taste (in both cases the reverse can often occur), but merely because it is nature. Every more refined human being not utterly devoid of feeling experiences this when he wanders about in the open, when he resides in the country or lingers at the monuments of ancient times, in short, whenever in the midst of manmade contexts and situations he is taken aback by the sight of nature in its simplicity. It is this interest, often elevated to a need, that lies at the bottom of our many fondnesses for flowers and animals, for simple gardens, for walks, for the land and its inhabitants, for many an artifact of remote antiquity, and the like (provided that no predilection or any other serendipitous interest comes into play here) [...]"

It is not these objects, it is an idea portrayed by them that we cherish in them. We treasure the silent creativity of life in them, the fact that they act serenely on their own, being there according to their own laws; we cherish that inner necessity, that eternal oneness with themselves. They are what we were; they are what we should become once more. We were nature like them, and our culture should lead us along the path of reason and freedom back to nature. Thus they depict at once our lost childhood, something that remains ever dearest to us, and for this reason they fill us with a certain melancholy. Because at the same time they portray our supreme perfection in an ideal sense, they transport us into a state of sublime emotion. [...]"

Since this interest in nature is founded upon an idea, it is able to reveal itself only to minds receptive to ideas, that is to say, moral minds. Most people by far only affect that interest, and the universality of this sentimental taste in our times, expressing itself (especially since the appearance of certain writings) in maudlin journeys, gardens, strolls, and other penchants of this sort, is in no way a proof of the universality of this way of feeling."<sup>[1]</sup>

The aspect Schiller takes as his point of departure here is crucial: he emphasizes the moral side of experiencing nature. Without it the aesthetic in it will progressively be devalued; the sentiment loses the very element that actually lends it depth and nobility; indeed, we witness how aesthetic enjoyment, when it lacks this background, slowly sinks until it unites completely with the purely material.

Yet if nature is to have a moral, i.e., a purifying and edifying effect, it first and foremost must itself remain undefiled, pristine nature: "If somehow by means of the most perfect sort of deception one could give an artificial flower the look of being natural . . ." Schiller writes in the same passage, "then the discovery that it is an imitation would utterly destroy the feeling I have been talking about."

Nothing is more characteristic of the average position of today's nature enthusiasts than the construction of a large artificial waterfall in the Radau valley, for example, or the illumination of the Gießbach stream with Bengal torches.

The opportunities for a truly pure, unspoiled effect of nature on the mind are pushed back into ever more limited spaces. The movement driving this is overpowering from various sides. In our time the conflict

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between real and ideal interests has taken on a previously unheard of abrasiveness. The character of work, even the ostensibly most sober one in everyday life, just a few generations ago was still such that it somehow allowed for artistic romanticizing. The machine with everything that stands in direct relation to it simply excludes this possibility. The mill and the foundry become picturesque motifs in the landscape. The factory is and remains prosaic and ugly – despite all of Menzel's virtuosity. Craftsmanship and agriculture in its old patriarchal form can be sung about. It will not occur to anyone to put machinery into verse; or at least the verses would not make poetry. One still knows individual life work; in the other the subject itself has become entirely indifferent: it merely serves to set the finished mechanism, i.e. something inherently dead, in motion externally. And – "life shudders before death"; the beauty of natural life adamantly refuses any organic union with these things in a poetic guise.

Yet the achievements of modern developments in technology deserve so much admiration as such, and in their positive effects they are of such extraordinary bearing despite the curse of ugliness they bear, indeed despite much bigger evils sticking to their soles, that any resistance generally rising up against them must find itself mercilessly crushed by the violence of facts. Equally, the unnatural, indeed monstrous and dangerous growth of major cities that is linked to this development challenges repercussions so imperiously that it would be not just futile but also cruel if one were to oppose all those events that facilitate the occasional recreation in nature for its tortured, cooped up, and dulled people. After all, a part of those who are truly receptive and needy often owe their share of nature enjoyment to the very events that consider those with little money and free time.

One calls for the other, causes and effects have become interlaced into a dense weave it is nearly impossible to untangle, and thus an actual solution to the problem that does justice to both sides can no longer be found.

