The End of "German Culture"

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I. EXILE AND EMIGRATION: THE SURVIVAL OF "GERMAN CULTURE"

Introduction

In 1941, the Hungarian ambassador in Washington paid a courtesy call to the State Department, since Nazi Germany had forced his country to declare war against the United States. It turned out to be a very civilized meeting indeed and after the ambassador, following the rules of diplomacy, had fulfilled his somewhat delicate mission, the secretary of state politely asked him to sit down so that the two of them might take the rare opportunity for a good talk over crackers and a glass of brandy. The following conversation ensued.

"I cannot hide from you, Mr. Ambassador, how much I regret that the Hungarian Republic has decided to wage war against my country, the United States of America!"

"Sir," the ambassador replied, "please believe me when I say how much I personally resent this decision. I must, however, correct a minor point: I do not have the honor to serve the Hungarian Republic, but the Kingdom of Hungary!"

"*Gosh,* why didn't anyone tell me! Would you be kind enough, Your Excellency, to elaborate on the reasons that led the Hungarian king to make this decision, which, after all, could have serious consequences for both of our countries?"

"Excuse me once more, sir, but our head of state isn't a king, he's an admiral."

"Isn't that interesting! Then, excuse me if it's top secret, but can you please tell me how big your fleet is and how many aircraft carriers and submarines are stationed on the Danube?"

"Mr. Secretary, now I'll tell you a secret indeed: we don't have any warships at all!"

"I'm sorry. So how many war planes do you have?"

"None."

"Very well, this obviously means that you will have to attack with

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your land forces. Which of our allies will you attack first? Poland, I suppose?"

"No, by no means, sir, the Poles are our best friends!"

"Well, do you want to attack anyone at all then, in this most peculiar of wars?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Secretary, we would love to attack the Romanians as quickly as possible."

"So why don't you do it?"

"Because the Romanians are our allies!"

"For heaven's sake, then why don't you declare war against the Russians instead of taking on the United States of America?"

"Because we are already thinking of the time after the war."

"What do you mean?"

"We would rather be occupied by the Americans than by the Red Army!"

A Hungarian diplomat told me this story when I first came to Budapest in the fall of 1989 to explore the possibility of founding an Institute for Advanced Study there on the model of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. The Hungarians know how to charm you while criticizing you: hidden behind the self-irony of my interlocutor was the advice to learn more about the history of Hungary and its neighbors before embarking on the adventure of institution-building there. I had other meetings in Budapest in which humor and irony played a much smaller part. When talking to the minister of culture about my ambitious project, I mentioned the names of the Hungarian colleagues I was asking for help and advice. He somewhat nervously began to note them down while muttering: "There are just too many of them, there are just too many." When I asked him what seemed to disturb him so profoundly, he answered that there were too many Jews among those with whom I hoped to build the institute. The minister was not an anti-Semite at all; he just wanted to be helpful by drawing my attention to the deplorable fact that, in Hungary, anti-Semitism was not restricted to the past but was very much a current concern, and that I should be aware of it if I wanted to succeed. He accepted the outrage with which I reacted to his remarks—but not without intimating that he felt somewhat ambivalent about a German's outrage over his alleged anti-Semitism.

I began to feel more and more insecure. How should I ever be able to understand the political and cultural context in which I wanted to operate? My feeling of insecurity reached its peak when a professor of history, who, like many of his colleagues, had turned into a politician,

solemnly declared that now, after the fall of communism, the time had come to revise the Paris treaties. Above all, he said, it was time to correct the "infamous agreements" of Trianon in 1920, in which Hungary ceded large parts of its territory to Austria, Yugoslavia, and Romania. By now, I was accustomed to expressing my outrage, and I told the historian-turned-politician how absurd his words sounded to me. But when the new war in the Balkans broke out, I remembered these incidents and suddenly became aware that my Hungarian colleagues' remarks might have been much less surprising than I had thought ten years ago. Whether you call it "short" or "long," the twentieth century was not over yet. All of a sudden it seemed as if, at our own fin de siècle, we were returning to its beginning. "Versailles" once again became a term in our political vocabulary.

Though it may seem so, given the themes of my Tanner Lectures, I do not want to follow the shrewd advice an American colleague once gave me when I was about to embark upon my very first lecture in this country: he said to begin by telling a story that your audience isn't sure is relevant to your topic at all. To find out, they will listen through to the end of your presentation. Instead, I will try to indicate the kind of work I have been doing over the past ten years and thus to describe the background against which my lectures should be understood. Since 1989, I have become engaged in various experiments of institution-building that have established or enlarged four institutions of higher learning and scholarship in countries of the former Communist bloc: the Collegium Budapest, the first Institute for Advanced Study in Central and Eastern Europe; the New Europe College in Bucharest; the Graduate School for Social Research in Warsaw; and the Bibliotheca Classica in Saint Petersburg, which is associated with a classical secondary school, a "Gymnasium." In addressing problems of cultural policy today and tomorrow, and that is how I would roughly describe the theme of my Tanner Lectures, I am speaking from recent experience. Trying to improve local contexts of knowledge in Central and Eastern Europe, I have begun to understand the degree to which the division of Europe was not only a problem for the East, but also a problem for us in the West. This has provided me with a fresh view of the past and present of German culture.

To give the Tanner Lectures on Human Values is a task as honorable as it is awesome. I, for my part, cannot pretend that I shall be able to "contribute to the intellectual and moral life of mankind," as Obert Clark

Tanner hoped when he endowed these lectureships. I can only aim at doing something modest in scope and in ambition. The subject of my lectures is "German Culture," i.e., the overrating of culture at the expense of politics. I thereby address a past and present threat to the intellectual and moral life of a country and of a continent, of Germany and of Europe.

Lessons in Diminished Particularity

If there is anything like a German ideology, it consists in playing off Romanticism against the Enlightenment, the Middle Ages against the modern world, culture against civilization, the subjective against the objective, and community against society—in the end glorifying German particularity. This "exceptionalism" was always a point of pride—not least because it was based to a considerable degree on cultural aspirations and achievements. The subjective, inward realm established by German idealism, the classic literature of Weimar, and the classical and romantic styles in music not only preceded the founding of the political nation by more than a hundred years: they were hailed as being a political act that henceforth legitimated any withdrawal from society into the sphere of culture and private life.

Having given a similar résumé in a book some years ago, I was pleased when Hans Magnus Enzensberger quoted it at length in one of his essays. Pleasure turned into perplexity, though, when I realized that he had used my words to characterize the modern history of—Spain. Thus, I was taught an ironic lesson: German history is not nearly as exceptional as the Germans are inclined to believe. In recent decades, this lesson in diminished particularity has been convincingly taught in attempts to show the persistence of the *ancien régime* in all of modern Europe; in the examination of the interconnectedness of Europe's societies and their politics in the decade after the First World War; in the reconstruction of a cycle of German national doctrines whose ideological transitions, rather than ideological persistence, are seen as characteristic; and in the assurance that cultural pessimism was not a German specialty, but rather a feature of bourgeois societies in general.[1]

[1] I am alluding to publications by Arno Mayer, Charles Maier, Harold James, Jim Sheehan, David Blackbourn, and Geoff Eley.

These attempts, persuasive in different ways, and yet convergent in counteracting "the chronic overstatement of the unfolding and ultimate triumph of modernity,"[2] did much to reinsert Germany's peculiar past into a broader context of European history. They reflect rather than having created a climate of opinion that enticed revisionist historians to insist on the imitative character of National Socialism, whose ideology, they alleged, was modeled on the earlier fascisms of Latin Europe, and whose atrocities mirrored the earlier crimes of Stalinism. Using chronology not only as an explanation but, equally falsely, also as an excuse, German particularity was thus seen as almost a European normality. The Holocaust was reduced to not much else than a dreadful accident on a road where careless and ideology-intoxicated driving was not the exception but the rule. The search for embeddedness led to understanding and understanding eventually led to forgiveness and to oblivion: *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.*

To understand German history and its peculiarities has been a challenge not only for professional historians, but for philosophers as well. Even more: it seemed as if only philosophy could come up with an explanation for historical developments that, at first glance, eluded historical understanding. That was the argument in John Dewey's *German Philosophy and Politics* as well as in George Santayana's *Egotism in German Philosophy,* which were published in 1915 and 1916, respectively. Dewey singled out Kant's doctrine of the two realms—"one outer, physical and necessary, the other inner, ideal and free . . . primacy always [lying] with the inner"[3]—as the most important element for understanding German national life; and George Santayana did the same when he described transcendental philosophy as its preferred "method of looking in one's own breast"—adding, somewhat caustically, that "the German breast was no longer that anatomical region which Locke had intended to probe, but a purely metaphysical point of departure . . . ."[4] For Santayana, the perversity of German thought consisted in glorifying an egotism that other nations regarded as an impediment to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible. But Dewey, who was not less critical, also admired

[2] Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. 5.

[3] John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1942), p. 69.

[4] George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 21.

the pervasiveness of the transcendental method, which had made Germany the only country in the world where even cavalry generals employed philosophy to bring home practical lessons. The most striking parallel between Dewey and Santayana, however, is that, at the beginning of and during the Second World War, both republished books they had written in the middle of the First World War and now felt entitled to reprint without any alteration. In the same vein, Thorstein Veblen's study on *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution,* which was originally published in 1915, was reprinted in 1939. Apparently, Germany and German culture had not changed at all.

The Typical German

Thus, not only Germans themselves saw inwardness as Germany's political predicament and cultural ideal; in a mixture of adversity and admiration, foreign authors asserted this as well—and possibly more than the Germans did. When, in 1942 and 1943, the London Institute of Sociology took the suggestion of Morris Ginsberg and organized a series of lectures and discussions on *The German Mind and Outlook,* the result was quite flattering for the nation with which England found itself at war for the second time in a generation. The debates were chaired by G. P. Gooch, who proudly identified himself as the president not only of the Institute of Sociology, but also of the English Goethe Society. The institute's secretary summed them up: "Whatever may be the coming shape of German society, it is impossible to envisage a condition that shall be stable, pacific and humane, unless it embodies the master ideas of Goethe: faith in individual development, sympathy and unity with nature, vision and imagination unceasingly transforming the mundane and commonplace into symbol, drama, and poetry."[5] This meant that the failure of German politics must be repaired at home—and that, in fact, it could be repaired by drama and by poetry. The better Germany, the cultural nation, would survive the war unharmed.

Although by now I have already moved up to the year 1945, there might still be too much history around for those concerned that the Tanner Lectures should not deteriorate into antiquarian deliberations. So let me give you an example of how much debates like those of the

[5] Alexander Farquharson, "Summary," in *The German Mind and Outlook,* ed. G. P. Gooch et al. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1945), p. 218.

London Sociological Society. which ended in a kind of Goethe epiphany, still matter today in the land of poets and thinkers. In 1949, the Allensbach Institut, the German equivalent of the Gallup Institute, asked a representative sample of Germans about their knowledge of and relationship to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This was the year when the Federal Republic was founded, as the institute proudly recalls. Generously funded by the largest German TV station, the Goethe poll was repeated this year, when the poet's 250th anniversary was celebrated with much pomp and circumstance.[6] Mentioned abroad, these polls sound rather funny—at home they were and are still taken seriously indeed. In 1949, for instance, Germans were asked whether, after 1945, they had had "a major spiritual experience." Only a disappointing 46% answered "Yes"—a result the pollsters judged so dismal that it had to be compensated by the answer of a publisher, who claimed he had a major spiritual experience each day. Somewhat mischievously, he added: "This is a stupid question indeed. I would go so far as to say that any German who had not had a major spiritual experience since 1945 had better hang himself."

