Kaiser Wilhelm II:

Psychohistory and Influence on Twentieth Century Europe

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Kaiser Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany from 1888 to 1918, is one of the most controversial figures of 20th Century European history. Some scholars blame Wilhelm II as the primary cause of The First World War because of the German naval military buildup and his “carte blanche” endorsement of the Austrians when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Franz Duke Ferdinand. The Germans backed the Austrians, and because the Russians backed the Serbians, Germany declared war on Russia as well. Germany, in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan, attacked Belgium and France, the supposed ‘weaker’ enemies. With France in the war, Britain was obligated to defend France because of previous treatise. Thus, The First World War commenced after these declarations of war.

Victors often write history, but with access to the Kaiser’s memoirs and the documents of those close to him, it becomes clear that external factors were largely the cause of his personality disorder because of his childhood. Secondly, scholars tend to argue that the Kaiser had narcissistic personality disorder, which is a condition in which people have an inflated sense of self-importance and an extreme preoccupation with themselves.1 However, his memoirs and testimonies written about the Kaiser reveal he had histrionic personality disorder, which is a condition in which people act in a very emotional and dramatic way that draws attention to themselves, and they constantly seek reassurance or approval.2 The Kaiser also displayed some symptoms of borderline personality disorder as well, which is common. Histrionic personality disorder is commonly misdiagnosed to be narcissism, so this error is understandable. However, from a historical perspective, the difference is extremely important. This is because even though his actions as a result of the disorder may have “contributed directly to the deterioration of Anglo-German relations before the First World War,” the Kaiser “in the deepest layers of his

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2 Ibid.
personality wished that they [Germany and Britain] would live together in friendship and peace.”

In this case, Kaiser Wilhelm II’s actions during his reign are in concert with a psychological context, and psychohistory remains useful in determining causation. Therefore, bearing in mind his psychological shortcomings, it seems to follow that the Kaiser should not bear full responsibility for The First World War because first, he did not wish for war, second because his advisors were largely responsible for provoking the war, and third because other nations’ politicians and royalty largely misattributed his actions and did not do all they could to prevent the war. On the other hand, the Kaiser, despite his shortcomings, did everything within his power to enter into treaties and negotiations for peace.

Mental health professionals define histrionic disorder as “a pervasive pattern of excessive emotionality and attention seeking, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts.” For diagnosis, the person must exhibit five or more of the following traits: (1) he or she is uncomfortable in situations in which he or she is not the center of attention; (2) interaction with others is often characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior; (3) he or she displays rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions; (4) he or she consistently uses physical appearance to draw attention to themselves; (5) he or she has a style of speech that is excessively impressionistic and lacking in detail; (6) he or she shows self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of emotion; (7) he or she is suggestible and easily influenced by others; and (8) he or she considers relationships more intimate than they actually are. Most, if not all, of these characteristics describe Kaiser Wilhelm II. However, a description of his childhood is necessary to obtain a full psychohistory.

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4 Ibid, 511.
The Kaiser’s Childhood

When the Kaiser was born, he probably suffered minimal brain damage because of the administration of chloroform and ergotamine or because of the foetal asphyxia. With minimal brain damage, children are “overly sensitive to stimulation, hyperactive, and have a limited attention span.” However, the worst came after his birth; he began to exhibit symptoms of a bad left arm as a result of a birth injury. According to Sigmund Freud, “it was not the cripples arm in itself, but the attitude of the proud mother towards it that was the underlying cause of Wilhelm’s later disorder.” The Crown Princess had deprived “the child of her love because of his affliction” and “when the child had grown into a mighty man, he proved unequivocally by his actions that he never forgave his mother.” In addition, his father seems to have had limited emotional contact with his son because he was frequently away on trips, depressed, and dealing with political affairs. Because of this, Wilhelm’s mother raised him almost completely in the early years of his life. Also, because of his arm, he was subjected to numerous processes associated with his arm which produced significant psychological consequences. He had to put his arm into animal baths. Essentially, they put his arm into an animal that was recently killed twice a week for several years. They also tied up his right arm to provoke him to make use of his bad left arm. However, this method was applied when he was beginning to learn to walk, and Wilhelm II developed violent reactions due to frustration. He also developed toriticullis and had to wear a head brace for several years.

