THE SEDUCTION OF UNREASON

THE INTELLECTUAL ROMANCE WITH FASCISM FROM NIETZSCHE TO POSTMODERNISM

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· POLITICAL EXCURSUS I ·

Incertitudes Allemandes: Reflections on the German New Right

Just as ancient peoples lived their past history in their imagination, in mythology, so we Germans have lived our future history in thought, in philosophy. We are philosophical contemporaries of the present day without being its historical contemporaries.

—Karl Marx, "A Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right:* Introduction"

The history of the Germans is a history of extremes. It contains everything except moderation, and in the course of a thousand years the Germans have experienced everything except normality. . . . Nothing is normal in German history except violent oscillations.

—A.J.P Taylor, *The Course of German History*

In june 2000 the German public sphere was unsettled by another sensational outburst. Ernst Nolte, a senior German historian given to floating revisionist claims, was awarded the Konrad Adenauer Prize from Munich's famed Institute for Contemporary History. Journalists and historians immediately clamored for the resignation of director Horst Moeller (Moeller had been an adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl during the 1990s), who, they claimed, had permanently tarnished the institute's reputation.

Though there are few doubts about Nolte's academic qualifications per se, the political circumstances surrounding his receipt of the prize were highly fraught. For it was Nolte who, in 1986,

unleashed the German Historians' Debate by claming that the Soviet Gulag was "more original" than Auschwitz—which, consequently, seemed to dwindle to the status of a "second order" crime—and that Hitler's actions in the east (Operation Barbarossa) constituted an act of self-defense in the face of a perceived threat.

During the 1990s, however, in a series of controversial interviews and articles, Nolte's views became increasingly strident, and his will to provoke seemed to become an end in itself. He has repeatedly insisted that Nazi anti-Semitism possessed a "rational kernel," implying that certain of Hitler's policies toward the Jews were, given the historical circumstances, far from unreasonable. And in a controversial biography of Martin Heidegger, he openly contended that National Socialism had been the "right course" for Germany in 1933. Many of his more outrageous claims were reiterated in an open exchange of letters with the French historian François Furet, recently published in English.[1]

Were Nolte's views widely shared? Is there a danger in contemporary Germany that the liberal political consensus, so painstakingly forged during the heyday of the Bonn Republic, might indeed crumble? Hardly. Instead, Nolte's recent excrescences (in his acceptance speech, he proudly reiterated verbatim his most contentious claims and theses) is better understood as the last gasp at a failed effort to halt the "Western drift" of German political culture. A chronicle of these efforts—largely unsuccessful but significant nevertheless—follows.

A Rightward Drift

In his 1922 essay on "The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity" Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch reflected on the dilemma of German particularism as defined in opposition to the values of the cosmopolitan West. Troeltsch realized that in the course of World War I the ethos of Germanocentrism, as embodied in the "ideas of 1914," had assumed a heightened stridency. The subsequent peace, under the sign of the draconian Versailles Treaty, instead of muting

the idiom of German exceptionalism that Troeltsch viewed with such mistrust, seemed only to fan its flames. Thus, though Germany was nominally and for the first time a republic, convinced democrats remained few and far between. Moreover, the emergence of a vociferous, revanchist-minded revolutionary nationalism, propounded by a group of oxymoronic "conservative revolutionaries," sounded an ominous note. Although the fledgling republic would successfully fend off right-wing coup attempts in 1920 (the Kapp Putsch) and 1923 (Hitler), the handwriting was on the wall. In his article, Troeltsch sought—in vain, as it turned out—to blunt the thrust of German particularism to thereby return Germany to the values of the universalist fold. A model of intellectual historical concision, his reconstruction of German exceptionalism remains instructive, even though today the *Geistesgeschichte* approach has fallen out of favor.