The Goethe polls make it possible to compare the Germans of 1949 with those of today and to compare East and West almost ten years after reunification. Asked, for instance, whether they considered Goethe a typical German, 47% in the East, but only 31% in the West answered in the affirmative—16% less than in 1949. Do Goethe's novels still matter today?: 37% in the West, 49% in the East say yes. Do you know at least one Goethe poem by heart? Only 10% in the West, but 25% in the East do. In every respect, East Germans seem to feel closer to Goethe and his legacy than West Germans do. The German press found much food for thought in the fact that, in 1949, the majority of Germans considered Faust the most important character in Goethe's drama, whereas fifty years later Mephisto had sneaked into first place—if only in the West. In the East, Faust still played the leading role.

The most intriguing aspect of the Goethe polls, however, does not lie in the answers they yielded, but in the importance both the interviewers and the public attributed to these surveys. The people's image of Goethe was seen as a litmus test for the state of the nation. Two results were especially reassuring. First, Goethe's popularity had not dramatically diminished since 1949. Second, Goethe was even more popular in

[6] Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *Demoskopie und Kulturgeschichte,* eine Goethe-Umfrage für das Nachtprogramm des NWDR 1949 (rpt. Allensbach/Bodensee: ZDF-Nachtstudio, 1999).

the East than in the West. This meant that the cultural nation was alive and well. It also meant that German unification had turned out to be an asset, not a liability, in the attempt to preserve the best that Germany has to offer to itself and to the world: culture. The polls also showed some disturbing results: for instance, why do only 27% of those Germans who regard themselves as moderately leftist see in Goethe the typical German, whereas 48% of the political right do? This question has remained unanswered, because unasked.

A Strange Indifference to Politics

Whenever George Santayana taught German metaphysics at Harvard College, he felt "under its obscure and fluctuating tenets . . . something sinister at work, something at once hollow and aggressive"[7]—a statement of inspired vagueness sharpened, twenty-five years later, by John Dewey, who spoke of the "underlying strains of continuity connecting the creed of Hitler with the classic philosophic tradition of Germany."[8] Such claims of continuity—which often were stretched to claims of causality—were reinforced by the Holocaust, the singular collective crime that doomed German culture and seemed to seal its separation from the mainstream of Western civilization once and for all. Yet attempts to construe causal links between the sphere of politics and the spiritual realm have not been very convincing—regardless of whether individuals like Luther, Kant, Schelling, and Nietzsche or intellectual movements like Idealism or Romanticism were seen as the beginning of a road that inevitably, with Hitler, turned out to be a dead end. Whether one calls it introspection or inwardness, emotional individualism or philosophical egotism—none of these traits belongs exclusively to the German national character.

The question how Germany could become a modern economy without fostering modern social values and political institutions is generally answered by referring to the preponderance of the state, which gave from above what, in other countries, the bourgeoisie had to fight for and acquire through its own efforts. Modern Germany, it has been argued, "thought primarily in terms of the might and majesty of the state, modern England primarily in terms of the rights and liberties of the citi-

[7] Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy,* p. viii.

[8] Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics,* p. 15.

zen."[9] This view, which contrasts Germany, land of obedience, with England, the land of the free, has come under heavy attack. Still, one can hardly deny that idolization of the state has shaped the contours of German society and the course of German history to a large extent. This has involved a considerable weakening of politics and of the public sphere. At times, it could seem as if Germany was a state without politics. Yet it never aimed at being a state without culture.

Fritz Stern has convincingly argued that the strange indifference to politics that characterized German private and public life can be largely explained by the high premium placed on cultural preeminence and on the illiberal elitism that has prevailed in Germany since the time of Weimar classicism. Culture was the arena of the absolute, a realm without compromise. Its exaltation led to the illusion that culture could be a substitute for power and therefore a substitute for politics.[10] From here on, when I speak of "German Culture," I use the term in exactly this sense. Unlike "civilization," "culture" has remained a term that, in the German language, is almost naturally distant from, if not contrary to, politics. The connotation of "culture" is as positive, warm, and promising as that of "politics" is ambivalent, cold, and suspicious. Even today, the term "Weimar Republic" suffers from linguistic bruises, whereas "Weimar Culture" is nostalgically remembered as a great promise that has remained largely unfulfilled. The elevation of culture and the degrading of politics contributed to the downfall of the first German Republic. This ambivalence survived well into the Federal Republic, whose battle cry was "Bonn is not Weimar," and it survives in the reunited Germany.

The Holocaust, the great divide of Western civilization, should have marked the point of no return, after which the exaltation of culture over politics was no longer possible in Germany. That is, I believe, what Theodor Adorno wanted to say when he called barbarous any attempt to write a poem after Auschwitz. The poems Paul Celan wrote after Auschwitz were anything but barbarous—not because Celan had survived, but because his poetry reflected the helplessness, not the power, of culture. Yet the Holocaust did not become a point of no return, at least not for a long time. It did not mark the end of "German Culture."

[9] Gooch et al., *The German Mind and Outlook,* p. viii.

[10] Cf. Fritz Stern's books *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (1961; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) and *The Failure of Illiberalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

One reason for this, as preposterous as it may seem, is the aesthetic appeal of fascism and later National Socialism, which shaped the mental makeup of much of the intelligentsia and the cultural elite in Germany beyond the end of the Second World War.

The Aesthetic Appeal of Fascism

Today we are inclined to think of National Socialism and culture as a contradiction in terms. A look at Hitler and his companions at the Munich exhibition of "degenerate art" in 1937, poking fun at some of the greatest expressionist paintings of our century, is enough to strengthen our belief that the Nazis could not but destroy the *Kulturstaat* that had, for centuries, been the idol of German self-understanding and national pride. True, many Nazi figures—Hitler the painter, Joseph Goebbels the novelist, and Albert Speer the architect—still carried the artistic ambitions of their youth around with them after they seized power, sometimes turning meetings of the inner circle of the National Socialist Party's leadership into a quixotic *salon des refusés.* Yet today we can only laugh or shake our head in disbelief when we read about Hitler telling Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador, that he was tired of politics and longed to return to oil painting, "as soon as I have carried out my program for Germany . . . . I feel that I have it in my soul to become one of the great artists of the age and that future historians will remember me, not for what I have done for Germany, but for my art."[11]

In her famous article in *Foreign Affairs* in April 1940, Dorothy Thompson described Germany as the problem child of Europe, pointing out that many of Hitler's character traits resembled those of a sick society that eventually brought a sick person to power: "What frustrations must be in this man, one thought—so sensitive, so cruel, so weak, and so aggressive! And those characters around him—perverts and adventurers, frustrated intellectuals who could not hold a job in any good newspaper or get their plays produced or their books published." In Hitler she saw a man who, after the common adventure of the First World War, took refuge the rest of his time in a dream-world, "a man whom nobody 'understood,' full of envy, furtive hatred, frustrated cre-

[11] As reported in an article in *Time* on September 11, 1939, p. 29. The caption of the article was "Painters' War," alluding thereby to the fact that the Polish commander-in-chief, Marshall Edward Smigly-Rydz, was "an able if academic landscapist."

ative power."[12] One should not read into Thompson's article a futile attempt to reduce to psycho-babble the political and moral catastrophe that National Socialism meant for Germany. Rather, I see in it a useful hint that here—in exact contrast to the German ideology as described above—we are confronted with attempts to compensate cultural failure or unfulfilled artistic aspirations by political means. In Germany, that was a revolutionary move indeed, which may also help us understand why the totalitarian character of the National Socialist state also expressed itself through aesthetics.[13]

Through ritual, not through belief, National Socialism was able to cast an aesthetic spell even outside Germany and even on those who had no great sympathy for Hitler or who had lost it as the criminal aspects of his politics became increasingly apparent. Wyndham Lewis was not the only one who—in his book on the Hitler cult published after the outbreak of the Second World War—originally regarded Hitler as a politician with a muse, though he added immediately, as if shocked by his own words, that if Hitler were a poet, he would be "one of the most boring poets."[14] In France, members of the political far right envied Germany because National Socialism was seen as the legitimate heir to the fascist movements that had their origin in the Latin countries of Europe. But while fascism had become sclerotic and unsure of itself in both Italy

[12] Dorothy Thompson, "The Problem Child of Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 18 (1940): 391.

[13] I do not know whether Goebbels read Dorothy Thompson's article or whether its content was brought to his attention by his staff. If so, he must have been especially appalled by it, since he saw the German war against the United States in large part as a culture war—unlike the war against France and England, whose culture was criticized but basically accepted, or the war against Communist Russia, which was denied any cultural achievement whatsoever. On April 23, 1942, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "I have the impression . . . that the Americans participate in a European war every quarter century in order to be able to take for themselves as cheaply and easily as possible whatever cultural work has been done in Europe. The American continent is hardly in a position to bring forth anything of its own in the cultural realm. It is dependent upon imports from Europe, and since the Americans are so crazy about money, they naturally like to take possession of the results of our creative and inventive labors as far as possible without paying for them." Goebbels ridicules an incident that he takes as the final verdict on the inferiority of American culture: "The Metropolitan Opera has been closed. And that in a country that has only a single opera and whose leadership is insolent enough to wage war on behalf of a European culture allegedly threatened by us!" Joseph Goebbels, *Diaries 1942–1943,* ed. Louis P. Lochner (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1948), pp. 180–81. To set the record straight: the Met was never closed at any time during World War II. The only occasions for which the Met ever closed were Kennedy's assassination, the death of a singer during the opening night of *The Makropulos Case,* and a blackout in the city caused by a snowstorm. In 1942, there were opera houses in Cincinnati, San Francisco, Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Hartford, Miami, Charleston, and other cities. I would like to express my thanks to John Church, information service director at OPERA America, who was kind enough to provide this information.

[14] Wyndham Lewis, *The Hitler Cult* (1939; New York: Gordon Press, 1972), p. 47.

and France, it had been vigorously transformed and thus survived in Germany. National Socialism had preserved the anarchistic and artistic attitudes characteristic of early fascism: a youthful disrespect for established authority and the general will to *épater le bourgeois,* especially since the bourgeoisie was, to a large extent, identified with Jewish culture.[15]

Rilke had once seen in Mussolini above all a man of poetic qualities. Fascism was seen by many as the equivalent of *l'art pour l'art* in politics.[16] For authors like Brasillach, Drieu, and Alphonse de Chateaubriant, it seemed only natural that any politician who dreamed of being a poet must become a fascist—as Degrelle, Mussolini, Hitler, and Codreanu did. This was a curious statement in a country where socialists like Léon Blum also dreamed of being Flaubert. And yet, admiration for what Brasillach would call "the aesthetic sensibilities" of Hitler as an individual and National Socialism as a movement also had a political effect.[17] Many *hommes de lettres* who were skeptics when they set out to attend the rallies of the National Socialist Party in Nuremberg returned as fanatics: "Oui, Hitler est bon" was Alphonse de Chateaubriant's résumé in 1937, whereby a strange aesthetic fascination was turned into a dangerous moral judgment.[18] These writers and intellectuals, without necessarily becoming unmitigated admirers of the Nazis or, certainly, of Germany at large, helped to create a context of empathy and understanding that made collaboration not only possible but honorable and even necessary. This helps to explain why the SS division "Charlemagne," which consisted of French and francophone volunteers, was among the last troops defending Hitler's Chancellery in Berlin against the Red Army. Fired by anti-Communist feelings and the deeply engrained anti-Americanism of the French Right of the thirties, they be-

[15] Here I cannot pay due attention to the difference between "collaboration with Germany" and "collaborationism with the Nazis" that has been stressed by Stanley Hoffmann. Cf. his article "Self-Ensnared: Collaboration with Nazi Germany," in *Decline or Renewal? France since the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), pp. 26–44.