Though the issue with his arm produced significant consequences, namely overcompensation, the relationship with his mother ultimately led to the development of the Kaiser’s personality disorder. “A variety of parent-child relationships may contribute to

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6 Ibid, 19.
[histrionic] development. The excessive needs may develop in part through an overly eroticized parent-child relationship.”

The Kaiser’s relationship with his mother was indeed very tense. His mother, though in her letters expressing warmth and love for her first child, admitted later that Wilhelm II was “mutilated” and for this reason the first years of his life were ‘not joyous–I fought against the disappointment and the nagging worries, for his arm embittered my life – and I never learned to be happy that he was mine!”

The Kaiser also knew about his mother’s disappointment in his arm. In 1880 on his engagement, he told his former tutor Dr. Hinzpeter that he “had never thought it possible that…a lady could ever take any real interest in him” on account of “his unfortunate arm!” When Dr. Hinzpeter questioned his mother, she admitted to having criticized Wilhelm as a child. Because of his mother’s feeling of inadequacy based on his arm, Wilhelm also felt inadequate. In addition, Wilhelm indeed exhibited an ‘overly erotic’ relationship with his mother. John Van Der Kiste stated that the Kaiser “still enjoyed a very close, if a little bizarre, relationship with his mother. Several of his letters to her while he was at school had dwelt on his ‘little secret’ for her and her alone, dreams that he described in embarrassing detail of rituals in which they embraced each other tenderly and he watched her remove her gloves, then kissed her ‘dear, soft warm hands.’” If only a little disturbing, this demonstrates the environment in which histrionic disorder is likely to develop.

Histrionic Personality Disorder Diagnosis

The first criterion of a histrionic is that he or she is uncomfortable in situations in which he or she is not the center of attention. These traits were exhibited in the Kaiser’s “insistence on

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7 Comprehensive Handbook of Psychopathology, 516.
8 Rohl, Young Wilhelm, 75.
9 Ibid, 80.
10 Ibid, 80.
11 John Van der Kiste, Kaiser Wilhelm II: Germany’s Last Emperor (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), 19.
turning every ‘conversation’ into a hectic monologue [and] his need to have people about him all the time.” It was also said by the Viennese that “Wilhelm insisted on being the stag at every hunt, the bride at every wedding, and the corpse at every funeral.” These remarks, along with many more, demonstrate Wilhelm II’s self-centeredness.

A histrionic’s interaction with others is also often characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior. A recorded display of this criterion occurred with the women Ella and Ana during a hunting expedition where they visited him. It was reported that “a policeman was about to order Ella and Anna away when one of the Prince’s suite intervened to explain that the ladies were ‘for his master’. The three of them took a room for the night and made so much noise that all other guests were awakened. Word of Wilhelm’s pillow talk during this escapade reached the ears of Crown Prince Rudolf, who informed an Austrian military attaché of Wilhelm’s ‘enchanting conversation with these two unclean females.’” After a few incidents such as this and some suspected pregnancies, he was less publicly involved with women. However, “the Kaiser still regularly flirted with attractive women on his journeys away from Berlin…” The memoirs of Elisabeth Wedel-Berard offers one of the most penetrating glances into this inappropriately seductive behavior. She claimed that Kaiser Wilhelm II wrote, “Chère comtesse, you have indeed a difficult life behind you. Oh ma chère adorée, how great you are in my estimation! You sacrificed your love out of patriotism! That is magnificent! You refused your former husband everything, would you refuse me, adorée, everything too, if we

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13 Ibid, 30.  
14 Kiste, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 45.  
15 Ibid, 67.
should one day be together? If I knelt before you and begged?"16 Therefore, in many instances he displayed inappropriately seductive behavior, thus fulfilling criterion two.