Yet if perfection cannot be achieved, this does not exclude that what can happen will happen; and *a lot* can happen.

Endless one-sided pointing out of material aspects while completely ignoring the ideal ones has long become usual practice in treating all questions related to this. An end finally must be put to this one-sidedness. In particular, all those who are equipped with any kind of power and opportunity to effectively intervene in the course of public affairs would have to be convinced more passionately that it is important in these matters to not just swim with the tide but equally, where it is appropriate, to dam it up; to not just promote what the loud voice of the majority desires at that moment, but to also ensure that the justified demands of the minority are not needlessly spurned and that the assaults made by the rough spirit of the times do not grow excessively.

In some individual aspects our neighbors can serve as examples to us. France is far ahead of us when it comes to the sensible maintenance and inventory of even the smallest remains of ancient architecture. The reverence of the English for the monuments of their past is well-known; the subtlety with which they combine economic and aesthetic interests in the countryside deserves equal praise. This delivers actual proof that a highly developed culture must not necessarily lead to the abuse of nature. To be sure, England has sadly long lost its true, wild forests; in fact, its woods should be referred to as parks. Yet in this country of factories and economic agriculture, such a deep and generally formed feeling for the grace of its landscape lives side by side with practical sense that the country does not look like a magazine for economic products but like a garden. Fields and meadows are framed by rank hedges whose existence is hardly perceived as a reduction in material gain, so that 5 percent of arable land is covered by them according to an official estimate. A wealth of individual free-standing and beautifully grown trees or tree groups is scattered all over the country; on the wonderfully lush meadows, on the banks of streams, even in the midst of fields, they enliven the scenery everywhere.

Compare to this the above-mentioned process of combining our fields, the truly lamentable denigration

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of our beautiful fatherland that continues to be perpetrated here at a large scale without any opposition worth mentioning. Consolidating farmland makes a standardized working of the land possible and thus encourages a greater cultivation of the soil and since it regulates drainage and similar issues, it comes with undeniable economic advantages. In some places these advantages are entirely disproportionate to the significant costs that the entire laborious process causes, and ultimately it results in a few wealthy people winning while the rest pick up the tab. Let us leave that aside though and acknowledge the desirable aspects of the matter itself for a large number of communities; why can what is economically necessary not happen without carelessly sacrificing the beautiful in our landscape? That the regulation of streams, which has been common for decades, not only deserves to be called barbaric from an aesthetic point of view but also causes the most serious real disadvantages due to accelerated draining was proved by the late *Oberforstdirektor* [Chief Forest Superintendent] Burckhardt in Hannover, and perhaps there has been a small backlash in this direction since then. This needs to be put an end to once and for all by way of instruction, and the commissions tasked with implementing policy must receive the strictest orders to protect the picturesque forms of forest boundaries, the way they peter out into individual stands of trees and coppices, in short, all the unique features of the transition from forest to meadow and field, and furthermore that they must abandon the system of absolute straightness and rectangularity in the building of paths and primarily consider preserving what has historically grown as much as possible. Finally, the government would have to strongly suggest that hedges which had to be removed due to the reorganization of fields be replanted in a different spot, that they be used as regular borders for meadows and gardens, and that individual trees and shrubs must be preserved and planted in order to not just promote the picturesque in the landscape, but also to care for the protection of birds, who are in danger of losing all their nesting sites due to the consolidation of community boundaries in line with current practice.

Yet we do not only need opposition against this for the benefit of that share of society who are sensitive to this, more than that we need a positive care for the more deeply defined overall welfare of our people. The awakening of a true, vital reverence for nature, a full appreciation of all the sustaining, cleansing powers inherent in it could have such a beneficial effect on the development of all our circumstances of life as hardly anything else could. If only we could decide to strengthen the healthy, original relation between humans and nature where they still exist instead of continuously destroying them, to recreate and newly inspire them where they have been eradicated or lacking in the first place – this would not only deny the fungus of modern tourism a good part of its nourishment: indeed, little by little a lot of social toxins would be reabsorbed into the newly forming atmosphere. Someone once said: “Everyone should own a piece of earth to call their own.” That is asking a lot and neither feasible nor necessary in the literal sense. Yet there is truth in this sentence: Everyone should learn to *feel at home somewhere*. This art, which used to be taken for granted, is progressively becoming lost. To revive it, to ensure that the love for one’s native soil once again becomes powerful in folklife should be considered one of the most noble and urgent tasks for our legislation and administration.