[16] Cf. Erwin von Beckerath, *Wesen und Werden des faschistischen Staates* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1927).

[17] William R. Tucker, "Politics and Aesthetics: The Fascism of Robert Brasillach," *Western Political Quarterly* 15 (1962): 608.

[18] Alphonse de Chateaubriant, *La gerbe des forces (Nouvelle Allemagne)* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1937), p. 69. But not only the French fascists were impressed by the Nuremberg party rallies. In 1937, Nevile Henderson went there for the first time: "The effect, which was both solemn and beautiful, was like being inside a cathedral of ice . . . . I had spent six years in St. Petersburg before the war in the best days of the old Russian ballet, but in grandiose beauty I have never seen a ballet to compare with it." Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), pp. 66–67.

lieved they were fighting a culture war in which European values had to be defended against Asiatic bolshevism and American materialism. It is this far-reaching aesthetic underpinning of National Socialist politics that makes it so wrong to make light of the films of Leni Riefenstahl or an author like Paul de Man's predilections for German "aesthetic nationalism,"[19] to see them as expressions of a merely peripheral and hence morally defensible sympathy for Nazism. They point to the heart of the matter.

Art and Morality

In 1939, an extraordinary and shocking portrait of Hitler was published in *Esquire.* The portrait was shocking not least because of its title: "That Man Is My Brother." The author was Thomas Mann. Not only was Hitler more representative of his country than the world had originally thought. Not only did even a likable observer come to detect, in the dreadful Nazi physiognomy, familiar German features. With Thomas Mann, a great artist seemed to take Hitler's artistic claims seriously. The disappointed bohemian painter who passed unopposed from one political triumph to the other was a catastrophe, a miserable phenomenon, and yet one could not help viewing him with a certain shuddering admiration: "Must I now, however much it hurts, regard the man as an artist-phenomenon? Mortifyingly enough, it is all there: the difficulty, the laziness, the pathetic formlessness in youth . . . . The lazy, vegetating existence in the depths of a moral and mental Bohemia; the fundamental arrogance that thinks itself too good for any sensible and honorable activity, on the grounds of its vague intuition that it is reserved for something else . . . . A brother—a rather unpleasant and mortifying brother. He makes me nervous, the relationship is painful to a degree. But I will not disclaim it."[20]

Thomas Mann's confession was convincing not least because here an artist made things difficult for himself by admitting, painful though it was, a certain aesthetic appeal in Hitler and in National Socialism. Given his admiration for Richard Wagner, in whom we saw one of the

[19] Cf. Lindsay Waters, "Paul de Man: A Sketch of Two Generations," in *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism,* ed. Werner Hamacher et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 397–403.

[20] Thomas Mann, "That Man Is My Brother," *Esquire* 11, no. 3 (1939): 3, 132.

great German "Masters," Mann must indeed have hesitated to bring Hitler and Wagner together at all. Yet he qualified Hitler's ideas as "a distorted phase of Wagnerism" and called Hitler's reverence for the musician-artist well founded, if rather illegitimate. The hours when he hated Hitler the miserable, Mann said, were not his best hours. Mann said he was able to cope with Hitler only in those other hours when he overcame his hatred and used the device he recognized as the prerogative and prerequisite of all creative writing: irony. "That Man Is My Brother" is a literary masterpiece—and thereby points to the limits of art and literature. Caught in irony, Thomas Mann the artist was unable to come to terms with a phenomenon like Hitler, since "the moral sphere . . . is really not altogether the artist's concern." It was the moral distance inherent in the arts and in literature that, in European history, had led many to regard the great man, the genius, as usually an aesthetic, not an ethical phenomenon. So, whether one liked it or not, Hitler—in part an aesthetic phenomenon in which madness was tempered with discretion—must also be called a genius.

In portraying Hitler, Thomas Mann anticipated that, with National Socialism, "German Culture," strictly speaking, must come to an end. He also pointed to the moral limits of artistic aspiration and aesthetic judgment. He did not fall prey to the illusion and hope that there is an elective affinity between artistic Modernism and democratic beliefs. Almost the opposite seems to be true. Among the great painters whom Hitler and his comrades publicly despised, quite a few would have been only too glad to be accepted by this third-rate painter, because they felt close to his ideas. In calling Hitler his brother, Mann also helped an uncomfortable truth come to light. At its core, artistic Modernism was by no means genuinely democratic; rather, it overtly displayed a propensity for authoritarian if not totalitarian views. As an aesthetic program, Modernism could not be condemned on moral grounds. To avoid censorship, it had to be contained, as it were, in a social context in which moral considerations permeated politics and public life.

That's why the illusory overrating of culture played such a dangerous role in German history. When culture was accepted as a compensation for politics, the absence of morality in the public sphere was accepted as well. The aesthetic appeal first of fascism and later of National Socialism was not a superficial phenomenon. It must be a core element in any attempt to explain the attractiveness of Nazi ideology for a large segment of the German bourgeoisie and many German artists

and intellectuals. When members of the London Institute of Sociology predicted that Germany would be able to survive Nazism only if its core cultural values, represented by Goethe, were restored, it fell prey to the grand German illusion: culture always came first, politics followed. The contrary was true. To survive the civilizational break it had inflicted upon Europe, Germany would have to give up the most German of all ideologies: the illusion that culture can compensate for politics. But this process took a long time. "German Culture" survived the Second World War well into the second German republic. One of the reasons for this was a blurring of exile and emigration.

The Blurring of Exile and Emigration

In the summer of 1948, the German writer Gottfried Benn, whose poems and prose had tested the German language to the extreme, wrote a letter from Berlin to *Merkur,* the magazine that was to become the leading intellectual publication in postwar Germany. Benn had been blacklisted by the Allies for his alleged adherence to the Nazi regime. In his letter, he offered a sweeping explanation for the past and future catastrophes of his times: "In my view, the West is doomed not at all by the totalitarian systems or the crimes of the SS, not even by its material impoverishment or the Gottwalds and Molotovs, but by the abject surrender of its intelligentsia to political concepts. The *zoon politicon,* that Greek blunder, that Balkan notion—that is the germ of our impending doom."[21] Benn, a master of surprising prose, thus turned the classical problem of Germany's intelligentsia upside-down. He did not deplore the aloofness of German intelligentsia from the public realm that had made them easy prey for the Nazis—he pretended that the intellectual had failed to remain unpolitical and had thereby contributed to a political catastrophe. Benn was an admirer of Plato's *Republic,* which he called the most impressive vision of humankind ever conceived. In Book X of the *Republic,* the philosopher explains why poetry must be exiled from the city.[22] Benn also wanted to separate poetry from politics. But whereas Plato had banned poetry from the city because it was concerned neither with truth nor with virtue, Benn turned things around and took

[21] Gottfried Benn, "Letter from Berlin, July 1948," in *Prose, Essays, Poems,* ed. Volkmar Sander (New York: Continuum, 1987), p. 80

[22] Cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1964), pp. 133ff.

Plato's proscription as a warrant for cultural escapism. At the same time, he acted like a seer who claims a privileged point of view—thus sounding a strange echo of the preposterous ambitions that a free-floating intelligentsia had hatched during the Weimar Republic.

Benn closed his letter in bitter irony:

> And so farewell, and greetings from this blockaded city without electric power, from the very part of the city which, in consequence of that Greek blunder and the resulting historical world, is on the brink of famine. Written in a room of many shadows, where there is light for two hours out of twenty-four: for a dark, rainy summer, incidentally, robs the city of its last chance of brief happiness, and the spring lays autumn over these ruins. But it is the city whose brilliance I loved, whose misery I now endure as that of the place where I belong, the city in which I lived to see the Second, the Third, and now the Fourth Reich, and from which nothing will ever make me emigrate. Indeed, one might prophesy a future for it now: tensions are developing in its matter-of-factness, changes of pace and interferences are developing in its lucidity, something ambiguous is starting up, an ambivalence such as centaurs or amphibia are born from. Finally, let us thank General Clay, whose Skymasters will, I hope, convey this letter to you.

Written in his nervous and original prose, Benn's letter displays in a nutshell the German mindset immediately after the end of the Second World War: the lack of any feeling of responsibility or regret; boundless self-pity; and unwillingness to learn from past experience. If one had to explain why reeducation in Germany was bound to fail, this letter could provide the key. Yet neither the open disdain for democracy nor the tacit acceptance of the Nazi regime as a legitimate period in German history is the most important passage in this disturbing document. Let me quote Benn's words once more: This is "the city whose brilliance I loved, whose misery I now endure as that of the place where I belong, the city in which I lived to see the Second, the Third, and now the Fourth Reich, and from which nothing will ever make me emigrate." The poet could not even emigrate—because he perceived himself as already living in exile. Berlin, the blockaded city, is the metaphor for an existence in exile; and Benn—who had been expelled from the National Chamber of Writers (*Reichsschrifttumskammer*) in 1937, who had been no anti-Semite and had never even thought of joining the Nazi Party—believed himself to have lived in exile for most of his life, artistically as well as politically.

When the war ended, emigration and exile had become, in Germany,

blurred genres of existence.[23] For much of the German intelligentsia—scientists, artists, and writers alike—confusing past moral options became the prerequisite for mastering the present and planning the future. It was accompanied by an attempt to obliterate the boundaries between the public and the private sphere. Undeniable individual suffering was enlisted in the cause of shedding collective responsibility. "I mention my family," Benn wrote after the war; "three of my brothers died in battle; a fourth was wounded twice; the remainder, totally bombed out, lost everything. A first cousin died at the Somme, his only son in the recent war; nothing is left of that branch of the family. I myself went to war as a doctor, 1914–18 and 1939–44. My wife died in 1945 in direct consequence of military operations. This brief summary should be about average for a fairly large German family's lot in the first half of the twentieth century."[24] In this tale, sad and true, suffering alone counted. There was no quest for the cause or search for responsibility.

Not 1945, the year in which the Second World War ended, but 1948, the year of the monetary reform, must be seen as the turning point in the history of postwar Germany. Not bad conscience but a new currency propelled the change that brought with it a new society. German history in the twentieth century is a disclaimer of discontinuities. Neither the year 1945 nor the year 1933 marked a break—at least not for large segments of the scientific intelligentsia and the cultural elite. When intellectual temperaments, similar in their antidemocratic *ressentiment* and yet as different from each other as the philosopher Martin Heidegger, the jurist Carl Schmitt, the poet Gottfried Benn, and the officer and anarchist Ernst Jünger, expressed their sympathy for the Nazis' seizure of power, one must see this not as a conversion, but as a sign of continuity. The year 1933 was a turning point in German history, all right, but it meant the return to a Germany that had not lost its sense of self-worth after Versailles; 1933 was not a break, it was the fulfillment of German history. As Gottfried Benn put it, the new state had to be commended not least because it promised to give culture its due: the separation between politics and culture was about to end. In the state of the Nazis, the cultural nation would be reborn.