Thirdly, a histrionic displays rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions. The Kaiser demonstrated this in his personality first when he was only a boy. When his Prussian cousins visited, “the cousins found him likable enough, but too mercurial, volatile, and restless, full of energy one moment, morose and brooding the next. They nicknamed him ‘Wilhelm the Sudden’”17 The next incident reported that expressly exhibited rapidly shifting emotions was in 1908 when Sir Edward Goschen, the new British ambassador, arrived in Potsdam to hand in his credentials. Goschen reported that:

I was shown into a long room [Goschen wrote] with the Emperor standing at the far end – nearly. I bowed and bowed and bowed. But he had is Overlord face on – and never moved a muscle – not a smile, not a movement of any sort. He might have been cut out of stone. I handed him my letters with the usual words. Still not a sign – so I had to make a speech. When I had finished, at last he broke into a genial smile – shook me warmly by the hand and gave me a nice cheery welcome to [Berlin] saying all sorts of nice things. But I shall never forget those first 5 minutes. It was appalling and I nearly choked over my little speech. Afterwards I presented the Staff – I thought him genial…But the Staff told me that for him he was depressed.18

Therefore, the Kaiser exhibited shifting emotions from one extreme to the next both in childhood and as an adult.19

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19 Another historian encountered the shallowness of Wilhelm’s personality. She/he remarked, “‘Nonetheless, although I believe that Victoria, like Wilhelm, can be classified as a narcissistic personality, Victoria’s narcissism was fundamentally different from her son’s. She lacked Wilhelm’s artificiality and superficiality. One never gets the sense, as with Wilhelm, that her feelings, actions, and attitudes were not quite genuine or that her personality was little more than a succession of theatrical poses.” Thomas A. Kohut. “Kaiser Wilhelm II and his parents: an inquiry in to the psychological roots of German policy towards England before the First World War,” in Kaiser Wilhelm II New Interpretations: The Corfu Papers, ed. John C. G. Rohl & Nicolaus Sombart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 68.
Histrionics also consistently use physical appearance to draw attention to themselves. The Kaiser was certainly obsessed with his appearances. In regards to his routine and countless uniforms, historian John Van Der Kiste wrote:

After washing he was shaved by his barber and had his moustache brushed by Herr Haby, the ends turned up in the soon to be familiar shape of a letter W. Then he could dress in the uniform he thought correct for the first activity of the day. According to his cousin Marie, Queen of Roumania, he ‘changed his uniform several times a day as a smart woman changes her gown.’ In addition to his much-cherished foreign uniforms he had a full one for every Prussian regiment, over three hundred alone, to say nothing of hose of Bavaria, Saxony and Wurttemberg, as well as naval and marine uniforms. All had their own individual badges, sashes, caps, helmets, epaulettes, shoulder points, belts, swords, lances and firearms. The resulting wardrobe and armoury had to be housed in a hall containing huge wardrobes, with a Kammerdiener on duty from morning to night to select at the shortest possible notice any outfit he might require.²⁰

Therefore, appearances to the Kaiser were very important. Even more incriminating was the Kaiser’s daughter’s governess Anne Topham. Her description of the Kaiser outside of his

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²⁰ Kiste, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 68.
uniform was that, “Many German gentlemen lost much in appearance when out of uniform, ‘but
none to the extent that their Emperor did. He no longer had any shred of dignity, and, curiously
enough, that charm of manner…was also bereft of its influence and merged into what was an
offensive, wearisome buffoonery.’ He was wise, she added, ‘not to appear before his subjects
except in uniform.”22 Therefore, he did not merely use his wardrobe and appearances to look
presentable, but they were also required for him to act presentably. However, his wardrobe, and
perhaps mustache, were ultimately used as a tool to draw attention to himself, thus fulfilling
criterion four of a histrionic.

Histrionics also tend to have a style of speech that is excessively impressionistic and
lacking in detail. In a key speech, the Kaiser proclaimed to the people “Thus we belong to each
other – I and the Army – we were born for each other and will cleave indissolubly to each other,
whether it be the Will of God to send us calm or storm’… ‘You will soon swear fealty and
submission to me, and I promise ever to bear in mind that from the world above the eyes of my
forefathers look down upon me, and that I shall have one day to stand accountable to them for
the glory and honour of the Army.”23 “Insecurity drove him on to strut and swagger, assuming a
theatrical pose that the martial atmosphere of Berlin demanded he should personify.”24 The
Kaiser made this speech to create an impression on the German people, but it lacks detail.

