

German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Wolfgang Schieder:

Hitler's Mein Kampf: An Edition – But For Whom?

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 39, No. 1

HITLER, MEIN KAMPF: A CRITICAL EDITION – THE DEBATE
(May 2017), pp63-76

Hitler's Mein Kampf: An Edition—But For Whom?

WOLFGANG SCHIEDER

After seventy-two years an edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* has again been published in Germany. The editors of the two-volume work stress that there is 'basically nothing comparable' (p. 66) to it.¹ This is true to the extent that it is the first historical-critical complete edition, but there can also hardly be any other contemporary edition that has caused such a public stir, even before publication. The reasons for this are not so much scholarly as political. The Nazi Franz Eher Verlag, which held the copyright for *Mein Kampf*, was banned by the Allied Control Commission in 1945 as an NSDAP organization. After a complicated legal process in 1965 the copyright was transferred to the Bavarian state whose Finance Ministry has held it since then. According to the legal provisions the Ministry could retain the copyright for seventy years calculated from Hitler's death and this meant that until 1 January 2016 it could prevent any reprint of *Mein Kampf*. Of course, the copyright was not intended to protect the author but had a political purpose right from the start: it was meant to help prevent *Mein Kampf* from disseminating Nazi ideology.

What was forbidden, however, was reprinting the book, not owning it or trading in old copies. In any case the ban was very difficult to enforce abroad. For all these years anyone with an overwhelming urge to read it could do so in larger libraries, buy it at second-hand markets, or acquire reprints abroad, where neo-Nazi publishers often even had copies of the German original on offer, for instance, in Denmark or Canada. In the meantime, the book can also be downloaded from the internet. Even this reviewer has owned a copy for some years and often used it as the textual basis for his research and uni-

Trans. Jane Rafferty (GHIL). First published as Wolfgang Schieder, 'Hitlers "Mein Kampf": Eine Edition—aber für wen?', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 61 (2016), 187–97. Translated and reproduced by permission of Peter Lang Academic Publishing Group <www.peterlang.com>.

¹ Since the edition, somewhat confusingly, has two different paginations and also chapter numbering, pages for quotations are from the only pagination that runs through the two volumes, pp. 1–1,966.

versity teaching; naturally its use for scholarly purposes was not banned either.

It was just widespread ignorance of all this that gave rise to the false public assumption that only with the expiry of the copyright on 1 January 2016 would *Mein Kampf* again become available after a long time. Connected with this was fear that the book could once again have a disastrous effect, something which must be counteracted. Of course, this was also a purely political assumption, by no means generally shared by historians. From a scholarly perspective publication of *Mein Kampf* after expiry of the copyright was nothing to get excited about as long as it did not explicitly serve to glorify National Socialism. The only cause for concern was the idea that neo-Nazi publishers might profit from a new edition of the book, for which a specific defence strategy should be considered.

In the opinion of this reviewer and others the public hype about *Mein Kampf* is based on the notion, disputed by scholars, that Hitler essentially had this book to thank for his path to political power. However, until 1933 *Mein Kampf* was anything but a hugely successful publication. In fact, the public tended to be unimpressed by it if they took any notice of it at all.² Before Hitler came to power it was Alfred Rosenberg's *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, not so much *Mein Kampf*, that was regarded as the central manifesto of National Socialism and, significantly, disputed by the Christian churches.³ To put it somewhat exaggeratedly, one could say that Hitler came to power despite, not because of, *Mein Kampf*. As his early critical biographers from Theodor Heuss to Konrad Heiden have established, it was not Hitler's writings that had such a fateful effect on the masses but his speeches.⁴ Fixation with *Mein Kampf* distracts from the fact that it was quite different political, social, economic, and cultural factors that 'made Hitler possible' (Werner Conze).

This is not to say that it is quite wrong to republish Hitler's *Mein Kampf* today. The book is undoubtedly a 'key historical source', if not

² See Othmar Plöckinger, *Geschichte des Buches: Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf' 1922–1945* (2nd edn. Munich, 2011), 173–91.

³ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (4th edn. Munich, 1932).

⁴ Theodor Heuss, *Hitlers Weg: Eine historisch-politische Studie über den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1932); Konrad Heiden, *Adolf Hitler: Das Zeitalter der Verantwortungslosigkeit. Eine Biographie* (Zurich, 1936).

for Hitler's political rise then for his original pipedreams. The editors rightly stress that the book is 'the most comprehensive and, in some respects, the most intimate testimony of a dictator whose policies and crimes completely changed the world' (p. 9). Regardless of the book's contradictory content and its chaotic structure, in which biographical and ideological elements are completely mixed up, it can certainly provide important insights into Hitler's self-perception and policies as a dictator. This applies to his obsessive racial antisemitism and also to his cut and dried foreign policy notions. There can also be no doubt that after Hitler came to power the book, with massive state support, was made into the central programmatic text for National Socialism.

So it certainly is a valid enterprise to present a largely misinformed public with an edition of *Mein Kampf* accompanied by critical commentary. The Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ) has delivered this service. To a large extent the edition historicizes *Mein Kampf* in its political significance and recognizes it as a characteristic product of the time in which it was written. Andreas Wirsching, Director of the IfZ, hopes thereby to prevent in a purely scholarly way this 'racist product' from making 'its way in the world freely and without a commentary' (p. 4) again today.⁵ It is questionable, however, whether this can actually be achieved with the edition.

Background, Aim, and Presentation of the Edition

The mere announcement that this scholarly edition was to be published did mean that after the copyright expired no German publisher dared to put a simple reprint of the original text on the market. And so far there has been no objection to the fact that the IfZ, out of understandable concern that a private (possibly extreme right-wing) publisher could make money from *Mein Kampf*, published the new edition itself using public funds. However, this reticence does not, of course, apply to translations of the original text into other languages that are starting to appear outside Germany. In Italy today there are already six different editions piled on the tables of larger bookshops, though all are reprints of the 1934 translation. And although there

⁵ Andreas Wirsching in the Foreword to the edition.

was a public dispute about the advisability of a French edition after the socialist politician Jean-Luc Melenchon came out heavily against it the translation was still published after renowned contemporary historians such as Christian Ingrao gave their support. In this context it is completely farcical that the Bavarian Landtag decided not to finance the project any longer having previously provided, it is said, about 600,000 euros. One can only applaud the Munich institute for not being intimidated by this and for publishing the edition using its own and third-party funds.

But how was the edition of *Mein Kampf* supposed to be structured in terms of content? If the main aim was to enlighten the public then Hitler's book needed to be thoroughly commentated, but without any burdensome research. If, on the other hand, the aim was to do justice to the professional rules for historical editions, comprehensive text-critical work was needed but very little commentary since experts in the field can be assumed to have a high degree of knowledge. The editors have made no clear decision in either direction. Given public expectations on the one hand and the requirement to meet academic standards on the other this was probably the only solution. However, the result is not entirely convincing.

In technical terms, the editors' greatest problem was that there is no complete manuscript of *Mein Kampf* that can serve as the basis of an edition. Of the original typed text of *Mein Kampf* only 23 pages remain: the first five pages and a further 18 conceptual pages with notes on chapters 4 to 7 and 10 to 11 of the first volume.⁶ Apart from that an earlier printed work by Hitler has survived, namely the well-known essay entitled 'Warum musste ein 8. November kommen?' of 1924.⁷ On the other hand, another text, a sixty-page memorandum that Hitler presented at his trial in spring 1924 has strangely gone missing. So the only possible basis for the edition was the text of the printed book, though between 1925 (vol. 1) and 1927 (vol. 2), combined in 1930 into a *Volksausgabe*, no less than thirty-eight versions

⁶ See *Mein Kampf*, 69, based on Florian Beier and Othmar Plöckinger, 'Neue Dokumente zu Hitlers Buch Mein Kampf', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 57/2 (2009), 261–318.