Walter Benjamin made the distinction between the politicization of culture, which was characteristic of Communist regimes, and the

[23] The allusion is, of course, to Clifford Geertz's "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *American Scholar* 49, no. 2 (1980):165–79.

[24] Quoted from E. B. Ashton, "Foreword," in Benn, *Prose, Essays, Poems,* p. xiii.

aestheticization of politics, which was part of fascist ideology. Hard as it is for us to understand today, it was the aesthetic appeal that turned large segments of the German intelligentsia into followers of the Nazi regime—at least for a while. The sympathies of many fellow travelers dwindled only when, on June 30, 1934, dissidents within the National Socialist Party and suspected enemies of the state were executed without trial. Members of the intelligentsia who had sympathized with the Nazis reacted in disgust. However, it was more the absence of taste than the lawlessness that they found intolerable in the behavior of the Nazi death squads. They were not morally appalled, but aesthetically disappointed. Rather unwillingly, I believe, Gottfried Benn made this clear when he wrote to his friend, the writer Ina Seidel, on August 27, 1934: "I live with my lips pressed tightly together, inwardly and outwardly. I can't go along with this anymore. Certain events have pushed me over the brink. What a horrible tragedy. The whole thing begins to look to me like a third-rate theater that constantly announces a performance of *Faust* when the cast hardly qualifies for a potboiler like [the operetta] *Hussar Fever.* How great seemed the beginning, and how dirty it all looks today."[25] How dazzled must he and others have been to believe that the Nazis would ever be able to play *Faust,* i.e., to take culture seriously. This was the dream of much of the cultural elite: that Germany would become a state in which politics and culture would no longer be separated. It was the fascist dream of a theatrical state.[26] When the dream turned out to be an illusion, it was disappointment, not distance or opposition, that followed. After 1934, many German intellectuals would have gladly remained fascists—if the Nazis had only tolerated it.

The lips pressed tightly together—this was to become a prominent feature of Germany's intellectual physiognomy during the Nazi period. One could still think but hardly speak and certainly not speak up. After 1934, many intellectuals who stayed on went into what they called "inner exile." "On January 1," Gottfried Benn wrote, "I am going to leave my apartment, my practice, my whole life here in Berlin and I am going back into the army . . . . I don't know what place they will send me to.

[25] Quoted from Reinhard Paul Becker, "Introduction," in Benn, *Prose, Essays, Poems,* p. xxviii.

[26] I have not used the term "theatre state" because Clifford Geertz wrote that "the expressive nature of the Balinese state . . . was always pointed not toward tyranny" and that in Bali "power served pomp, not pomp served power." This qualification almost precludes the borrowing of even a term, not to mention a concept. Cf. Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 13.

My future is uncertain . . . . But morally and economically I cannot go on living like this, I have to cut myself loose from all my ties here. It is an aristocratic form of emigration."[27] "German Culture" thus survived: the belief that while politics took its murderous turns, the better part of Germany, the *Kulturstaat,* would remain unharmed. After 1945, these intellectuals did not for a moment think of themselves as fellow travelers who had, though indirectly and with a certain degree of reluctance, added legitimacy to the Nazi regime and prolonged its criminal life span. Having felt aesthetically averse to the Nazis was enough to foster their conviction that, in the recesses of their heart, they had also been contemptuous of Nazi politics. They had lived in exile. They had been resistance fighters.

This strange yet powerful self-delusion was enhanced by a curious fact. There was one institution in Germany that withstood the Nazi seduction without compromise: the German language. Unlike France, where the literary quality of the *Nouvelle Revue Française,* for instance, hardly declined when Pierre Drieu la Rochelle took over from Jean Paulhan and where the *collabos* wrote as well as members of the *Résistance,* the German language put up decided resistance—admittedly, against the majority of its speakers and writers.[28] There is no National Socialist literature of any rank. As a consequence, those who had been writing in "inner exile" with no chance of publication later thought that they had also lived in opposition.

Reticence to Emigrate

When Gottfried Benn was asked why he had remained in Germany even after 1934, he replied that the idea of emigrating had never occurred to him. First of all, there was no pressure to leave the country. More important still: to go into exile was no viable intellectual option, because it had no tradition in Germany. True, Marx and Engels had fled to London to wait for times to change and in recent years Spanish intellectuals had fled their country to escape persecution there. However, the notion of "emigration," which would only later acquire its entire ethical weight,

[27] Gottfried Benn, letter to Ina Seidel, quoted from R. P. Becker, "Introduction," in Benn, *Prose, Essays, Poems,* p. xxix.

[28] Cf. Pierre Hébey, *La NRF des années sombres, juin 1940–juin 1941* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

did not yet exist. When members of his generation left Germany, Benn said, they were not taking the political action of emigration, they were just trying to escape personal hardships and unpleasant circumstances by traveling elsewhere. That was a curious statement and a cynical one indeed. It seemed as if Benn, for instance, had never heard of Heinrich Heine's Parisian exile—though, by the way, he quoted Heine only a few sentences later. There was an anti-Semitic tone in the rejection of emigration and exile: a German could not possibly adopt what had been the fate of the Jewish people for centuries.[29]

One may be inclined not to take Benn's argument too seriously. After all, it did not explain anything; it was just an excuse. The case of Thomas Mann, however, shows how difficult it was for a non-Jewish German intellectual to accept the idea of emigration and of exile. In February 1933, Thomas Mann had left Germany for Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris, where, after a triumphant beginning in Munich, he was scheduled to talk about Richard Wagner, whose art, as Mann was eager to remind his audiences at home and abroad, was the epitome of "German Culture" insofar as it displayed "a complete anarchistic indifference to the state, as long as the spiritually German, the "Deutsche Kunst' survives."[30] A vacation in Switzerland was to follow. There, his children convinced him not to return to Germany. In the beginning, Thomas Mann tried to see the necessity of exile as spiritually beneficial and as a welcome opportunity "to throw off those obligations I had assumed in the course of the years out of social considerations [and] to concentrate hereafter on my own life."[31] A more German reaction to the exile forced upon him is hardly imaginable: no political outburst, just a quiet retreat into inwardness.

The thought of returning remained with Mann. His wish, hardly understandable in hindsight, was to go back to Germany and live there in a kind of inner emigration whose aristocratic character might have resembled that of Gottfried Benn: "One would not have to behave like [Gerhart] Hauptmann or [Richard] Strauss, but one could try to pre-

[29] In July 1934, Thomas Mann speculated about the fate of the German people after the end of the Nazi regime: "Perhaps history has in fact intended for them the role of the Jews, one which even Goethe thought befitted them: to be one day scattered throughout the world and to view their existence with an intellectually proud self-irony." Thomas Mann, *Past Masters,* trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), p. 220.

[30] Thomas Mann, "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," in *Past Masters,* pp. 90, 86.

[31] Thomas Mann, March 15, 1933, in *Diaries 1918–1939* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), p. 127.

serve a noble attitude and refrain from any public appearance."[32] For him as well, the point of no return is reached with the Röhm massacres. Until then, Mann had withstood pressure from his children and his friends to react publicly to what was happening in Germany. Eventually, he yielded. The decision to act politically came with an artistic farewell. On August 9, 1934, Mann wrote in his diary: "The whole day nothing but rain and thunderstorms, so that one cannot go out. I made excerpts for my political statement . . . . In the evening I browsed through my diaries and noted passages of political importance . . . . Katia and the children were listening to the radio, which was broadcasting the 'Twilight of the Gods' from Bayreuth, which was constantly disturbed by the thunderstorm. I resisted listening to it, I do not want to hear anything from Germany anymore . . . . It's nothing but cultural propaganda. My toothache is coming back."[33]

Was that the end of "German Culture"? Not quite. Thomas Mann had taken the interest the Nazis expressed in cultural matters quite seriously, even though he found it appalling. On September 8, 1933, he read a Franconian newspaper

> that was sent to me for some mysterious reason, containing a speech by the "Fuehrer" about culture. Astounding. This man, a typical product of the lower middle class, with a limited education and an acquired taste for philosophizing, is truly a curious phenomenon. No doubt at all that for him, in contrast to types like Göring and Röhm, the main concern is not war but "German culture" . . . . Never before have the men of power, the men of action in world affairs, set themselves up in this way as the preceptors of their people, even of mankind. Neither Napoleon nor Bismarck did so . . . . They took political measures to promote what aspects of . . . cultural life seemed useful to them, rigorously suppressing what went against them. But never would they have spoken *ex cathedra* to proclaim a cultural theory for the nation or to outline a cultural program . . . . To be sure, they had as yet no notion of the "totalitarian state," which provides not only a power base for everything and even dominates culture—culture above all.[34]

Mann despised the cultural ambitions of the Nazis, and yet there was a seductive power in their totalitarian attempt to give politics a cultural

[32] Thomas Mann, November 20, 1933; in *Tagebücher 1933–1934,* ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1977), p. 14 (my translation).

[33] Ibid., p. 502 (my translation).

[34] Mann, *Diaries,* p. 170–71 (September 8, 1933).

base. That is why, even in exile, he had to say to himself: "Germany, even a Germany wracked by confusion, is a tremendous country [indeed]."[35]

The primacy accorded to culture so uniquely in Germany did not cease casting its spell on Thomas Mann—even when this idea was shrouded in something as dreadful and despicable as the Nazi ideology. Even though Mann had once declared himself to be above all suspicion of wanting to become a new Fichte, a *praeceptor patriae,*[36] he often toyed with the idea and almost burst into tears when he came to realize that the decision to remain in exile had made it impossible for him ever to play this role. On March 14, 1934, a visitor from Germany quoted a remark by Gottfried Benn: "'Do you know Thomas Mann's house in Munich? There is truly something Goethean about it.'" Mann felt tormented to the depths of his heart: "The fact that I was driven away from that existence is a serious flaw in the destined pattern of my life, one I am attempting—in vain, it appears—to come to terms with, and the impossibility of setting it right and reestablishing that existence impresses itself upon me again and again, no matter how I look at it, and it gnaws at my heart."[37] As these words make clear, the firm conviction was that, even in exile, "German Culture" would survive and could not only compensate for politics, but actually teach politics a lesson, as Goethe had been able to do, having once, almost without irony, exclaimed: "What do the Germans want? Have they not me?"[38] That was the poet's dream: not just to be readmitted to the city, but to become a teacher to its citizens. Only Goethe, so it seemed, had been able to fulfill this role, more than a hundred years earlier, in Weimar, far from exile.

Weimar and St. Helena

Last year, I was asked to give a speech at the convention of the Goethe Institute in Weimar, where the Goethe medals are bestowed upon foreign scholars for their outstanding service to German culture abroad. My speech had the title "Goethe's Presence of Mind." Immediately after

[35] Ibid., p. 155 (May 3, 1933).

[36] Thomas Mann, "An Appeal to Reason" [1930], in *Order of the Day: Political Essays and Speeches of Two Decades* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), pp. 46–68. Gottfried Benn especially liked this essay. He praised Thomas Mann for having almost played a singular role in trying to save the Weimar Republic while it was still alive.

[37] Mann, *Diaries,* p. 200 (March 14, 1934).

[38] Mann quotes Goethe, "that greatest unpatriot of them all," in "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," p. 86.

my talk, the prime minister of Thuringia, the German state in which Weimar is located, came to me and reproached me for having done Weimar and German culture a disservice by quoting a passage from another speech on Goethe.