Histrionics also show self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of
emotion. His daughter commented on his exaggerated expressions many times in her memoirs.
She wrote, “My father could laugh like a great big boy, and every now and then would slap his

22 Kiste, Kaiser Wilhelm II, 68.
23 Ibid, 59.
24 Ibid, 59.
knees in mirth. He had a great sense of humour and could tell some wonderful stories.”

She also wrote that, “The manner in which my father handled Edward was considered gushing, too extravagant in his use of words.” These remarks both demonstrate his exaggerated expressions both in public and private life, thus fulfilling criterion six.

Finally, histrionics are suggestible and easily influenced by others. Hinzpeter and the Kaiser’s mother first recognized the suggestibility of Wilhelm. Hinzpeter, his tutor, told Wilhelm to express an opinion about everyone and everything without fear. Hinzpeter taught him that no one should dominate him, even his advisors. However, when the Kaiser was almost 8, his mother wrote to Queen Victoria of her son’s failings on this account. She wrote, “he is inclined to be selfish, domineering and proud, but I must say they too are not his own faults, as they have been hitherto more encouraged than checked.” Thus, despite Hinzpeter’s encouragements, the Kaiser ultimately was highly suggestible. Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany, later remarked to Count George Herbert von Munster, German ambassador to Paris, that the Kaiser was “like a balloon, if one did not hold him fast on a string, he would go no one knows whither.”

Therefore, both early and later in life, the Kaiser was easily influenced by others, thus fulfilling the seventh criterion.

The final criterion in which histrionics consider relationships more intimate than they actually are is impossible to discern. However, it is only necessary that a person meet 5 of the 8 criterion for a diagnosis of histrionic personality disorder. Thus, based on the overwhelming evidence of the Kaiser’s personality, there is a strong probability Kaiser Wilhelm II was a histrionic.

26 Ibid, 17.
28 Ibid, 74.
Borderline Personality Disorder Diagnosis

There are many studies to support that when a person has histrionic personality disorder, they also exhibit some of the symptoms of other personality disorders. One study by Widiger and Rogers indicated that “at least 80% of the persons that met the…criteria for histrionic personality disorder were likely to meet the criteria set for another personality disorder.”

Furthermore, “the greatest overlap was with the borderline and narcissistic personality disorders (51% met the criteria for borderline, and 73% met the criteria for narcissistic).” Though I agree that the Kaiser exhibited some symptoms of narcissism as some historians such as Kohut speculated, the Kaiser exhibited many symptoms of borderline personality disorder as well. He exhibited (1) frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment, (2) affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood which included intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety, (3) inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger, and (4) an identity disturbance with an unstable self-image or sense of self. Wilhelm exhibited the first criterion in his memoirs, which display a real sense of abandonment, primarily by other nations. He writes about the purpose of the ‘encirclement’ of the German nation in that “England, France, and Russia had, though for different reasons, and aim in common- viz., to overthrow Germany.” In his opinion, these nations sought to destroy Germany and thus himself, the Kaiser, as well. Eulenberg recorded instances of the second and third criterions of borderline personality disorder in both 1900 and 1903 when aboard the Kaiser’s North Sea cruises. In 1900, he wrote that “H.M. is no

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29 Comprehensive Handbook of Psychopathology, 510.
30 Ibid, 510.
31 Ibid, 492.
longer in control of himself when he is seized by rage. I regard the situation as highly dangerous…”

Later in 1903, Eulenburg reported that the Kaiser “is difficult to handle and complicated on all things, no matter how trivial. No one can make even the most harmless remark…without provoking a violent objection, an insulting response or even an outburst of rage.” Eulenberg wrote that the Kaiser wandered around the ship “as if in a dream-world,” and he remarks that he cried as he saw “[the Kaiser’s] face completely distorted with rage.” In these instances, he exhibited instability due to irritability and anxiety, which produced intense anger and was difficult to control. The fourth criterion, or an identity disturbance with an unstable self-image or sense of self, is difficult to determine. The self is defined as “the individual’s experience of himself as an independent centre of initiative that is continuous in time and space.”

