Exile and Emigration

The Survival of "German Culture"

Wolf Lepenies

The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences–anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how—and under what conditions—the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

Every year the School hosts several vistors who do not participate in the theme of the year. These visitors have often been Members in the past. Wolf Lepenies, was a member in the School of Social Science in the academic years 1979-80 and 1982-84. He was elected Rektor of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin in 1986. During his three terms of office—he will step down as Rektor in the fall of 2001—Wolf Lepenies was one of the founders of the Collegium Budapest, the New Europe College in Bucarest and the Bibliotheca Classica in Saint Petersburg. Under his leadership the Wissenschaftskolleg also became instrumental in setting up *Point Sud*, an "Institute for Local Knowledge" in Bamako (Mali) and *Europe in the Middle East*, a joint research project with the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute where young Germans, Arab and Jewish Israelis and Palestinians work and learn together.

While pursuing many projects in institution building, Wolf Lepenies has continued to do research and publish books in the history of science, the history of ideas and also on matters of current politics. In the fall of 1999, Lepenies returned to the School of Social Science as a visitor. During his stay in the fall, he gave the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Harvard University, an annual, invited lecture series sponsored by the Tanner Foundation. His Thursday Lunch Seminar was drawn from these lectures; he intends to turn them into a book on the relationship between politics and culture in Germany over the last two hundred years.

–Debra Keates, Series Editor

Exile and Emigration:
The Survival of "German Culture"

Prologue

To prepare for this lecture, I read books here at the Institute that once had been checked out by Ernst Kantorowicz and Erwin Panofsky or that were bequeathed to its library by the late Felix Gilbert. I was fortunate in having the chance to talk with friends like Albert Hirschman and Fritz Stern. I understand why Abraham Flexner, its founder, when asked who had done most for the Institute, dryly replied: "Adolf Hitler." The names of the emigrés I have mentioned do not represent the tradition of "German Culture" as I am defining it throughout my talk. By "German Culture" I understand the traditional overrating of culture at the expense of politics. It has been a threat to the intellectual and moral life not just of Germany and of Europe, but also of the United States.[1]

"German Culture" Abroad: Victorious in Defeat

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."[2] This is a quotation from what the *New York Times* called "that rarest of documents, a genuinely profound book."[3] Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* is, in my view, not 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 speak in analyzing their own culture. Cab drivers all of a sudden used words like Gestalt and Max Weber's terminology invaded everyday life, providing names like the "Charisma Cleaners" which Bloom, to his horror, found in Chicago.

   In the 19th 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 their 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*—all these joined in a successful attack on the rational project of American culture. Americans thus became 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 1940s Chicago, one of his students, unaware that the philosopher was not his contemporary, always spoke in his paper of "Mr. Aristotle." Such was Bloom's American dream: to send Professor Weber back 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.

Allan Bloom's teacher at Chicago was an emigré, 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 believed in its original faith, that is, the self-evidence of the natural and divine foundations of the rights of man. He came to the conclusion that there was no longer any difference between the abandonment of the idea of natural right and the adherence to it. The difference between German thought on the one hand and that of Western Europe and the United States on the other had completely vanished. 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."[4] Victorious in defeat, "German Culture" had proven its fundamental assumption: it could not only compensate, it could even take its revenge on politics.

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, and *Gemeinschaft* against *Gesellschaft*. This "exceptionalism" was always a point of pride, not least because it was based on cultural aspirations and achievements. The inward realm established by German idealism, the classic literature of Weimar, and the classical and romantic styles in music preceded the founding of the political nation by more than a hundred years. Henceforth, they legitimated any withdrawal of the individual from society into the sphere of culture and private life.

Having given a similar conclusion in a book some years ago, I was pleased when the German writer 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 own 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 those 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.[5]

These attempts to counteract "the chronic overstatement of the unfolding and ultimate triumph of modernity,"[6] did much to reinsert Germany's peculiar past into a broader context of European history. They reflect 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. This was the argument offered 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"[7]—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 [...]."[8] 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 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 both republished books they had written in the middle of the First World War without any alteration at the beginning of, and during, the Second World War. In the same vein, Thorstein Veblen's study on *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, 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. It is possible that foreign authors asserted this more often than did the Germans. When, in 1942 and 1943, the London Institute of Sociology organized a series of lectures 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 not only as the President 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."[9] 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.