I had quoted from the address in honor of Goethe that Paul Valéry had given in the Grand Amphithéâtre of the Sorbonne on April 30, 1932, one hundred years after the poet's death. Valéry had great difficulties in preparing his speech, as he wrote in a letter to André Gide. He did not know German and did not know much of Goethe, having read only few of his works, among them *Faust* in French translation and some biological stuff, *crâne et plante,* which he called, somewhat condescendingly, "not bad at all." It had taken him five whole days to type his speech on his old Remington typewriter, and when it was written he no longer wanted to read it. There was something in Goethe that disturbed him: "Il y a quelque chose qui me gêne chez Goethe." And yet I do not know of a greater tribute to Goethe, "the most complex figure in the world," than this speech. Valéry used the opportunity of his talk in the Sorbonne to dwell on a theme that had been the *idée directrice* of many of his own works: how might the world, and especially Europe, have developed if political and intellectual power "had been able to join forces, or at least if the relations between them had been less precarious."[39] Valéry never stopped dreaming of what he called a *politique de l'esprit,* but he knew that he was only dreaming: "The two forms of power may well be incommensurable quantities; and it is no doubt necessary that they should be so."

Among the handful of men in which Valéry's dream seemed to have come true were Napoleon and Goethe, "one of them no doubt . . . the wisest, the other perhaps the maddest of mortals . . . both of them . . . the most exciting characters in the world."[40] That's why 1808, when Goethe and Napoleon met in Erfurt, was such a priceless moment in world history: "Coquetry was essential at such a meeting. Each wanted to appear at his ease, and carefully arranged his smile. They were two magicians attempting to charm one another. Napoleon assumed the role of emperor of the mind and even of literature. Goethe appeared as the embodiment of mind itself. Did the emperor perhaps have a clearer sense of the true nature of his power than Goethe imagined? Napoleon knew better than anyone that his power, more than any other power in

[39] Paul Valéry, "Address in Honor of Goethe," in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry,* ed. Jackson Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), vol. 9, p. 147.

[40] Ibid., p. 173.

the world, was in the strictest sense magic—the power of minds over minds—a spell!"[41] Valéry's description of the Erfurt meeting is extraordinary, a drama in itself, full of a tension that, even today, has lost nothing of its vibrant power. It is not just a meeting of two men of genius that Valéry describes, it is the meeting of the French and the German minds in their highest forms; never before and never again has the culture war characteristic of Franco-German history found a more delightful and yet ironic description. Valéry does not hesitate to admire Goethe, but into his glowing admiration he stirs a pinch of disturbing and in the end devastating critique—not so much of Goethe as of the German understanding of him.

Goethe is nothing less than the incorporation of inwardness, he is "courtier, confidant, minister, a diligent official, a poet, collector, and naturalist" at the same time; the great, in Germany perhaps the greatest, "apologist of the world of Appearances . . . . In the evening of his days, in the heart of Europe, himself the center of attraction and admiration of all intelligent people, the center of the greatest curiosity, the subtlest and noblest master of the art of living and of deepening the taste for living," Valéry writes, Goethe probably thought of Napoleon, "perhaps his greatest memory, whose look still lingered in his eyes."[42] Valéry's words show nothing but admiration, so it seems, for the greatest German poet, though they were tempered by Goethe's admiration for a great French mind. In truth, this admiration served to prepare a deadly blow, not to Goethe but to "German Culture": "Wolfgang von Goethe was to die a little more than ten years after the death of the Emperor, in that little Weimar which was a sort of delicious St. Helena for him . . . ."[43]

Weimar a delicious St. Helena—that meant that the happy coexistence of political and intellectual power had been nothing but an episode in German history, a remote island, an exile from which no Goethe would return. In Germany, there was a political promise in culture then that had not been fulfilled. Valéry gave his speech in 1932.

[41] Ibid., p. 171.

[42] Ibid., pp. 156, 161. In this context, it is interesting to note that Maurice Barrès called Goethe's drama *Iphigenie* "a civilizing work which 'defends the rights of society against the arrogance of the spirit'"—a rejection of "German Culture" if there ever was one. I am quoting Barrès from Thomas Mann's speech "Goethe and Democracy," which he delivered in the Library of Congress on May 2, 1949. It seems to me that this speech, in which Mann mentions the Sorbonne address from 1932, is an implicit answer to Paul Valéry—and full of complicity.

[43] Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

Nine months later, the Nazis came to power. One of the first concentration camps was built in the immediate vicinity of Weimar, at Buchenwald.

Tomorrow I shall speak on "The End of 'German Culture.'"

II. UNIFICATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE END OF "GERMAN CULTURE"

Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche once remarked that the German spirit is an indigestion: it does not finish with anything. I have difficulties in finishing with "German Culture." Whenever it seems to be over with, it creeps back. As I have tried to argue in my first lecture yesterday, "German Culture"—by which I understand the traditional overrating of culture at the expense of politics—did not end with the Nazi regime and with the Second World War. It survived well into the Federal Republic, not least due to a blurring of exile and emigration. That is where I want to pick up today. First, I will discuss the argument that "German Culture" survived abroad. Notably in the United States, it was victorious in defeat. The "Westernization" of the Federal Republic almost sealed its fate. The division of Germany, however, kept it alive. The process of European integration has made it obsolete. But now "German Culture" has become a European problem.

"German Culture" Abroad: Victorious in Defeat

To prepare for these lectures, I read books at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton that once had been checked out by Ernst Kantorowicz and Erwin Panofsky or that were bequeathed to the institute by the late Felix Gilbert. I was very fortunate in having the chance to talk with friends like Albert Hirschman and Fritz Stern. I understand why Abraham Flexner, when asked who had done most for the institute, dryly replied: "Adolf Hitler." The names I have mentioned do not represent the tradition of "German Culture" as I have defined it here. Rather, they share with another émigré, Thomas Mann, the view that politics cannot

be reduced to culture and that, for the intellectual, democracy is the readiness to be political. The best of Germany's cultural tradition that survived in exile, and notably in the United States, was not "German Culture."

A side-effect of emigration, however, was that "German Culture" survived as well. While the Allies fought Hitler, German thought conquered the West. "The new American life-style [became] a Disneyland version of the Weimar Republic for the whole family."[1] This is a quotation from what the *New York Times* called "that rarest of documents, a genuinely profound book."[2] I do not regard Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* as a particularly good diagnosis. But it is a striking symptom of the uneasiness that the survival of "German Culture" caused in the United States. Bloom deplores an invasion that led to a dramatic change in American philosophical thought and to the formation of a new language, one the Americans from now on felt compelled to use in analyzing their own culture. Cabdrivers used worlds like *Gestalt* and Max Weber's terminology invaded everyday life, like the Charisma Cleaners, which Bloom, to his horror, found in Chicago.

In the nineteenth century, when authors like John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold tried to soften utilitarian thought by propagating what they called the "culture of the feelings," they turned to German philosophy and poetry—as did the French whenever they tired of Cartesianism. The same happened in the United States. Nietzsche's rejection of rationalism on rational grounds, Freud's discovery of the unconscious, Max Weber's attempt at disenchanting the world, Heidegger's Hellenism, Thomas Mann's mysteries and sufferings as described in *Death in Venice*—they all joined in an attack on the rational project of American culture. Americans thus forgot that their own intellectual legacy had been one of philosophical and political cosmopolitanism. They were no longer able to talk with any conviction about good and evil anymore and had become utterly dependent on German missionaries for their knowledge of Greece and Rome, Judaism and Christianity. Admiringly, Bloom tells the story of Alexandre Koyré, who was excited when, in 1940 in Chicago, i.e., in exile, one of his students, unaware that the philosopher was not his contemporary, always spoke in his paper of "Mr. Aristotle." That was his American dream: to send Professor Weber back

[1]Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 147.

[2]Roger Kimball, "The Groves of Ignorance," *New York Times Book Review,* April 5, 1987, p. 7.

to Heidelberg and Dr. Freud back to Vienna, while not only Mr. Aristotle but also Mr. Plato and Mr. Locke and even Monsieur Rousseau would be granted permanent residency in the United States. The German émigrés and their legacy prevented this dream from coming true.

One must not forget, and certainly not at this point, that Allan Bloom's teacher at Chicago was an émigré—Leo Strauss. One could argue that *The Closing of the American Mind* is nothing but an updated sequel to *Natural Right and History,* the Walgreen Lectures that Leo Strauss gave in 1949, the year two separate German states were founded. He asked whether the American nation still cherished its original faith, i.e., the self-evidence of the natural and divine foundations of the rights of man. He came to the conclusion that the difference between German thought on the one hand and that of Western Europe and the United States on the other had completely vanished. There was no longer any difference between the abandonment of the idea of natural right and adherence to it. With bitter irony, Leo Strauss concluded: "It would not be the first time that a nation, defeated on the battlefield and, as it were, annihilated as a political being, has deprived its conquerors of the most sublime fruit of victory by imposing on them the yoke of its own thought."[3] Victorious in defeat, "German Culture" had proven its fundamental assumption: it could not only compensate, it could even take its revenge on politics.

"German Culture" at Home: A Moral Failure Turned to Intellectual Advantage

Leo Strauss complained that German thought had become indistinguishable from Western thought in general. In retrospect, one must see this complaint of a German émigré as the prophecy of one of the great political success stories of the twentieth century. First the Federal Republic and then all of Germany became part of the West. The "Sonderweg," German exceptionalism, has finally flowed into the mainstream of parliamentary democracy, the market, and the rule of law. The revolt of culture against civilization is over. It no longer makes sense to think of culture as a compensation for politics. Today, we are witnessing the end of "German Culture." Fifty years ago, however, things looked different.

[3] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 2.

In the West, "German Culture" did not merely survive the war. It fared well after defeat and capitulation. Politics seemed to be discredited forever; a remilitarization of the country was unthinkable; only culture—due not least to the "inner exile" where it had taken refuge—was left with a legitimate past and hopes for the future. At the same time, it was shaped by emigration, exile, and reimmigration. It thereby became more and more difficult to identify purely German traditions of thought and scholarship; as a rule, a mixture of domestic and especially Anglo-Saxon traditions prevailed. The Federal Republic's political and military loyalty to the West was thus enhanced by its cultural "Westernization."

In 1964, when German sociologists recalled that an economist named Max Weber had written some interesting stuff around the turn of the century, the scholars they invited to talk about him were an émigré philosopher, Herbert Marcuse, who was now teaching in California; a French political scientist who had studied in Berlin, Raymond Aron; and an American sociologist who had graduated from Heidelberg, Talcott Parsons. It is almost beyond belief that in France an author like Emile Durkheim could have become a French classic only after a detour abroad. Ideas and ideologies of German origin, thoughts and thinkers, were not simply stored in exile; they survived in another cultural milieu by actively adapting to it. It was still easy for Georg Simmel to unmask pragmatism as nothing more than Nietzsche's thought in American disguise. After the Second World War, it had become much more difficult to identify the thoughts and traditions that first emigrated and then returned to Germany. Empirical social research, for instance, was widely regarded as an instrument of Anglo-Saxon reeducation; not many knew that it was already flourishing in Vienna when Columbia University was just taking shape.