Other historians, such as Kohut, speculated that Kaiser Wilhelm II experienced himself “as part of others and others as part of himself, that is, he experienced them as archaic ‘self-objects’.” Though made in reference to the Kaiser’s narcissistic tendencies, it also fits in with the secondary diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Essentially, the Kaiser did not develop into a strong, cohesive self, and he was not able to experience other people separate from his self. He experienced other people and objects as self-objects, and this developed into a need to establish these relationships to make up for the shortcomings of the self.

However, the primary diagnosis of histrionic personality disorder and the secondary diagnosis of borderline personality disorder bear no significance unless they are viewed in terms

of causation of actions. Because Wilhelm II ultimately became the Kaiser or Emperor in Germany, he naturally had influence on policy-making.  

Life as an Emperor and Kaiser

These histrionic and borderline personality tendencies developed fully later in life when the Kaiser was emperor. His advisors commonly said that “he had the politically alarming tendency to adopt the opinions and goals of the person with whom he had last spoken.” He assimilated the opinions of others in his sense of self to make up for his shortcomings and provide him a sense of purpose. This manifested itself into a contradictory character. Wilhelm’s use of the press in order to glean the opinions of the public also contributed to his contradictory behavior. Wilhelm II’s ultimate goal as Kaiser was popularity with the German people, namely the middle classes. However, public opinion often shifted during Wilhelm II’s reign, and contradictions notoriously fill a press’s publications. It is thus conclusive that his use of the press to gain insight into public opinion directly contributed to his contradictory behavior, which was the basis of distrust for other monarchs.

His buildup of the German navy is also the direct result of the Kaiser’s inner instability and insecurity. As Kohut said, “as ships and the Navy increased the Kaiser’s sense of psychological strength, harmony, and cohesion, so too did he assume that the construction of the high seas’ fleet would increase the strength, harmony, and cohesion of the German nation.” Wilhelm experienced the navy as a self-object, that is, the navy was not for a militaristic, diplomatic, or political objective, but designed in such a way as to compensate for his inner instability.

35 Historians debate the extent to which the Kaiser had power over policies in Germany. Therefore, my assessment of the Kaiser’s influence is limited to things in which he had direct control over or influenced directly. (i.e. naval building program and foreign relations)
38 Ibid, 235.
instability and insecurity. Therefore, the navy was primarily to build up the strength of the German nation and himself, not as an act of hostility to other nations. At the very most, it was a tool used to coax Britain into an alliance with Germany.

However, many nations, primarily Britain, viewed the buildup of the German Navy as a threat, and according to T. G. Otte “…political circles in Britain (and elsewhere) were acutely aware of the Kaiser’s perceived mental instability and character defects, and this perception informed the day-to-day conduct of British policy towards Germany.” Therefore, not only did the Kaiser’s personal instability and personality disorders affect the internal politics of Germany, it also contributed directly to the disintegration of foreign relations. Erichsen warned Lord Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary “that Prince Wilhelm was not, and never would be, a normal man…That while it was not probable that he would actually become insane, some of his actions would probably be those of a man not wholly sane…on these grounds the accession of the Crown Prince would possibly be a danger to Europe.” This communication had a lasting impression on Lord Salisbury because he allegedly said ‘Erichsen’ whenever the Kaiser committed an indiscretion. Salisbury wrote to Queen Victoria in 1888 “that all Prince William’s impulses, however blamable and unreasonable, will henceforth be political causes of enormous potency: & the two nations are so necessary to each other, that everything that is said to him must be carefully weighed. It is to be hoped that natural grief & a feeling of decency will…dominate him & exclude all lower impulses.” The ‘lower impulses’ of the Kaiser continued to shape Salisbury’s outlook on European affairs for the remainder of his life.

