**Gobineau, (Joseph) Arthur, Comte de** (b. Ville d’Avray, 14 July 1816; d. Turin, 13 Oct. 1882), novelist, diplomat, essayist, ethnologist. Protégé of Alexis de Tocqueville, who as Foreign Minister appointed Gobineau his Cabinet Head. Gobineau’s diplomatic career took in Germany, Persia, Brazil, and Sweden. In *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*The Inequality of Human Races*, 1853-5), Gobineau made racial distinction – white (intelligent, courageous), black (sensual, brutal), and yellow (materialistic, feeble) – history’s guiding principle. The white race, whether Germanic, ancient Greek, or Indo-European (“Aryan”), enabled civilization. Apparent exceptions, such as China, were ascribed to white influence. Civilization partly depended upon miscegenation, interracial breeding, yet in that dilution lay its downfall. Gobineau was not anti-Semitic; he admired the effort of “white” Jews through Mosaic Law to maintain their “purity.” Tocqueville protested that Gobineau’s argument was probably wrong and certainly pernicious.

The Wagners briefly met Gobineau in Rome in 1876. There is neither evidence nor likelihood that Wagner read Gobineau or learned of his ideas until after their 1880 meeting in Venice; Wagner makes no mention of Gobineau’s theories before 1880, nor does Cosima in her diaries. Thus, despite the claims of writers such as Robert Gutman (ch. 13), the possibility of influence upon *Parsifal*, whose poem was essentially completed in 1877, its “orchestral sketch” in 1879, tends towards zero. Gobineau visited Wahnfried in 1881 (when Wagner presented his collected writings to “the Count”) and in 1882.

“Scientific” fatalism might appeal to Wagner as Schopenhauer’s disciple, though not as revolutionary. Gobineau presented not a political program, but an alleged scientific truth, echoing the Enlightenment project of discerning fundamental historical laws, akin to those of Newton – or, as later racists would prefer, Darwin. Gobineau believed in human degeneration; Wagner varied. Whereas Gobineau’s driving force was miscegenation, Wagner, in a late echo of Feuerbach, pointed to dietary change. Though Wagner seems to have come to attribute some importance to miscegenation, he introduced a gendered element and retained the prospect of regeneration or redemption through art and religion. Thus an 1881 *Brown Book* entry, possibly intended in part to correct Gobineau’s non-racial essay, *La Renaissance*: “In the mingling of races, the blood of the nobler males is ruined by the baser feminine element: the masculine element suffers, character founders, whilst the women gain as much as to take the men’s place. (Renaissance). The feminine thus remains owing deliverance: here art – as there in religion; the immaculate Virgin gives birth to the Savior.” (BB/E, 23 Oct 1881). Gobineau denied universality and founded morality upon ontology: Aryan deeds were good because they were performed by Aryans. Wagner, however, desired universal redemption, Jews included; morality should transform ontology.

Yet, as with Schopenhauer, Wagner found “confirmation” of previously held views, and “corrected” instances in which both writers erred. Cosima describes Wagner, during Gobineau’s 1881 visit, as “downright explosive in favor of Christian theories in contrast to racial ones” (CWD, 3 June 1881). Correspondence demonstrates mutual respect but both men standing their intellectual ground. Despite some writers’ claims, Gobineau’s influence on Wagner was minimal, differences more revealing than correspondences. However, the pan-Germanist Ludwig Schemann and other members of the Bayreuth Circle founded a Gobineau Association in 1894, transforming Gobineau’s pessimism into a racial and political opposition between Aryan and Jew. Cosima dissociated herself and the Festival.

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