Debates like those of the 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 Organization, asked a representative sample of Germans about their knowledge of and relationship to 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.[10] 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 dis-

mal 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 unification. Asked, for instance, whether they considered Goethe a typical German, 47% in the East, but only 31% in the West answered in the affirmative. Do you know at least one Goethe poem by heart? Only 10% in the West, but 25% in the East do. 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 Mephistopheles 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 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 "something sinister at work, something at once hollow and aggressive,"[11] a statement of inspired vagueness sharpened, twenty-five years later, by John Dewey, who spoke of the "strains of continuity connecting the creed of Hitler with the classic philosophic tradition of Germany."[12] Such claims of continuity which often were stretched to claims of causality 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.

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 citizen."[13] 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 attitude 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 pre-eminence 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.[14] Let me repeat: whenever 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 survived, but because his poetry reflected the helplessness rather than the power, of culture. Yet the holocaust did not mark the end of "German Culture." One reason for this, as preposterous as it may seem, was the aesthetic appeal of fascism and later National Socialism, which shaped the mental make-up 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 Adolf Hitler 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* which had, for centuries, been the idol of German self-understanding and national pride. True, many Nazi figures—Hitler the painter, 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 Nazi party's leadership into a quixotic salon des refusés. Yet 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."[15]

In her famous April 1940 article in *Foreign Affairs*, 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 destined eventually to bring 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 creative power."[16] One should not read into

Thompson's article a futile attempt to reduce to psycho-babble the moral and political 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.

More through ritual than through belief, National Socialism was able to cast an aesthetic spell on many intellectuals even outside Germany. 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."[17] 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. While fascism had become sclerotic and unsure of itself in both Italy and France, in Germany it had been vigorously transformed while preserving the anarchistic and artistic attitudes characteristic of early fascism: a youthful disrespect for established authority and the general will to *épater le bourgeois*, especially as the bourgeoisie was, to a large extent, identified with Jewish culture.[18]

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.[19] For authors like Brasillach, Drieu, and Alphonse de Chateaubriant, it seemed only natural that any politician who dreamed of becoming 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 had disastrous consequences.[20] Many *hommes de lettres* who were skeptics when they set out to attend the rallies of the National Socialist party returned as fanatics: "*Oui, Hitler est bon,*" was Alphonse de Chateaubriant's resumé in 1937, whereby a strange aesthetic fascination was turned into a dangerous moral judgment.[21] These writers and intellectuals created a context of empathy and understanding that made collaboration not only possible but honorable and even necessary. Among the last troops defending Hitler's chancery in Berlin against the Red Army was the SS division "Charlemagne," which consisted of French and francophone volunteers. They believed they were fighting a culture war in which European values had to be defended against Asian bolshevism and American materialism. It is this far-reaching cultural underpinning of National Socialist politics that makes it so wrong, in my view, to make light of the films of Leni Riefenstahl or an author like Paul de Man's predilections for German "aesthetic nationalism,"[22] 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. With him, 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 not, however much it hurts," wrote Thomas

Mann, "regard the man as an artist-phenomenon? Mortifyingly enough, it is all there: the difficulty, the laziness, the pathetic formlessness in youth [...]. The [...] 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."[23]

"That Man is My Brother" is a literary masterpiece. It points to the moral 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 which, 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 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 their third-rate colleague, because they felt close to his ideas. In calling Hitler his brother, Thomas Mann 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, however, 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 is 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 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. 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, a physician whose poems and prose had tested the extreme limits of the German language, offered a sweeping explanation for the past and future catastrophes of his times: "In my view," he wrote in a letter from Berlin, "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."[24] Benn, a master of surprising

prose, thus turned the classical problem of Germany's intelligentsia upside-down. He did not deplore the aloofness of the German intelligentsia from the public realm that had made them easy prey for the Nazis, he pretended that the intellectual had failed to remain un-political and had thereby contributed to a political catastrophe. He 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 his-torical 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."

Written in his nervous and original prose, Benn's letter displays in a nutshell the German mind-set 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 re-education in Germany was bound to fail, this letter could pro-vide 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. What is more disturbing is the poet's belief that he could not 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.[25] 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 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; noth-ing 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 summa-ry should be about average for a fairly large German family's lot in the first half of the twen-tieth century."[26] In this tale, sad and true, suffering alone counted. There was no quest for the cause, nor 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 post-war Germany. Not bad conscience but a new currency propelled the change that brought with it a new society. German history in the 20th 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 intelli-gentsia and the cultural elite. When intellectual temperaments, similar in their anti-democratic 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 Juenger, expressed their sympathy for the Nazi's seizure of power, one must not see this as a conversion, but as a sign of continuity. The ominous year 1933 was not a break, it was the fulfillment of German history. In the state of the Nazis, the cultural nation would be reborn.