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40 Ibid, 476.
41 Ibid, 476.
42 Ibid, 477.
43 Ibid, 478.
Salisbury even went so far as to decline to meet with Wilhelm in 1889, which severely embittered the Kaiser even after 25 years following the incident. Gottlieb von Jagow remarked when he was German ambassador Rome to his British colleague that “Lord Salisbury remained like Achilles in his tent at Hatfield. This had greatly offended His Majesty…” Thus, the dislike between the Kaiser and Salisbury was mutual.

The dismissal of Bismarck and then Caprivi combined with the Kruger telegram affair further strengthened Salisbury’s convictions of Wilhelm’s instabilities. The Kruger telegram in particular decimated the perceptions of the Kaiser by British officials. The naval building program began at this juncture so as to precipitate Britain into taking Germany more seriously. The Kaiser also made frequent predictions of an Anglo-French War, which convinced Salisbury and the Queen that the Kaiser’s primary goal was to provoke a war between England and France. Both these predictions and the naval buildup gave England cause for great concern.

When the Boxer rising occurred in China, Wilhelm proceeded to dispatch Germans to the China relief force which further concerned Salisbury of Wilhelm’s “warlike spirit.”

However, Salisbury’s successors were less concerned with the Kaiser’s instabilities. Wilhelm, forewarned about Queen Victoria’s approaching demise, rushed to her bedside as her grandson. Though the British public highly praised the Kaiser for his moving gesture, Wilhelm’s outburst in April 1901, where he chided the British government for not adhering to his suggestions, reversed the good impression and resurrected concerns about the Kaiser’s

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44 Ibid, 479.
48 Ibid, 488.
49 Ibid, 488.
50 Ibid, 489.
51 Ibid, 490.
instabilities.\textsuperscript{52} The subsequent Tangier episode provided concern that the Kaiser was trying to break up the Anglo-French entente of 1904.\textsuperscript{53} Lansdowne declined the Kaiser’s attempt to speak with him privately because a precarious situation ensued. Sir Edward Grey, Lansdowne’s successor, warned that “[t]he danger of speaking civil words at Berlin is that they may be used or interpreted in France as implying that we shall be lukewarm in our support of the Entente.”\textsuperscript{54} Grey’s subsequent meeting with Wilhelm went smoothly, but Grey certainly did not like the Kaiser and thought he was mentally unstable and superficial.\textsuperscript{55}

The Daily Telegraph affair brought the Kaiser’s apparent mental instability to a head. The Foreign Office saw it as another attempt to influence public opinion in Britain in favor of Germany, and in early November 1908, “political circles in London were gripped by a ‘war-scare.’”\textsuperscript{56} Former Foreign Secretary Lansdowne said, “It is inconceivable that they should provoke a European war but the Emperor is becoming more irresponsible with every year that passes!”\textsuperscript{57} The ambassador in Paris wrote that the Kaiser’s “temperament was so excitable and so little to be relied on that it was impossible to say what further follies he might commit.”\textsuperscript{58} Finally, Grey the British Foreign Secretary informed the Lord of Admiralty that the fleet be ready “in case Germany sent France an ultimatum and the Cabinet decided that we must assist France.”\textsuperscript{59} Though this crisis dissipated, Grey was “tired of the Emperor; he is like a battleship with steam up and the screws going, but with no rudder and you cannot tell what he will run into or what catastrophe he will cause.”\textsuperscript{60} In all of the above incidents, foreign Politicians commented

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 490-491.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 494.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 495.
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\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 498-499.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 499.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 499.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 499.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 500.
upon the Kaiser’s mental instabilities, and foreign relations further deteriorated. Therefore, the Kaiser Wilhelm II’s personality disorder directly contributed to the deterioration of foreign relations and, in Britain, “did not allow for stability and consistency in German foreign policy.”