The situation in East Germany was different. Forced political loyalty to the Communist régime in the Soviet Union was not conducive to restructuring scientific thought or cultural belief-systems in innovative ways. Yet, while the Federal Republic was Westernized, the German Democratic Republic did not undergo a similar process of Russification. While broken English became the *lingua franca* for West German tourists, many East Germans simply refused to speak Russian. The West was internationalized, while the East remained a province where the *Internationale* had to be sung daily. In the first German Republic of workers and peasants, no professor of German could read or teach Franz

Kafka, no philosopher could read or teach Ludwig Wittgenstein, no sociologist could read or teach Max Weber, no economist could read or teach John Maynard Keynes, no psychologist could read or teach Sigmund Freud in an unbiased way—if they could read and teach the works of these authors at all. Censorship took its toll. In the East, the years from 1933 to 1989 belong to a single epoch conspicuously lacking in cultural modernity.

In West Germany, a moral failure turned into intellectual advantage. Denazification foundered. The old élites were reactivated rather soon. The confrontation between émigrés and fellow travelers, between opponents of the régime and its collaborators, between Jews who had been driven out of their fatherland and anti-Semites who had been responsible for their flight, led to the production of works of art and scholarly books both provocative and full of innovative energy. In philosophy, the intellectual tension created by a constellation of thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Karl Löwith, and Hannah Arendt was awesome. In sociology, the confrontation of the Frankfurt School with the émigré Karl Popper, on the one hand, and scholars like Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Schelsky, both members of the National Socialist party, on the other, shaped the development of the discipline. To this day, German historians are caught in bitter feuds over their professional legacy, haunted by past masters who were both moral cowards and intellectual bravados during the time of the Third Reich.

In East Germany, good moral intentions turned out to be an intellectual disaster. Communists who had survived Nazi persecution and Russian exile tried to make denazification work. Culture became politically correct, but also boring and repetitive. Debates among the intelligentsia dealt with minor corrections of the established cultural canon, but they never questioned the canon itself. Once seen as stimulating within the intellectual micro-climate of the GDR, these debates have today rightly been forgotten. Bertolt Brecht was something of an exception, but even he turned more and more into a principal who was, above all, interested in the survival of his company. The Communist émigrés first helped the GDR to win moral recognition, but this recognition withered away with the fall of communism. When the archives of the Communist Party in Moscow were opened, it became evident what an ignominious role the leading heroes of German emigration to the East had played during the purges and political trials of the thirties. They had left one totalitarian régime—only to succumb to another.

The Failure of the Interpreting Class

What the cultural elite of the GDR had learned better than anything was the art of being ruled (Wyndham Lewis). Unlike Poland or Czechoslovakia, East Germany never had a sizable samizdat or a catacomb culture; and unlike Hungary, it did not—and could not—produce groups of engaged émigrés. Czech writers who fled to Paris or to London thereby became alienated speakers. Writers from Leipzig who went to Munich or to Berlin were still living in Germany. More important still: they remained native speakers. Those who stayed in the GDR found, as a rule, ways and means to come to an understanding with the *nomenklatura.* Not all intellectuals became fellow travelers, to be sure, but a great many of them enjoyed the security and subsidies accorded to the cultural elite by a Communist regime that leveled, but never equalized. When Carlyle spoke of the man of letters as a modern priest and of the "Priesthood of the Writers of Books" that had become so influential in modern times, he was not speaking merely metaphorically. He believed that literary men who wanted to fulfill their mission ought to be poor. They had to form a monastic order. Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe probably committed their worst mistake in forcing members of the cultural elite to either collaborate or join the lower classes. Many of them had to work as furnace stokers and road sweepers, as cabdrivers and handymen. Thus they became members of mendicant orders indeed. The Communist regimes in the East were dealt a deadly blow by an intellectual proletariat they themselves had created. The situation in the GDR was different. Its cultural elite suffered from a lack of discriminative strain: its members lived in a culture with blurred moral alternatives. When the cultural elite was put to the test with the breakdown of the regime, the elite's failure became obvious. It was the failure of the interpreting class.

The first successful German revolution was a true and spontaneous *levée en masse*—aided by the very visible hand of Mikhail Gorbachev. It was neither the result of a long and open struggle against Communist rule, like the fight of Solidarnosč in Poland, nor the final triumph of twenty years of resistance in the underground of Prague, nor the culmination of shrewd piecemeal reform in Budapest. The German November revolution was neither led by a workers' union nor designed by the cultural and intellectual elite. Its heroes were hundreds and thousands of ordinary people who grasped the chance to leave a dictatorship by

fleeing to the West German embassies in Prague and Budapest. Its heroes were thousands and hundreds of thousands who took to the streets of Leipzig and of Dresden. Their exit and their voice created the revolution.[4] In this revolution, the intellectuals were with the crowd, but not of it. The heroes of this revolution were, with a few exceptions, no intellectuals. In contrast to the upheaval in Prague, for instance, artists and students were not spearheading the revolt. "Wir sind das Volk" (We are the people) was a most appropriate slogan indeed. Intellectuals admired the slogan—and misunderstood it completely. In the framework of their own mentality, this slogan had to be read as the wish for the immediate realization of a socialist dream, while in reality it expressed the farewell to any socialist utopia. When the Berlin Wall was breached on the eve of November 9 more than ten years ago, the slogan was only slightly changed. Now the masses no longer chanted: We are the people, but: We are one people. This minor exchange of just one single word, however, revealed their true intentions: to join the capitalist West. At that time it became obvious that the cultural elite—in the East as well as in the West—had been unable to read the public mood. Intellectuals had failed on their own ground. They had not only misjudged a political power structure and overrated the strength of the Eastern economy. They had misunderstood the meaning of words. Culture is about interpretation and making sense. In Germany, the cultural elite has had great difficulties in making sense of unification. The failure of the cultural elite was neither misjudgment of amateur-politicians nor the miscalculation of would-be economists: it was the failure of the interpreting class.

The Devil and the Economy

In decades of mutual denial, conflict, coexistence, and eventually cooperation between the two German states, "German Culture" survived in the center of political rhetoric and on the margins of reality. However deep the divide between a capitalist German state and a socialist German state seemed to be, allegedly they remained indivisible as a cultural nation. When the real wall collapsed more than ten years ago, it became

[4] Cf. Albert O. Hirschman's brilliant interpretation of the collapse of the German Democratic Republic: "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic," in *A Propensity to Self-Subversion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 9–44.

obvious that unification had not been seen as a realistic scenario either by the political leadership in the West or by the *nomenklatura* in the East. It also seemed as if the cultural elite in both Germanies had thought of unification as Béranger had thought of the Republic: "I want to dream it, but not have it." At least, it had not wanted unification to happen the way it did. In the East, the unwillingness of the masses to realize the socialist dream was as much deplored by the intelligentsia as the so-called Deutschmark-Nationalism was disdained by intellectuals in the West. The belief in a common culture had been a much weaker motive, the longing for democracy had been a much lesser goal in the German revolution than the cultural elite had hoped for. Asking what the real driving force of the revolution had been, the cultural elite was given a clear answer: "It's the economy, stupid!"

It's time now to come back to the devil. In my first lecture I mentioned the two Goethe polls that were conducted in Germany in 1949 and fifty years later.[5] One of the more interesting results of these polls is the brilliant career that Mephisto has made for himself in the West. In 1949, when the Germans were asked which character in Goethe's drama *Faust* fascinated them most, 18% voted for Faust, 12% for Gretchen, and only 7% for Mephisto. In 1999, however, the preferences have turned around: in West Germany, 12% are now fascinated most by Mephisto and a mere 10% by Faust. In the East, not much has changed, at least not at first glance: 24% vote for Faust, 18% for Mephisto. The differences between East and West become even greater when only those are asked who have actually read *Faust:* now 34% in the West prefer Mephisto, 20% Faust. In the East, the result is exactly the reverse: 33% vote for Faust, 24% for Mephisto. These results have been interpreted as an indicator of a deep change of value-orientation and mentality observable in Germany over the past thirty years. "Be practical, my dear good sir!" Mephisto urges Faust. The Germans seem to have followed his advice—more so than Faust ever did. The times are over when John Dewey could call Germany a country where even cavalry generals relied on philosophy to bring home practical lessons. There are no cavalry generals anymore, and philosophy has come down from its high horse.

For a long time, the majority of the German population could not embrace the idea that enjoying one's life could be a legitimate way of

[5] Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *Demoskopie und Kulturgeschichte,* eine Goethe-Umfrage für das Nachtprogramm des NWDR 1949 (rpt. Allensbach/Bodensee: ZDF-Nachtstudio, 1999).

giving meaning to it. When asked whether having fun could give meaning to one's life, only 26% answered yes in 1974, but 56% did so twenty-five years later. Hedonism and the pleasure principle, as embodied by Mephisto, reign supreme. The East-West divide still exists, but it points more to problems of the past then to troubles for the future. The younger people are, the more they prefer Mephisto to Faust, in the West as well as in the East. There is no longer, as Faust whimpered, "A curse upon vain property, / On wife and child and husbandry! / A curse on mammon, when his gold / Lures us to rash heroic deeds, / Or when his easeful arms enfold / Us softly, pampering all our needs!" Rather, Germans in East and West are eager to follow Mephisto's advice: "Strike out, be free, / And learn what the good life can be."[6] Mephisto symbolizes a society for whose members private well-being counts, not public ideology.[7]

In the German conception of democracy, social welfare plays a central role. More than anywhere else in the West, the legitimacy of democracy is inextricably bound to a good performance of the economy and the functioning of an all-embracing system of social security. The abbreviation SWR, Ernst Fränkel once mockingly said, stands for German democracy, which must be defined as a Society without Risk.[8] In 1930, when Thomas Mann tried to defend the declining Weimar Republic, he was aware of the intricate linkage between the legitimacy of the existing political system and the performance of the economy. His courageous public speech was called "Appeal to Reason." In the September elections, reason had been dealt a terrible blow: the National Socialist Party had increased its share of the vote from 2.6% to 18.3% thereby making it the second largest party after the Social Democrats. Yet even on this occasion where he vigorously defended the Republic, Thomas Mann still doubted "whether the parliamentary system of western Europe, which Germany took over as being somehow available and convenient after the collapse of the feudal system, is really quite suited to her case; whether it does not in some sense and to some extent warp and do

[6] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part One,* trans. with an introduction by David Luke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 48, 49 (v. 1597–1603, 1542–43).

[7] During the Second World War, when Thomas Mann wrote a novel whose subject might also be described as the legacy of "German Culture," he could not but name it *Doctor Faustus.* When his son Klaus, in 1936, wrote a novel whose subject was the adaptability of the German mind to any political circumstance, he called it *Mephisto.*

[8] Cf. Ernst Fränkel, *Deutschland und die westlichen Demokratien* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968). Fränkel spoke of the GojR, the "Gesellschaft ohne jedes Risiko."

violence to her political ethic." The lack of authenticity prevented the Weimar Republic from winning political legitimacy; the lack of economic security deprived it of massive moral support. A combination of cultural and economic shortcomings doomed the Weimar Republic. It was too much, Mann said, to demand sound political thought from an economically ailing people—a very German sentence indeed. Having said this, Thomas Mann, a nonpolitical man no more but a committed Republican for quite some time, took refuge in "German Culture" again. When he affirmed that he did not want to become a *praeceptor patriae,* what he really wanted to say was almost the opposite: this was a time when—after politics had failed—the poet, the writer, the artist had to act. He proclaimed that form, "be it ever so playful, is akin to the spirit, to what leads one on to social betterment; and art is the sphere in which the conflict between the social and the ideal is resolved."[9] Culture had to come to the rescue of the Republic. But it was helpless, as it turned out before long. Four years after Mann had spoken of art as the sphere in which the great conflicts of the times could be solve, his books were burnt in Berlin.