⁷ Adolf Hitler, 'Warum musste ein 8. November kommen?', *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, Apr. 1924, printed in Eberhard Jäckel (ed.), *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924* (Stuttgart, 1980), 1,216–27.

were published.⁸ Because of this dilemma the editors decided to take the first editions of the first and second volumes as their text and to take account of seven other editions at particular points. This proved to be a sensible decision since in the editions selected there were only small stylistic changes, nothing substantial (p. 70). So the edition's critical apparatus does not deliver any particular insights. The editors can rightly ascertain that in twenty years Hitler made virtually no changes to his book.

Another editorial decision concerns the layout. In principle the editors had two possibilities here: they could either stick to the original setting of Hitler's text or else ignore the original pagination. The editors went for the first option, though without really explaining this important decision (p. 77). While commentary and text are divided on each double page into a pattern of five columns, the body of the text is reproduced on each right-hand page in two columns and in its original size.⁹

However, the disadvantage of this historicizing procedure, which amazingly the editors have not considered, is that it creates great proximity to Hitler's book. Instead of the reprint generating the greatest possible distance from the Führer's efforts, which was actually the editors' intention, they produce a sort of authenticity. The edition makes it possible to read the text of *Mein Kampf* in its original form without taking notice of the surrounding commentary and the text-critical apparatus. The effect of such selective reading of the edition on uninformed readers could well be rather creepy and would probably induce them to read the commentary anyway. However, uncritical sympathizers or those with merely a feeling of nostalgia have the opportunity to enjoy *Mein Kampf* as if it were an original or unchanged reprinted edition. Not to have thought that all their editorial efforts could have been for nothing due to the graphic layout of the text is a considerable failure on the part of the editors.

Of course, in the translations of *Mein Kampf* that are now popping up all over the place the original text is certainly presented in an

⁸ See Hermann Hammer, 'Die deutschen Ausgaben von Hitlers "Mein Kampf"', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 4/2 (1966), 161-78, to which the editors essentially refer. Cf. *Mein Kampf*, 71.

⁹ On p. 79 of the edition it states that there are always two columns for the commentary and three for the text, but this is an error – the exact opposite is the case.

alienated way, so why not in a critical edition in the original language? I consider this to be a spurious attempt at originality in a historicist vein, which in the case of Hitler, of all people, is totally inappropriate. Precisely if the intention is not to show too much respect to the original, as the editors claim, then it would have been sensible to abandon the original pagination of *Mein Kampf*, and to chose a different path typographically as well, not just in terms of the font used. Technically it would not have been difficult, as in many other editions, to mark the original pagination in a suitable form in the printed text. Admittedly this procedure would mean that the original running titles would disappear but since it can be proved that these were not introduced by Hitler but in the first volume by Josef Stolzinger-Cerny, an editor with the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and in the second volume by Rudolf Hess, this would be no great loss.

Again, as in other editions, forgoing reproduction of the original would have made it possible to have a variable pagination and, where necessary, to reduce the body of the text to fewer lines, depending on the number of text-critical notes and the amount of commentary. At least this would have avoided overloading the text with 'white areas'.¹⁰ According to the reviewer's rough calculation, on the left-hand side of the double pages there are at least fifty with a maximum of three, mostly very short notes, and at least ten are completely empty. In about half of the cases the space under the body of the text is also free of notes. So it is hard not to think that if there had been a different typographical page layout a great deal of space could have been saved in the edition.

On the other hand, of course, it could be argued that ultimately it is of little importance whether a new edition of *Mein Kampf* is very lengthy or space-saving. After all, this is the first complete critical version of *Mein Kampf*. This would be all well and good if the editors had not had the stated intention of making the edition particularly reader-friendly (p. 79). This is certainly not the case. Two heavy volumes measuring 21x28 cm, in other words, the size of a lexicon, are not exactly reader-friendly, as the reviewer has discovered. The editors' assertion that this is a format 'often used for works of non-fiction but also for magazines' (p. 77) does not help at all. Since when does the format of *Spiegel* or *Gala* justify that of a scholarly edition?

¹⁰ *Mein Kampf*, 77. This technical term conceals the fact that on many of the double pages of the edition there is an enormous amount of empty space.