It was the aesthetic appeal that turned large segments of the German intelligentsia into followers of the Nazi regime—at least for awhile. The sympathies of many fellow travelers dwindled only when, on the 30th of June, 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. The dream of much of the cultural elite, that Germany would become a state in which politics and culture would no longer be separated, turned out to also be the fascist dream of a theatrical state.[27] 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.

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. To go into exile was no viable intellectual option, because it had no tradition in Germany. The notion of "emigration," which would only later acquire its ethical weight, did not yet exist. When members of his generation left Germany, Benn said, they were not acting politically, they were just trying to escape personal hardship and unpleasant circumstances by traveling elsewhere. That was a cynical statement indeed. There was also 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.[28]

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 Thomas 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."[29] A vacation in Switzerland was to follow. There, his children convinced him to stay. In the beginning, 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."[30] A more German reaction to the exile forced upon him is hardly imaginable: no political outburst, just a quiet retreat to inwardness.

Yet, the thought of returning home remained with him. For a long time, his wish was to go back to Germany and live there in a kind of inner emigration. For him as well, the point of no return is reached with the Röhm massacres. Until then, Thomas Mann had withstood pressure 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, Thomas 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."[31]

Was this 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. The 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 concern is not war, but 'German culture' [...]. Never before have 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 or Bismark 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."[32] Mann despised the cultural ambitions of the Nazis and yet there was a seductive power to their totalitarian attempt to give politics a cultural base. That is why, even in exile, he had to say to himself: "Germany, even a Germany racked by confusion, is a tremendous country [indeed]."[33]

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 Nazi ideology. Even though Mann had once declared himself to be above all suspicion of wanting to become a new Fichte, a *praeceptor patriae*,[34] 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 to ever play this role: "The fact that I was driven 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."[35] 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, Goethe who, almost without irony, had once exclaimed: "What do Germans want? Have they not me?"[36] That was the poet's dream: not just to be readmitted to the city, but to become teachers to its citizens.

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

Fifty years ago, Leo Strauss complained that German thought had become indistinguishable from Western thought in general. In retrospect, one must see this complaint of a German emigré as the prophecy of one of the great political success stories of the 20th 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.

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 re-militarization of the country was unthinkable, only culture—due not least to the "inner exile" where so many intellectuals 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 re-immigration. It became 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 emigré 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, methods and men were not simply stored in exile; they survived in another cultural milieu by actively adapting to it before they returned to West Germany. 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 re-education; not many knew that it was already flourishing in Vienna when Columbia University was just taking shape.

The situation in the East 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. If 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. 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 emigrés 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 Heidegger, Jaspers, Karl Löwith and Hannah Arendt was awesome. In sociology, the confrontation of the Frankfurt School with the emigré Karl Popper on the one hand, and scholars like Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Schelsky, both members of the Nazi 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 emigrés 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 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 sizeable samizdat nor a catacomb culture; and unlike Hungary, it did not—and could not—produce groups of engaged emigrés. A Czech writer who fled to Paris or to London thereby became an alienated speaker. A writer from Leipzig who went to Munich or to Berlin was still living in Germany. More important still: he remained a native speaker. 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 levelled, 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 cab drivers 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: it lived in a milieu with blurred moral alternatives. With the breakdown of the regime, the failure of the cultural elite 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 Michail Gorbatchev. It was neither the result of a long and open struggle against communist rule, like the fight of *Solidarnosc* in Poland, nor the final triumph of twenty years of resistance in the underground of Prague, nor of shrewd piecemeal reform in Budapest. The German November revolution was neither led by a worker's 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.[37] 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; in reality it expressed the farewell to any socialist utopia. When the Berlin wall was breached on the eve of November 9th ten years ago, the slogan was only slightly changed. 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. It thus 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 the misjudgment of amateur-politicians nor the miscalculation of would-be economists: it was the failure of the interpreting class. This failure preserved "German Culture"—the traditional overrating of culture at the expense of politics—beyond the process of political unification.