Theology and "Realpolitik"

The stability of the second German Republic was based on the exceptional success of its economy and on its integration into Europe. For its citizens, accepting the constitution and reaping the benefits of the economic miracle were two sides of the same coin. Germany thus became a "normal" Western democracy. To tell the fate of "German Culture" in the four decades of the Federal Republic would be rather repetitive—despite 1968 and the years of terror, when intellectuals tried to achieve a cultural revolution at all costs. "German Culture," however, became an issue again with unification and with a renewed intrusion of theology into politics. On the one hand, we came to realize, to paraphrase the son of a German pastor, the stillbirth of politics from the spirit of theology. On the other hand, we are probably witnessing today the end of a secular consensus that shaped the political culture of the Federal Republic.

In his attack on German philosophical egotism that I discussed in

[9] Thomas Mann, "An Appeal to Reason," in *Order of the Day,* pp. 46–52.

my first lecture, George Santayana had written that "just as in pantheism God is naturalized into a cosmic force, so in German philosophy the Biblical piety of the earlier Protestants is secularized into social and patriotic zeal."[10] Political opposition in the GDR was, to a considerable extent, propelled by Protestant zeal. The Lutheran church knew how to get along with the socialist state, but at the same time it was able to resist and to contradict, often at great personal sacrifice for individual members of the church. Their moral convictions, however, never developed into a political strategy. The moralization of politics in the tradition of "German Culture" led to a mentality of "all or nothing" that, in the end, desecrated for all time the concept of politics, at least of party politics, which is nothing else than politics in a democracy. I vividly remember a meeting of a small group of former East German dissidents with Senator Edward Kennedy and Willy Brandt shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The dissidents, sticking to principles, and the senator, trying to promote pragmatism, had nothing to say to each other. It was especially sad that Willy Brandt, the émigré, was not able to translate and remained almost speechless throughout the meeting.

So, unlike the aftermath of the Second World War, when the confrontation of moral alternatives, the coexistence of fellow travelers and refugees, of victims and perpetrators, of internal and external exile, had created a cultural milieu full of tension and thus creativity, nothing comparable happened after 1989. The moral alternatives confronting each other were murky. There were no real émigrés and only a few dissidents. Most important perhaps was another difference: though many of them nostalgically represented the best of Germany's cultural past, the émigrés who returned after 1945 were also carriers of new ideas, whereas the East German dissidents were molded by a milieu conspicuously lacking cultural modernity. After 1945, pragmatism and a culture of compromise entered Germany; after 1989, idealism and inwardness were coming back. Even when the dissidents had won their freedom of political expression, their fundamental contempt for politics and the procedural elements of democracy remained. "We had hoped for justice, and all we got was the rule of the law," one of them quipped. Most of the dissidents rejected the idea of forming a party, and when parties were formed, it happened with great inner resistance indeed. The antipolitics of the East German protest movement thus created a political vacuum

[10] George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 12.

that furthered the resurgence of the Communist Party in the East and remained without any influence in the West. Cultural protest in Germany continued to be inefficient because compromise was not accepted as a political value. On the level of party politics, the miracle of unification had no effect.

On the level of political philosophy, however, one might speculate whether the miracle of unification may have contributed to the abandonment of a secular moral consensus that had been a cornerstone of West German democracy. The partition of Germany was the enormous price exacted for the unpardonable crimes of the Nazi era. The theological undertones of this argument could not be ignored. German unity was no longer simply an idea condemned by history and reason, as Donoso Cortés maintained in the nineteenth century. After the Holocaust, even considering unity a viable political option had to be regarded as nothing less than a revolt against divine justice. The notion of German partition as penance was part of the political consensus in the Federal Republic. It was forged by a Rhenish Catholic, Konrad Adenauer, who insisted on penance, i.e., *Wiedergutmachung,* instead of mere repentance.[11] Deeds mattered more than thought. This pragmatic reasoning was something like a doctrine of predestination in reverse: Germany paid, ergo the Germans felt sorry.

In the frame of this "political theology," crime and punishment, penance and predestination, all had a role to play—only the notion of miracle was conspicuously absent. When the "miracle" of German unity actually happened, the unbelievable revision of German partition came to be regarded as an instance of divine grace. It was a German author, Martin Walser, who, in his speech in the Paulskirche last year, asked that the remembrance of the Holocaust be reduced if not outright terminated. Walser had been among the few who had always believed in the desirability of German unification. Once more, so it seemed, it was the poet who had surpassed political wisdom. Once more "German Culture," with "a voice as tender and as powerful as religion itself,"[12] claimed to be the better politics. We may deplore this new religious nationalism but we need not fear it. It is and it will be contained by Germany's adherence to the European Union.

[11] I am grateful to Arno Mayer for a conversation with him on this subject.

[12] Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 5.

The End and the Rekindling of the Culture Wars

The growing together of Europe made it possible for the two Germanies to become one nation again without falling back into the traps of nationalism. In the process of European integration the cooperation between France and Germany played a crucial role. Unthinkable for our grandparents, unbelievable for our parents, French-German friendship had become the cornerstone in building a unified Europe. For centuries, the armed conflicts between the two countries were always prepared, accompanied, and followed by "culture wars." These wars seemed to have ended with the process of European integration. The moment of German unification, however, did rekindle the culture war, if ever so gently. As a consequence, we could witness a further cooling of French-German relations, which has continued ever since. In order to understand what is happening here, I want to describe, however briefly, some stages of the culture wars between France and Germany.

Whenever one country lost a war, cultural policy had to serve the need for revenge until it regained enough spiritual strength to seek retaliation on the battlefield. This holds true for Germany after the defeat at Jena and Auerstedt, when the Prussian king's cry that the state must replace by spiritual forces what it had lost in material strength eventually led to the founding of Humboldt's university; it holds true for France after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, when the desire to regain Alsace-Lorraine could best be fulfilled by learning from the enemy; it holds true for Germany during the First World War, when the "Ideas of 1789" were confronted with the "Ideas of 1914" and a great author like Thomas Mann poked fun at a civilization where country inns were named A l'Idée du Monde and even fishing trawlers were called Pensée or Honneur et Dévouement Moderne. Cultural revenge worked less well for France after the "strange defeat" of 1940. By then, the French had obviously forgotten how to use culture as a means for revenge.[13]

The culture wars between France and Germany were also fights about which country had proven more revolutionary in the past or possessed the greater revolutionary potential for the future. Friedrich Schlegel knew how to offend a neighbor by saying that the French

[13] "Nous lisons, quand nous lisons, pour nous cultiver: ce qui est fort bien. Mais nous ne penson pas assez qu'on peut, et doit, quand on agit, s'aider de sa culture." Marc Bloch, *L'Etrange défaite: Témoignage écrit en 1940* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1957), pp. 194–95.

Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* were the highest achievements of the modern epoch, thus daring to set a German novel equal to a revolution in France. It was a German writer in Paris, Henri Heine, who gave the most vivid and prophetic description of this revolutionary contest and where it might lead:

> It seems to me that a methodical people, such as we are, must begin with the Reformation, must then occupy itself with systems of philosophy, and that only after their completion could it pass to the political revolution. I find this sequence quite rational . . . . Give yourselves no anxiety however, ye German Republicans; the German revolution will not prove any milder or gentler because it was preceded by the "Critique" of Kant, by the "Transcendental Idealism" of Fichte, or even by the Philosophy of Nature. These doctrines served to develop revolutionary forces that only await their time to break forth and to fill the world with terror and with admiration . . . . The thought precedes the deed as the lightning the thunder. German thunder is of true German character: it is not very nimble, but rumbles along somewhat slowly. But come it will, and when ye hear a crashing such as has never before been heard in the world's history, then know at last that the German thunderbolt has fallen. At this commotion the eagles will drop dead from the skies and the lions in the farthest wastes of Africa will bite their tails and creep into their royal lairs. There will be played in Germany a drama compared to which the French Revolution will seem but an innocent idyl.[14]

Dewey quoted this passage in 1915 and 1942. Alfred Rosenberg might as well have used it in his sarcastic farewell to the French Revolution—if a Nazi propaganda minister could have allowed himself to agree with a Jewish émigré.

On Sunday, July 14, 1940, the *Völkischer Beobachter,* the aggressive mouthpiece of the National Socialist movement, carried on its front page news of German victories and British war cruelties. But most important was the lead article by Alfred Rosenberg with the title: "The End of the French Revolution."[15] Rosenberg proclaimed that the era of the French Revolution was over. Its legacy had been used by the French

[14] Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany: A Fragment* [1833/34] (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986 [1882]), pp. 158–60.

[15] Alfred Rosenberg, "Das Ende der Französischen Revolution: Zum Jahrestag am 14. July," *Völkischer Beobachter: Kampfblatt der national-sozialistischen Bewegung Grossdeutschlands* 53, no. 196 (1940): 1–2.

government for its cultural policies at home and for its cultural propaganda abroad. Germany, on behalf of a Europe that had grown tired of democratic politics and Jewish business, had ended these claims to cultural supremacy. Now, a so-called positive revolution would shape Europe's future, in which Germanic culture would play the leading role.

To justify their alliance with the Nazis, the French fascists not only had to admit that the Roman idea of Empire had been restored to vigor in the Third Reich. They also had to see in the German revolution the survival of their own Jacobin tradition or had to foresee soviets and *fasci* in the militant groups found in villages all over France in 1792.[16] In his hatred for the French Revolution—"1789, c'est Luther, Kant, Rousseau"—Charles Maurras went as far as to call any *fait révolutionnaire* a *fait boche,*[17] but even Marc Bloch, who would later be killed by the Nazis, had to admit, to his shame as he confessed, that it made sense to establish a link between the National Socialist movement and the French Revolution.[18]

Strange as these affinities between France and Germany may sometimes appear, they must be seen as part of a larger strategy in which a coalition of Latin and Germanic cultures would serve to strengthen political ties, notably the Rome-Berlin Axis. The "Sacred Mediterranean" had always greatly attracted the German mind. A love for all things Latin is a constant in Germany's cultural history, and with it comes a pro-Western shift, a willingness to accept liberty, legalism, and Christianity as core values of private and public life. Quite often the result of a conversion, this Latin love then becomes a violent passion—as in the case of Nietzsche, who eventually sacrificed Wagner for Bizet and begged the Roman pope to save Western civilization from Germany. When Germany joined the Western alliance, "Mediterranean Fever" was no longer a cultural passion—it had become part of political

[16] "En 1792, il y avait dans toute la France des soviets ou des faisceaux de combat, c'est-à-dire que dans chaque village, dans chaque quartier il y avait un groupe de militant autour d'un meneur." Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, *Chronique politique, 1934–1942,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 63.

[17] Charles Maurras, *Réflexions sur la révolution de 1789* (Paris: Les Iles d'Or, 1948), pp. 157, 158.