Finally the pretentious layout of the edition is particularly apparent in the way the commentating notes are arranged. In theory, in the format chosen for the edition, these could have been printed on the left-hand side of the double pages in three columns and on the right-hand side under the text of *Mein Kampf*, again in two more columns in numerical sequence. For some inexplicable reason, however, the editors decided to interrupt the arrangement of the columns and to place the notes randomly, such that there is no recognizable ordering principle. What is more, since the notes are set in italics page after page a turbulent, sometimes chaotic picture emerges. One often has to search for a note because the sequence is not immediately apparent. This system certainly cannot exactly be described as reader-friendly.

As a model for this format the editors, or the graphic designer, refer amongst others to Arno Schmitt's *Zettels Traum*, well known for being a particularly absurd example of graphic book structuring (p. 76). However, they also refer to a Jewish Bible from Venice of 1546 and to a reprint of an early modern edition of the Talmud as 'striking forms' of book structuring (p. 75). Quite apart from the fact that, unlike the present edition, in the case of early prints of the Talmud it was a question of fitting as much as possible on to a page because of the cost of paper, it seems to me to be extremely dubious to refer to editions of the Talmud, of all things, when discussing an edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

The fact that the editors were not entirely comfortable with the layout of the edition is revealed in the few attempts they make to defend its structure with metaphorical concepts. The key concept here is that of 'encirclement'. Their assertion is that the text of *Mein Kampf* is 'encircled' by the critical notes and the text-critical apparatus (pp. 79, 81). What this is supposed to mean is never explained. Presumably this metaphor, military in origin, is meant to suggest that the surrounding commentary makes the content of Hitler's text untouchable. But even if we were to take this metaphor seriously it makes no sense. The commentary and text-critical apparatus leave so many holes open to the text that there can be no question of complete 'encirclement'. So this metaphor is at best an original idea that has no place in a scholarly edition.

The editors talk of an 'edition with a point of view' (p. 12). This sounds very decisive but it is less unusual than they seem to be

aware. The fact that as an editor one would have a conviction and would make this into the yardstick for the scholarly work actually goes without saying. More promising is the editors' intention to see *Mein Kampf*, beyond the actual text, as a 'powerful symbol overlaid by myth' that should be demystified (p. 10). Unfortunately, however, here too there is no explanation of this symbolism. Do they mean a subtext beneath the text of *Mein Kampf* that needs deciphering? Or is it about the effect of *Mein Kampf* quite separately from the text? These are by no means trivial questions, for it would only be possible to demythologize *Mein Kampf* if it were clear what the mythology was in the first place. Presumably the editors are convinced that whatever myth *Mein Kampf* is about is destroyed by their critical commentary so that there is no need to go into such complicated questions at all. But this would be a mistake, as demonstrated, for instance, by the scholarly dispute about Hitler's 'charisma'.¹¹

Assessment of the Edition's Contents

The actual core of the edition consists of more than 3,000 scholarly commentaries. Of course it is impossible to assess the numerous corrections, and also discoveries, contained in these in the scope of a review. What is possible, however, is to arrange them into certain categories in order to give a systematic impression of the achievements, but sadly also the shortcomings, of the commentary. Into the first category fall those commentaries in which historical events and people, or contexts unknown today that Hitler mentions just briefly or incidentally, are explained in detail. They contain a wealth of information without which it would be virtually impossible to understand *Mein Kampf* today.

In a second category the editors go a step further and reveal factual errors and false assertions made by Hitler. Some of these are unconscious mistakes attributable to his lack of education. The editors can demonstrate, for instance, that Hitler got the wrong idea about Darwin's theory and that he confused species and races (p. 740). In the case of other mistakes they can prove that Hitler deliber-

¹¹ See Ludolf Herbst, *Die Erfindung eines deutschen Messias* (Frankfurt am Main, 2010).

ately provided false data (p. 458). They appropriately call this 'planned mendacity' (p. 33). Hitler made such false statements particularly frequently, they maintain, when it came to the 'stylization of his early biography' (p. 371). One example is Hitler's move from Vienna to Munich. He pre-dates this by a year in order to conceal the fact that he did not leave Vienna until after his twenty-fourth birthday on 20 April 1913 when he was paid his father's inheritance (p. 372). The editors also believe that Hitler's assertion in *Mein Kampf* that for a while in Vienna he worked on a building site is not true (p. 177). What they are overlooking here, however, is that he returned to this again in his *Table Talks* in order to draw a parallel between his own biography and that of Mussolini.¹² It can therefore be assumed that what he remembered was true.