This was the manner in which “Germany and England, two nations with fundamentally compatible interests, were driven towards armed conflict by a man who in the deepest layers of his personality wished that they would live together in friendship and peace.” Due to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s personality inadequacies, he was unable to successfully delineate between his hopes for an alliance between Germany and Britain and his hopes for Germany’s day in the sun. The Kaiser’s daughter, who knew him better than anyone, explained in her memoirs:

Since I had last seen my father in May, a world had been demolished and my father thoroughly shattered by the turn of events. I could see that at once. His thoughts were concentrated on the depressing fact that all his desperate efforts had not enabled him to extinguish the flames of war, or at least to localize them. That was the essential theme of the conversations he held with me. The bitterness of his words revealed that he, too, despite all the manifest skepticism, had fervently hoped that at the last minute a personal understanding between him and King George V would ward off the great calamity.

The efforts of the Kaiser at reconciliation between Germany and Britain failed. When the assassination of Franz Ferdinand occurred, the treaty between the Austrians and Germans provoked the Germans to enter the war against Serbia. Russia then entered on the side of the Serbians. Then, due to a popular perspective that war was inevitable, Germany attacked Belgium and France in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan. Then due to the treaty between Britain and France, Britain entered the war. The First World War commenced at the severe disappointment of the Kaiser, whose persistent efforts to prevent the war failed.

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61 Ibid, 500.
The Kaiser’s daughter remarked on two instances of the Kaiser’s extreme displays of honor and virtue during the First World War. First, she stated, “one of his orders…that air raids on London…should only be carried out if it was certain that Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey and St. Paul’s Cathedral would not be damaged and would above all not involve residential districts.”

She also said:

It may still sound legendary today, how the Kaiser behaved towards prisoners of war. In the same way that he visited our own wounded, he went to see the enemy wounded in the hospital…One characteristic action of my father was when he one day passed a train carrying French prisoners of war. He stopped his car and gave orders for the prisoner of war train to be halted. Then he requested the French officers to step forwards and made a speech in French in which he praised the bravery of the French army, offered them his sympathy as battle casualties and promised them they would be honorably treated in the prisoner of war camps. That was the attitude of the German Kaiser to the conquered.

These statements, largely unenclosed in conventional scholarship of the Kaiser, testify that though the Kaiser had a personality disorder, he was not vindictive and wicked like Hitler, the hated dictator of Germany in World War II. Wilhelm was in fact a caring individual who was essentially human and did not possess the capacity to keep The First World War at bay. Kaiser Wilhelm II’s youngest child and only daughter, Viktoria Luise, when reminiscing about her father, wrote, “I publicly admit that whenever I look back and above all when I consider what we experience under a degenerate Second World War leadership, I regain the pride I felt that this knightly, human and thoughtful man was my father.”

The Kaiser’s Legacy

Many scholars often blame Kaiser Wilhelm II as the primary cause of The First World War because of inconsistencies in his personality. Rohl, arguably the most prominent historian

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64 Ibid, 85.
65 Should one man possess so much of the responsibility of the outbreak of WWI? Can we discount the decisions of hundreds of politicians in the narrative?
on the Kaiser, argues that ‘personal rule’ of the Kaiser prevailed because of his personal appointments of the Chancellors to Germany.\textsuperscript{67} However, historian Geoff Eley argues that the Kaiser’s own personal rule in Germany was limited, and Rohl’s argument is flawed.\textsuperscript{68} In my analysis, I tend to side with Geoff Eley because of his convincing arguments against Rohl’s thesis, and because of the evidence of two personality disorders present in the Kaiser—histrionic and borderline. The Kaiser was very dramatic and constantly sought attention that identifies him as a histrionic, and his tendencies for breakdowns identifies him as a borderline as well. These personality disorders only had a profound influence in two areas: the naval building program and foreign relations. This is extremely disappointing because even though his actions as a result of the disorder may have “contributed directly to the deterioration of Anglo-German relations before the First World War,” the Kaiser “in the deepest layers of his personality wished that they [Germany and Britain] would live together in friendship and peace.” Therefore, because of his innermost wishes for peace and the several times in which he tried to initiate negotiations of peace, he is not the primary and only cause for the outbreak of The First World War. Due to his own advisors, who made the Shlieffen Plan and other mistakes, and foreign politicians largely misattributing his intentions and neglecting to meet with the Kaiser, The First World War commenced. Therefore, they also bore responsibility for the outbreak of The First World War.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 484.
Bibliography