The Economy and "Real Politik"

In decades of mutal denial, conflict, coexistence, and eventually cooperation betwen the two German states, "German Culture" survived in the center of politcal rhetoric and on the margins of reality. However deep the divide between a capitalist German state and socialist German state seemed to be, allegedly they remained indivisible as a cultural nation. When the real wall collapsed ten years ago, it became obvious that unification had not been seen as a realistic scenario by either the political leadership in the West nor 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: "[We] want to dream it, but not to have it." At least, neither elite had wanted unification to happen the way that 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 gave a clear answer: "It's the economy, stupid!"

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 Frankel once mockingly said, stands for German democracy which must be defined as a Society Without Risk.[38] 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, Mann still doubted "whether the parliamentary system of western Europe, which Germany took over as being 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 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, Mann, a non-political man no more but a committed Republican for 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 to social betterment; and art is the sphere in which the conflict between the social and the ideal is resolved."[39] Culture had to come to the rescue of the Republic but it was helpless, as it turned out before long: four years after Thomas Mann had spoken of art as the sphere in which the great conflicts of the times could be solved, his books were burnt in Berlin.

The stability of the second German republic was based on the exceptional success of its economy and 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. "German Culture," however, became an issue again with unification.

In his attack on German philosophical egotism, 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."[40] 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" which, 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 emigré, was not able to translate between the two "camps" and remained almost speechless throughout the meeting.

So, after 1989 there was nothing comparable to the period after the end 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. The moral alternatives confronting each other were murky. There were no real emigrés 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 emigrés 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 anti-politics of the East German protest movement thus created a political vacuum 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 the secular moral consensus that had been the 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 19th 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 repentence.[41] Deeds mattered more than thought. This pragmatic reasoning was something like the doctrine of predestination in reverse: Germany paid, ergo the Germans felt sorry.

In the frame of this "political theology," crime and punishment, penance and predesitination, 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 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,"[42] claimed to be the better politics.

EPILOGUES

Weimar and St. Helena

On April 30, 1932, one hundred years after the poet's death, Paul Valéry gave an address in honor of Goethe in the *Grand Amphithéâtre* of the Sorbonne. Valéry had great difficulties in preparing his speech, as he wrote in a letter to André Gide. He did not read German nor know much of Goethe, having read only few of his works, among them Faust in French translation and some biological writings, *crâne et plante*, which he called, somewhat condescendingly, "not bad at all." It had taken him five whole days to type the 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."[43] 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."[44] That is why the year 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."[45] 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. Goethe is nothing less than the incorporation of "German Culture," i.e., of inwardness far from politics, 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," Valéry writes, Goethe probably thought of Napoleon, "perhaps his greatest memory, whose look still lingered in his eyes."[46] The French writer does not hesitate to admire a German poet who admires a French genius, but into his glowing admiration Valéry stirs a pinch of disturbing and in the end devastating critique not so much of Goethe as of the German understanding of him: "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 [...]."[47]

Weimar "*une sorte de Sainte-Hélène délicieuse*": 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 which had not been fulfilled.

"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 capacity for cosmopolitan, for worldwide effectiveness."[48] Wagner's nationalism was so soaked in the currents of European art that Germanness and Europeanism no longer excluded one another. And as was so often the case, 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 fatherland, where the Nazis had replaced the intellectual's dream of a European Germany with the dreadful reality of a German Europe.[49]

During the First World War, Thomas 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, Thomas 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."[50] This prophecy has been fulfilled. The process of European integration—initially fueled more by coal and steel

than by culture and science—has made the idea of "German Culture" obsolete.

And now, at the end of my talk, I want to come back to the beginning 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 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 Tomas 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, film makers, 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."[51]

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 Vaclav Havel in the Czech Republic or Andrei Pleu in Romania. The routinization of charisma took its toll and many heroes, to adopt Sombart's distinction, realized that they were in danger of disappearing from the political stage if they did not transform themselves quickly into shopkeepers. 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—a sure sign that "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 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. Recognition of their 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 a cheap excuse—as can be noted in 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 meant 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, 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.[52] 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, are co-operating in Budapest. Extending the possibilities and chances for fund-raising was one, though not the decisive reason 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 multi-lateral arrangements are an 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 multi-national groups to make sure that, on the receiving end, not national but European institutions were created. Very deliberately, for instance, did we not create a *Collegium Hungaricum* but a *Collegium Budapest*. The institutions which 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 multi-lateral 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 those in the East, 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, it 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 mercury, 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 accept-ance 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.[53]

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.