A third category of commentaries on Hitler's *Mein Kampf* consists of explanations of terms. The editors were especially at pains to elucidate Hitler's use of political terms that were crucial to him. They can demonstrate, for instance, that Hitler uses the term *Volksgemeinschaft* particularly often even though, as they rightly stress, it was originally 'not genuinely National Socialist' (p. 190). According to the editors' calculations it appears in *Mein Kampf* no less than forty times, especially often in the fourth chapter of the second volume (p. 61). Also interesting is what they have to say about Hitler's use of the term *völkisch*. While he considered himself to be part of the *völkisch* camp, before the November putsch of 1923, he used it as a matter of course. To distance himself from the *Völkischen* it was not until the twelfth chapter of the first volume that he maintained that 'due to its lack of conceptual exactitude' it was 'practically indefinable'. As the commentaries here reveal, the editors discovered that in his appeal of 26 February 1925 for the refounding of the NSDAP Hitler even claimed 'always to have resisted the umbrella description *völkisch*' (p. 929).

It is also important that the editors can show the term 'Aryan' to have been a 'key concept' for Hitler at an early stage (p. 744). Less surprising is what the editors have to say about the term 'propaganda' since they have not taken the relevant research on conceptual his-

¹² Cf. Werner Jachmann (ed.), *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier 1941-1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims* (Hamburg, 1980), 246: 'At the same time both myself and the Duce worked on building sites. So there is also something human that connects me with him.'

tory into account here. On the other hand their finding that the content of the key term 'race' always 'remains vague' in *Mein Kampf* should be emphasized (p. 754). This confirms the older finding that National Socialism was unable to develop a definitive biological racial theory because this simply cannot be founded in natural science. It is no accident that the antisemitic Nuremberg Racial Laws of 1935 referred to the Jewish religion. It is less surprising than the editors seem to think that Hitler used the term synonymously with that of *Volk* (p. 779). This was in line with the by no means only racist usage of the word in the nineteenth century, which to some extent still exists today in the English word 'race'.

Unlike in most editions, in a fourth category of commentaries the editors also 'look at the future of that time' (p. 64). Although they warn against taking Hitler's book as a sort of 'blueprint' for the Nazi system of rule, in all the commentaries they point out a remarkable number of instances where the contents of *Mein Kampf* coincide with that of later Nazi policy (vol. ii, 14). As they demonstrate, for instance, the chapter 'Ostorientierung oder Ostpolitik' points more clearly than previously assumed to the Nazi policy of conquest in the Second World War (ibid.). Statements in the chapter 'Der Staat' are convincingly related by the editors to the later *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases) of 1933 (pp. 64–5). What should be emphasized particularly is that at a place long disputed where Hitler cynically regrets 'not having poisoned with gas twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew people who are damaging our people, like hundreds of thousands of our very best German workers', they take a differentiated view. They maintain that 'although this was not a plea for the genocide of millions', it 'did include the possibility of mass murder' (p. 52).