This mainly includes that we do not put the rural population off the countryside, that we do not tempt less well-off people especially to seek their fortune in the big city. To establish the principle of dividing property on a significant scale certainly was unavoidable at the time; it is no less certain that its pursuit to the last consequence and to this day is disastrous. It happens time and again that certain ideas which, from some side, meet a demand strongly felt at that moment, are adopted by the majority only for the sake of this one moment of truth with such passion and are preached to the outside world in word and deed that for some time any objection against the one-sidedness of its rule will be hushed or trail off unheard. It is as if heavy artillery scudded across a seed plot; there is no reflection or mercy. At some point, an end needs to be put to this. Could this not happen in this area before the last stalk has been trampled under? Before it is entirely too late, shouldn’t we come to realize that gold is being thrown away in order to pick up copper coins? As long as a community’s common property of meadows and pasture has not been divided every member of that community, even the poorest ones, have at least *one*

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inalienable property: the right to feed their livestock, be it a cow, a few goats or geese, for free. Once it is divided, the bit of land that will fall to them will soon enough be sold once penury knocks on their door. As long as a community has the right to have its requirements of wood for construction and fuel allotted from the state forest annually, to let their pigs feed among the oak trees, and to drive their cows onto forest pastures as in the Harz mountains, where until recently the herds' harmonic bell chimes sounded from one end of the mountains to the other, it is safe. Yet once it has been "compensated," be it in cash or with a piece of forest that in turn can be sold at will, all it takes is an unscrupulous mayor and a reckless majority in order to distribute the money among the individuals and thus completely ruin the welfare of the community for all time. One more thing: an immediate consequence of the sales and divisions is the use of animal feed, whose advantages for our national economy are being praised. We hear that a much higher profit was made from the former meadows, that no fertilizer was wasted by remaining unused, that the coins that had to be given to the shepherd as his salary were now being saved, and similar praises of this nature. Apparently, it also is considered a pity that the noble human vitality represented by the person of the shepherd in this case was wasted in such an undignified and unprofitable manner. As if it were preferable that such a man was driven to increase the number of the unemployed urban factory proletariat, for example, instead of honestly carrying out the admittedly low-paying but at least useful office of community shepherd and being provided with the basic necessities by his neighbors in return, which is much easier in the country! For can we assume that animal feed, if it is to dominate completely, can really prove sensible in the long term? Is it imaginable that this would not eventually lead to a degeneration of livestock when it is entirely deprived of fresh air, standing and lying in a dull barn year in, year out without using its muscles? Is it imaginable that consuming the meat and milk of such livestock would not eventually have a harmful effect on the human organism? Nature will hardly spare us the revenge it takes everywhere we act against its laws. Only in this case the revenge cannot be proved on an individual example or by the experience of long periods of time. This makes it easy to sin for generations until all aid comes too late.

So how does our legislation position itself towards these matters? Instead of partly impeding the division of common land in the interest of the less well-off and partly prohibiting it altogether especially in mountainous regions where the soil is of little value for cultivation, it is promoted as much as possible by putting the decision whether land should be divided into the hands of those who own the most, i.e., those who can hope to gain the greatest if not the only advantage from the restructuring. And how energetically the sale of forest land is carried out on the side of the state! Naturally, it does so by arguing and certainly fully intending to increase national wealth; but even if we acknowledge all the profits that may flow into the treasury through the possibility of extensive exploitation of the soil, reducing civil service positions, etc. – isn't this calculation fundamentally wrong after all? Isn't the sum of these material advantages ultimately small in comparison to the damage that might be done to the entire social development if the rural population progressively ceases to feel rooted to the natural soil and if the floodgates are opened for their influx into the major cities?