ENDNOTES

1   This is a résumé of the Tanner Lectures entitled "The End of 'German Culture,'" I gave at Harvard University in November 1999.

2   Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) page 147.

3   Roger Kimball, "The Groves of Ignorance," *The New York Times Book Review*, April 5, 1987, page 7.

4   Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) page 2.

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

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

7   John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (Freeport, N.Y: Books for Libraries Press, 1942) page 69.

8   George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940) page 21.

9   Alexander Farquharson, "Summary," *The German Mind and Outlook*, ed. G.P. Gooch et al. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945) page 218.

10 Institut fuer Demoskopie Allensbach, *Demoskopie und Kulturgeschichte*. Eine Goethe-Umfrage fuer das Nachtprogramm des NWDR 1949 wird 1999 fuer das ZDF-Nachtstudio wiederholt, Allensbach/Bodensee 1999.

11 Santayana, op. cit., page viii.

12 Dewey, op.cit., page 15.

13 Gooch et al., op.cit., page viii.

14 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).

15 As reported in an article in *Time* September 11, 1939, page 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."

16 Dorothy Thompson, "The Problem Child of Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 18 (1940): page 391.

17 Wyndham Lewis, *The Hitler Cult* (1939, New York: Gordon Press, 1972) page 47.

18 Here, I cannot pay due attention to the difference between "collaboration with Germany" and "collaborationism with the Nazis" which has been stressed by Stanley Hoffmann; see his article "Self-Ensnared: Collaboration with Nazi Germany," *Decline or Renewal? France since the 1930s* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974) pages 26-44.

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

20 William R. Tucker, "Politics and Aesthetics: The Fascism of Robert Brasillach," *The Western Political Quarterly* XV (1962), page 608.

21 Alphonse de Chateaubriant, *La Gerbe des Forces (Nouvelle Allemagne)* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1937) page 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) pages 66-67.

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

23 Thomas Mann, "That Man is My Brother," *Esquire* 11 (1939), No.3, pages 3, 132.

24 Gottfried Benn, "Letter from Berlin, July 1948," *Prose, Essays, Poems*, ed. Volkmar Sander (New York: Continuum, 1987) page 80.

25 The allusion is, of course, to Clifford Geertz's "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *The American Scholar* 49 (1980), No.2, pages 165-179.

26 Quoted from E.B. Ashton, "Foreward," in Benn, op. cit., page xiii.

27 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) page 13.

28 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 Knopf, 1933) page 220.

29 Thomas Mann, "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," *Past Masters*, pages 90, 86.

30 Thomas Mann, "March 15, 1933," *Diaries 1918-1939* (London: André Deutsch, 1983) page 127.

31 Ibid., page 502 (my translation).

32 Ibid., pages 170-71 (September 8, 1933).

33 Ibid., page 155 (May 3, 1933).

34 Thomas Mann, "An Appeal to Reason," [1930] *Order of the Day. Political Essays and Speeches of Two Decades* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942) pages 46-68.

35 Thomas Mann, *Diaries*, page 200 (March 14, 1934).

36 Mann quotes Goethe, "that greatest unpatriot of them all," in "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," *Order of the Day*, page 86.

37 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," *A Propensity to Self-Subversion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995) pages 9-44.

38 Cf. Ernst Frankel, *Deutschland und die westlichen Demokratien* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968.)

39 Thomas Mann, "An Appeal to Reason," pages 46-52.

40 George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, page 12.

41 I am grateful to Arno Mayer for a conversation with him on this subject.

42 Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism*, page 5.

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

44 Ibid., page 173.

45 Ibid., page 171.

46   Ibid., pages 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 Thomas Mann mentions the Sorbonne address from 1932, is an implicit answer to Paul Valéry—and full of complicity.

47   Ibid., pages 174, 175.

48   Thomas Mann, "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," *Past Masters*, page 92.

49   Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (1947, New York: Everyman's Library/Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) page 175 (Chapter XXI).

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

51   Amos Elon, "Prague Autumn", *The New Yorker*, Jan 22, 1990, page 132.

52   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 dangerous. Cf. Friedrich Naumann, *Central Europe* (London: King & Son, 1917), pages 34, x, 41.

53   Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, ed. Jost Schillerneit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1992) pages 313-314.
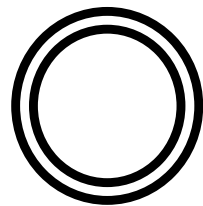
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