A particularly large proportion of the commentaries belong to a fifth category, that of establishing the ideological roots of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. This is not the result of any particular interest in the history of ideas on the part of the editors, nor is it reflected in their problematic methodological approaches. Rather their aim is to demonstrate 'how remarkably few independent and original thoughts are to be found in Hitler's book' (p. 57). Here they want to present *Mein Kampf* as the pitiful effort of an imitating dilettante in which there are only very few original ideas. In this way, Hitler's supposedly origi-

nal *Weltanschauung* is obviously meant to be deconstructed and his book de-demonized. In itself this is a very promising approach that can justify the reprint of *Mein Kampf* without more ado, even if the transfer of ideas to Hitler in terms of the history of their reception is not adequately substantiated. Less apparent, however, is why the editors nonetheless maintain that *Mein Kampf* contains a 'synthesis', even if they describe this only cautiously as a 'intellectual edifice largely consistent in itself' and not as a 'definitive synthesis' (p. 26).¹³

From a methodological point of view the first question should be what Hitler actually read and in what form he digested his reading. This is not pulled together in this edition but can be reconstructed to some extent from scattered references. According to August Kubizek, a friend during Hitler's youth, in Linz Hitler read 'numerous books'.¹⁴ In his later *Table Talks* Hitler himself maintained that in Vienna he read 'book after book, brochure after brochure'.¹⁵ But in 1941 he gave an insight into his style of reading. According to his statement he always started to read books from the end and it was only ever ' cursory reading'.¹⁶ Hitler did not read books in order to experience new things but only in order to confirm his pre-formed opinions. As another of his acquaintances reported in 1921,¹⁷ a 'hasty and somewhat random study' of the books was typical. Which books Hitler consumed in this superficial way must largely remain a mystery.

Before 1914 he most probably only borrowed books from libraries so that what he read at that time can no longer be reconstructed. The assertion by his first biographer, Adolf-Viktor von Koerber, that week upon week he saved up his meagre wages for '200 volumes of valuable scholarly works, history books especially political, philosophical scripts' must surely be pure fantasy (p. 145). From 1933 onwards his library only grew through chance gifts from his admir-

¹³ Cf., on the other hand, Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen, 1969), 119.

¹⁴ August Kubizek, *Adolf Hitler: Mein Jugendfreund* (Graz, 1953), 226.

¹⁵ See Harry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier* (3rd edn. Stuttgart, 1976), 177. Cited in *Mein Kampf*, 168.

¹⁶ Kubizek, *Adolf Hitler*, 227.

¹⁷ Cf. n. 153 in *Mein Kampf*, 1,352, based on unpublished memoirs by the Starnberg dentist and member of the Thule Society, Friedrich Krohn.

ers.¹⁸ Precisely for the time of *Mein Kampf*'s genesis hardly anything is known about Hitler's access to books. Even if we happen to know that in autumn 1921 Hitler was recommended Sparker's *Weltgeschichte* by Hess there is nothing to suggest that he followed this recommendation or that he ever held even one volume of this monumental work in his hands.¹⁹ Nor is there any evidence that he read the essay by the Americanist Franz Terner published in January 1924 in Karl Haushofer's *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* just because it was available in Landsberg prison, though the editors assume that he did (p. 745).

As we know, Hitler mentions only very few people by name in *Mein Kampf*. This makes it difficult to establish clearly who the people were whose ideas he may have appropriated. Whether, as the editors assume, he deliberately suppressed their identities because he 'certainly did not want to seem like an imitator' (p. 56) we do not know. As the editors themselves concede, however, it can 'generally not be established exactly where Hitler's wisdoms came from' (p. 745). So according to the strict rules of scholarly editions all that should actually have been said is that there is no direct evidence of a transfer of ideas. But since the editors want to establish Hitler as an imitator they committed themselves to searching for ideological models, especially in the *völkisch*-racist literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though there is certainly no direct reference to it in *Mein Kampf*. As their commentary shows, they have walked a conventional path in the history of ideas here. There is no trace of approaches to an intellectual history, of recent methods in the history of reception or discourse theory, even though the Hitler biography by Wolfram Pyta which the editors consulted would have given important clues.²⁰

The commentaries create the impression of an omnipresent flow of ideas in which Hitler is a possible recipient, though not a definite

¹⁸ See Timothy W. Ryback, *Hitlers Bücher: Seine Bibliothek – sein Denken* (Cologne, 2010).

¹⁹ Otto Kaemmerer and Konrad Sturmhoevel (eds.), *Spanners Illustrierte Weltgeschichte: Mit Berücksichtigung der Kulturgeschichte*, 10 vols. (3rd edn. Leipzig, 1893–8).