[18] Marc Bloch, *L'Etrange défaite,* p. 204: "J'abhorre le nazisme. Mais, comme la Révolution française, à laquelle on rougit de la comparer, la révolution nazie a mis au commande, que ce soit à tête des troupes ou à la tête de l'Etat, des hommes qui, parce qu'ils avaient un cerveau frais et n'avaient pas été formés aux routines scolaires, étaient capables de comprendre 'le surprenant et le nouveau.' Nous ne leur opposions guère que des messieurs chenus ou des jeune vieillards."

normality. "German Culture" had lost a crucial *raison d'être*—until 1989, Europe's wonder year in this dreadful twentieth century and the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

On November 4, 1989, more than ten years ago, a huge demonstration in East Berlin organized by artists and writers announced the fall of the *ancien régime.* Intellectuals suddenly felt they were *philosophes* who had worked all their lives for the revolution; the French Enlightenment thinkers' dream of a *politique de l'esprit* seemed in the offing in a renewed socialist Germany. When the masses took to the streets in the autumn of 1989 and finally made the Berlin Wall collapse, they evoked the image of the Bastille, whose storming had started the French Revolution. The French Revolution, however, had no territorial limits. Robespierre was convinced that the revolution was nothing less than an anthropological mutation and that the French, a new species, were forging ahead on the path all of humankind would take. The French Revolution was not French or European; it was universal. In 1989, Germany's cultural revolutionaries desired merely to conserve socialism in one country. The revolution had opened, once more, a German "Sonderweg."

German exceptionalism took a new turn. Soon the nonviolent character of the German revolution was used as a political asset. Unlike the Czechs, who, after all, had also been able to stage a "velvet revolution," German politicians and intellectuals could not hide the triumphant feeling that the belated nation finally had not only caught up with France's revolutionary head start, but had surpassed it. After two hundred years, differently than Heine foresaw and much differently than Hitler wanted, a revolution without *terreur,* therefore morally far superior to the French Revolution, had succeeded in East Germany.[19]

"German Culture"—A European Problem

In the last speech he gave in Germany before he went, unknowingly, into exile, Thomas Mann insisted on the modernity of Richard Wagner's Germanness, which was "broken down and disintegrating, . . . decorative, analytical, intellectual; and hence its fascination, its inborn

[19] In view of the enormous difficulties that the German courts have in sentencing those who were responsible for the crimes under East German dictatorship, one is reminded of Max Weber's remark that the tragedy of German history was that, unlike the Stuarts or the Bourbons, a Hohenzollern had never lost his head.

capacity for cosmopolitan, for worldwide effectiveness."[20] Wagner's nationalism was so soaked in the currents of European art that Germanness and Europeanism no longer excluded one another. As so often, Thomas Mann was also speaking about himself. He had always wanted to be a great German and hence a great European writer. This ambition could no longer be fulfilled in his homeland, where the Nazis had replaced the intellectual's dream of a European Germany with the dreadful reality of a German Europe.[21] During the First World War, Mann had somewhat coquettishly painted himself as an unpolitical man; now, in the ominous year 1933, he quoted Richard Wagner's sentence: "Whoever tries to get away from the political deceives himself" and called it a very un-German opinion indeed. In 1918, Mann had attacked his brother for his cosmopolitanism and for the outrageous ambition to be a German *homme de lettres;* thirteen years later, he called Heinrich Mann "a classical representative of the Germanic-Mediterranean artistic genius" and bid farewell to "German Culture": "If he ever did exist, the German master without the world, without Europe in his blood—today he cannot possibly exist, . . . in a Europe that is growing together intellectually and, in all likelihood in the near future, economically and politically as well; a mastery devoted to narrowness, to obduracy and the provincial nest would be a sorrowful phenomenon."[22] This prophecy has been fulfilled. The process of European integration—fueled much more, at the beginning, by coal and steel than by culture and science—has made the idea of "German Culture" obsolete.

And now, at the end of my second lecture, I want to come back to the beginning of my first lecture and to my recent experiences in Central and Eastern Europe. In a curious way, the problem of "German Culture"—the exaltation of culture and its use as a compensation for politics—has not disappeared. It is, however, no longer a German but a European problem.

Intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe created a culture of quarrel and complaint that eventually helped to overthrow the old Communist regimes. Amos Elon has described how the revolutions in

[20] Thomas Mann, "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," in *Past Masters,* trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred Knopf; 1933), p. 92.

[21] Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (1947; New York: Everyman's Library/Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 175 (chapter 21).

[22] Thomas Mann, "On the Profession of the German Writer in Our Time: Address in Honor of a Brother" (March 27, 1931), in *Letters of Heinrich and Thomas Mann, 1900–1949,* ed. Hans Wysling (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 284.

the East, above all the Prague Autumn, led to a victory of culture over power: "In Czechoslovakia, where the struggle between reformation and counter-reformation had prevented the emergence of a national church, the world of culture had often been a breeding ground for liberal revolt—from the time of Magister Jan Hus down to the days of Professor Tomáš Masaryk in this century. A great book could be written on how, in our time, [culture was] able to survive the age of darkness . . . . When all other points of moral reference were failing, culture alone—the novelists, playwrights, actors, philosophers, poets, filmmakers, artists, musicians—retained a measure of moral credibility, dignity, and ability to inspire the young. To think that it all started right under Kafka's windows [on the old Town Square]! The Prague Autumn of 1989 was a victory of culture over power."[23]

The rapid transformation of cultural reputation into political influence became a common feature of the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Artists and writers, scientists and scholars, were promoted to high political office. They became the heroes of the Eastern world. Artistic sincerity and moral probity were assets for a political career. It was a unique moment in postwar European history when it seemed as if, in the future, two political cultures would clash whose personnel consisted, on one side, of intellectuals with high moral credit but almost without expertise and, on the other, of professionals with much expertise but without too much moral concern. This constellation has remained an episode—with notable exceptions like that of Václav Havel in the Czech Republic or Andrei Pleşu in Romania. The routinization of charisma took its toll and many heroes, to adopt Werner Sombart's distinction, realized that they were in danger of disappearing from the political stage if they did not transform themselves into shopkeepers fast. While the cultural legacy of these early "heroes" of political change has largely been forgotten or belittled in the East, it enjoys, paradoxically enough, an ominous presence in the West. "German Culture" has become a European problem.

Today, Europe is facing the dilemma between a rhetoric that must invite all countries of the continent to join the Union and the harsh economic reality that leads the haves who would like to become the have-even-mores to protect themselves against the have-nots. I am not saying that the enlargement of the European Union would be easy and could be

[23] Amos Elon, "Prague Autumn," *New Yorker,* January 22, 1990, p. 132.

achieved with just a bit of economic sacrifice. I am only pointing to the recurrence of the compensation scheme that I have described, throughout my lectures, as the core element of "German Culture." While the countries of Eastern Europe are denied entrance into the common market, they are invited to join NATO and, above all, are praised for their cultural achievements. The military and culture are expected to make up for economic discrimination.

Western cultural policy, such is my experience, has acquired a rather bad name in the East. It's seen as an escape and as a cheap excuse—as is the case with a curious linguistic incident, the survival of the notion of "Central Europe" in Western discourse. As part of their strategy, the East European dissidents rejected the term "Eastern Europe" as a common political and geographical label. Using the term "Mitteleuropa" or "Central Europe" instead, by which they also wanted to dissociate themselves from Russia as the political East, they were able to turn a semantic opposition into a political issue. The vagueness of the term "Mitteleuropa," which sounded like the name of a very distant utopia indeed, offered a considerable advantage. It was an idea in constant need of interpretation. It was much less the description of a geographical territory than a design for a cultural model. It was a political idea behind a cultural mask. Pursuing this ideal was of great political significance—until 1989. After the fall of communism, however, it lost its function and its appeal. Politics no longer needed cultural camouflage. Today, the rhetoric of "Central Europe" is coming back—in the West.[24] Once again, it is used as camouflage: this time, cultural benevolence provides cover for political indolence.

In various attempts at institution-building in the countries of the former Communist bloc—in Hungary and in Romania, in Poland and in Russia—we have tried to learn from this experience and pursue an alternative cultural policy. Any bilateral arrangement was avoided thereby. Not for a moment, for instance, did we think of creating a German-Hungarian institute in Budapest or of founding a German-Romanian college in Bucharest. Six European countries, to give but one example,

[24] Friedrich Naumann knew that "economic considerations, however serious they may be, will not of themselves suffice to arouse the necessary enthusiasm" for the idea of Central Europe, which also needed, for its realization, "thinkers and poets." Yet his basic aim was "to make of 'Central Europe' a largely self-sufficing and an effectively united economic idea." Since this economic utopia can no longer be pursued, the reduction of "Central Europe" to a cultural label is pointless and politically dangers. Friedrich Naumann, *Central Europe* (London: King and Son, 1917), pp. 34, x, 41.

are cooperating in Budapest. Extending the possibilities and chances for fund-raising was one reason, though not the decisive one, for this policy. More important was the insight that cultural cooperation on a bilateral level very often leads to attempts at cultural domination and that multilateral arrangements are in effective check against such attempts. I will not enumerate all the countries that are engaged in these institutions. But I want to stress that the cooperation with France has been of primary importance to us.

We donors have worked in multinational groups to make sure that, on the receiving end, not national but European institutions were created. Very deliberately, for instance, we created not a Collegium Hungaricum but a Collegium Budapest. The institutions that we have founded on the model of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin have something in common with the Olympic games: they do not take place in a country but in a city. They are embedded in an urban, not in a national context. In the charter of these institutions were included, though to a different degree, what one might call European provisions, i.e., stipulations that require the institutes to appoint members from a number of countries, to attract students from various parts of Europe, and to teach and to learn in various European languages. The multilateral coalitions I have mentioned consist, as a rule, of private foundations and of governmental agencies. This public-private mix has had a considerable political impact because it showed, in an exemplary fashion, that the functioning of democracy consists not least in cooperation between the state and agencies of civil society.

To work in the field of cultural policy can be enormously rewarding—if one behaves less like an economist who generously gives advice and more like an anthropologist who humbly tries to understand. It is high time for us in the West to admit to ourselves that the long-lasting division of Europe has not just been a problem for *them,* but for *us* as well. Being cut off from intellectual traditions that made cities like Budapest and Warsaw, Bucharest and St. Petersburg, centers of great intellectual attraction in the European past has also impoverished us.

I want to conclude by quoting a parable by a great European author, Franz Kafka, a short, fragmentary text that bears no title:

> We are a group of five friends who once happened to leave the same house in sequence. The first to leave came out and stood near the gate. The second left or rather sailed out, smooth as a drop of mer-

> cury, and moved quite close to the first. The third emerged soon after, followed by the fourth and fifth. We finally ended up standing in a row. People soon began to notice us and started to point at us saying "those five there just came out of that house." We have been living together ever since. It would be quite peaceable if it weren't for a sixth who insists on trying to edge his way in. He doesn't actually do anything to bother us, but he's a nuisance and that's bad enough. Why does he keep on trying to intrude if nobody wants him? We don't know him and have no desire to take him on board. The five of us didn't know each other beforehand either and, if you like, still don't, but what we can accept and put up with among the five would be ruined by the advent of a sixth. In any case, there are five of us and we don't want a sixth. What is the point of constantly living in each other's pocket anyway; it doesn't make sense for the five of us; however, now that we're together we'll remain so, but we see no reason to fashion new alliances, especially judging from our own experience. But how do you explain all that to the sixth party? Lengthy explanations could almost give the impression of acceptance into the circle. Better say nothing at all and simply turn him away. No matter how much he pouts, we continue to fend him off, but despite all our efforts, he keeps on coming back.[25]

Cultural policy has its limits. The political and economic division of Europe persists. We must do everything we can to overcome it if we do not want to risk the end of European culture.

[25] Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1992), pp. 313–14.