The great, lasting forces working in silence are overlooked for what catches our momentary attention. One extreme step in this direction was attempted by some regulations in the draft law for policing fields and forests that was recently submitted to the [Prussian] Diet for consideration. It sought to ban poor people from gathering berries and mushrooms in the forest, and it even sought to make entering the forest dependent on permission by the landowner. No reasonable person will wish that the owner of a forest as such should not enjoy the full protection of the law. May all crimes be punished with the utmost severity, may one strive to prevent them by precautions: this is an altogether different matter. The *ideal* shared ownership of God's earth that appertains to all human beings as human beings and finds its most beautiful expression in the freedom to enter the forest is quietly denied by these clauses, and that is a stab in the heart of the German people. I do not want to be tolerated in the forest under the vexatious label of the "harmless walker" or even as a "tourist" – how weak and idle this sounds!; nor do I care whether certain official scenic beauties remain accessible to the masses for the purpose of admiring



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them or not: I want to have the right, all over the world and especially in my homeland, to set foot and to breathe the air and lust for life where my heart desires it and where I neither harm my neighbor nor disturb him in enjoying his property. What an unbearable idea it is to look at the world as a conglomerate of individual properties, to conceive of the world as closed off except for the highways and the few spots which other people's mercy has consented to allocate to me for rest and relaxation! The deep sense of equity inherent in the Germanic people has always instinctively found a compensation for the gap between the haves and the have-nots in the idea of "free nature," and there is nothing more revolutionary than driving one's spade into the ground right there to unsettle and disturb the ancient roots of our sense of justice. It is incomprehensible that conservative men refuse to realize this! It only aids Social Democracy when especially the most loyal and honest among our people are confused in such a manner and when the haves seek to declare themselves relieved of and free from any obligations towards the have-nots in this regard. One had better check ten times before one undertakes to destroy social circumstances and the immediate perception of life emerging from them for both the individual and the community; in doing so, one destroys something irreplaceable, a refuge for creative powers that must not be weighed against a whole bundle of individual advantages.

From the poor in the country they take everything that can endear their home to them, they loosen every strong bond tying them to the soil and ensure that the soil becomes devoid of all beauty and grace, that land and livestock become a mere commodity and that the farmer turns into a speculator, thus eventually driving the poor into the cities so that they will become proletarians there, i.e. truly miserable; meanwhile the urban population is carted out into the countryside. Instead one should not only cease to impoverish the rural lives of the former, but also try to give the latter something more settled by more spacious urban planning, by increasingly building small houses instead of tenement blocks and by making a piece of nature immediately accessible to anyone, even if it is just a garden, so that the toxic atmosphere alone won't force them to permanently seek a cure far away. By caring for such a small plot of land they would learn to understand nature more truly as when they only know it from Sunday trips. In order to facilitate something like this in the first place, the great number of cheap and fast means of public transportation that our current times have produced could be put to excellent use.

The intense and deep feeling for nature is where the true roots of the Germanic character lie. What drew our ancient forefathers into Wotan's sacred oak groves, what lives in medieval sagas, in the figures of Melusine or Sleeping Beauty, what is first heard in the songs of Walter von der Vogelweide and then emerges in a new, unforeseen opulence in Goethe's or Eichendorff's poetry and finally in the most unique revelation of German genius, in our magnificent music: it is always the same basic tone, the same deep attraction of the soul to the wonderful and unfathomable secrets of nature that speaks from this expressions of the national spirit. Isn't it as if an evil demon was driving us to trample on the most sacred which virtually gave us life and to bury the source from which we could always draw rejuvenating drink in our hunt for the phantom of glory and pleasure? Who wants to hear about advantages for the national economy when they know that they come at the cost of destroying the sprouts from which fresh spiritual life can blossom! –

In ancient Greece the state ensured that all ugliness was suppressed in the area that was at the center of ideal interest at the time. Even though it would be impossible to exert such discipline from above in extensive measure considering the diversity of our modern existence, some kind of protection for what is beautiful in our sense must be created. May we hope that a first, albeit small step in this direction can be welcomed when an enterprise such as the planned Drachenfels railway, an enterprise that is justified by no motive other than naked speculation, is denied the license it applied for.

## NOTES

[1] Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," in *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 179-181.

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Translation: Insa Kummer

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