²⁰ See Wolfram Pyta, *Hitler. Der Künstler als Politiker und Feldherr: Eine Herrschaftsanalyse* (Munich, 2015).

one. They are full of suppositions, assumptions, and comparisons with other texts that could have been the sources of Hitler's ideas even though this generally cannot be clearly proved. Whether Hitler drew from the texts mentioned by the editors, whether he even knew of them, and above all how he digested these texts is not touched upon at all. It is enough for the editors if any parallels to *Mein Kampf*, however remote, can be found in a book. In numerous notes they point out that a formulation or a thought is 'reminiscent', 'very reminiscent', or 'again reminiscent' of *Mein Kampf*. If Hitler had read all the books that he supposedly plagiarises in *Mein Kampf* he would have had to have spent all his time reading before he wrote it. Of course this is out of the question even if we accept, as he himself admitted, that he only flicked through them. In the heat of the moment the editors obviously forgot to take Hitler's intellectual ability to receive ideas when reading into account.

The commentators are on more solid ground only when dealing with the relatively few reference texts that Hitler explicitly mentions in *Mein Kampf*, or which we can assume for other reasons that he had read. The commentators can reference here Houston Chamberlain, Heinrich Class, Theodor Fritsch, and Hans F. K. Guenther. Amongst the foreign authors Henry Ford and Graf Grobineau should not be overlooked. We know that of the small circle of his early supporters Hitler was influenced by Dietrich Eckart, Gottfried Feder, and Alfred Rosenberg. All these are given special emphasis in the edition, but here, too, there is no exact analysis of how their ideas were received.

The commentators miss the target completely when they claim that Hitler was influenced by the anti-Jewish blood metaphors of a fourth-century Syrian religious teacher (p. 825). Not very convincing either is that Hitler's racially based idea of a 'mission of the German people' is conceptionally reminiscent of the role 'attributed to the proletariat in the Marxist view of history' (p. 1,016). It is methodologically extremely questionable if the editors think they can trace Hitler back to Max Weber: 'Admittedly Hitler would not have known Max Weber's writings first hand—if at all—but here Hitler formulates a thought that Weber had also developed in the context of his typology of rule' (p. 1,306).

Ultimately it is difficult to assess the edition from the point of view of a contemporary historian. The enormous editorial effort involved in producing the book certainly should be recognized. This

work could only be carried out by a large working group based at an academic research institute. However, if it was the editors' intention to do justice to both expert historians and a non-expert public, then the outcome is ambivalent. It was undoubtedly difficult for the editors to satisfy both. If they had decided on an edition that just followed scholarly editorial principles, then this certainly would not have been a great public success. On the other hand, an edition whose character was more that of a didactic documentation would have run the risk of not being taken seriously by scholars. Since this dilemma is basically insoluble, the editors chose a middle way. As mentioned, the great editorial edifice of the book does not make it particularly user-friendly for non-experts, and then again the numerous commentaries in which well-known historical facts are explained or mere suppositions expressed are problematic for contemporary historians.

In my view the editors' attempt to present Hitler just as an imitator of numerous *völkisch*-racist authors and to deny him his own ideological positions has not succeeded. Although it is undoubtedly a great achievement to have traced Hitler's ideological sources systematically for the first time, in the end far too much remains vague and cannot be validated in methodological terms. Since the editors regard Hitler just as an imitator of numerous *völkisch*-racist authors, at no point in the edition do they attempt to mark any of Hitler's independent ideological positions and to recognize to some extent the imitator's system. Did Hitler really just adopt unchecked everything that he read? Did he not simplify, exaggerate, or intensify the alleged fruits of his reading and sort of hammer them into his readers through constant repetition? The editors do grant Hitler a 'creative achievement' because in their view he formally forced together what was 'experienced, conceived, and acquired by reading'; but what this intellectual amalgamation process was actually like in detail remains largely unexplained.

WOLFGANG SCHIEDER is emeritus Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Cologne.