Troeltsch laments the fact that German cultural life had yet to shed its long-standing attraction to "counterrevolutionary" mores and habitudes. Tracing these attitudes back to what he identified as the "half aesthetic, half religious . . . spirit of antibourgeois idealism" characteristic of German romanticism, such trends have culminated, remarks Troeltsch, in a "curious mixture of mysticism and brutality." From the idea of "individuality," German romanticism developed "a new principle of reality, morality, and history." "Instead of ideas of the equal dignity of Reason everywhere and of the fulfillment of universal law, we have the conception of a purely personal and unique realization of the capacities of Mind in every direction, primarily in individual persons, but secondarily also in communities themselves." Instead of the ideas of the "dignity of Reason and of the fulfillment of universal law," one is offered the spectacle a "wealth of national minds all struggling together and developing their [separate] spiritual powers. . . ."[2] This approach, observed Troeltsch, was predicated on the assumption of the inequality of individuals. It encouraged a "deification of the state" and cynically entrusted leadership in the hands of "great men." "The political thought of Germany," Troeltsch concludes, "is marked by a curious dualism, which cannot but impress every foreign observer."

> Look at one of its sides and you will see an abundance of remnants of Romanticism and lofty idealism: look at the other, and you will see a realism which goes to the verge of cynicism and of utter indifference to all ideals and all morality; but what you will see above all is an inclination to make an astonishing combination of the two elements—in a word, to brutalize romance, and to romanticize cynicism.[3]

Few observers of the contemporary German scene have failed to note the changed tenor of German political culture in the aftermath of reunification. At issue is a resurrection of specters and spirits, visitations from the German past, albeit in a political context distinctly marked by considerations of restraint and stability—as though Konrad Adenauer's 1950s motto, "*Keine Experimente*" ("No experiments"), had become the unofficial German equivalent of the American "E pluribus Unum." The leading spirits of Germany's conservative revolutionary movement of the 1920s—Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler—have again became fashionable. The title of a recent book by the liberal CDU (Christian Democratic Union) parliamentarian Friedbert Pflüger, *Germany is Adrift: The Conservative Revolution Discovers Its Children,* captured the mood of the post-reunification Zeitgeist.[4]

This renewed fascination with German national revolutionary traditions from the 1920s is symptomatic of a broader sense of cultural disorientation. Today the German question has little to do with traditional issues of Macht- and Realpolitik; such questions have largely been settled by Germany's integration within the economic and political framework of the European Union. But it has everything to do with questions of German identity. In the aftermath of reunification, it has become permissible, even de rigueur, to raise the question, "*Was ist deutsch*?" (What is German?)—a question that, certain right-radical fringe elements notwithstanding, had remained taboo for much of the postwar period. "Why We Are Not a Nation and Why We Must Become One," proclaimed the German literary critic Karl Heinz Bohrer in a oft-cited essay from the early 1990s.[5] *The Nation That Does Not Want to Be One* reads the rueful title of a 1991 book by the conservative historian Christian Meier.[6] Belat-

edly, prominent German intellectuals have rediscovered identity politics.

Therein lies the dilemma. Historically, discussions of German identity have been beset with the ideology of German particularism described so well by Troeltsch. As a rule, they were explicitly formulated in polemical opposition to the ideas of universal human equality that emerged in the course of the French Revolution—the despised "ideas of 1789." Historically, such discussions conjure the specter of Germany going its own way. Thus, the problem of German identity politics is that the major historical and cultural reference points have been tainted with the ethos of German exceptionalism. Inevitably, when themes pertaining to the development of German national consciousness arise today, it proves difficult—if not impossible—to escape the ethnocentric and solipsistic phrasing of earlier debates over German identity. Since this was the idiom that Germans traditionally used to discuss questions of national identity, they unavoidably resurface in the present historical context—a preternatural return of the repressed.

Were such neonationalist longings confined to a fringe element—were they little more than the dyspeptic musings of isolated cultural malcontents—there would be no cause for alarm. Significantly, however, such trends have acquired an established institutional foothold in post-reunification German political culture. Conservative revolutionary positions on the state, foreign policy, national identity, geopolitics, and Germany's attitudes toward "the West" have gained a hearing among academics, publishing houses, newspapers, and political figures. In this respect one can safely say that say that, since reunification, the cultural parameters of the Federal Republic have distinctly shifted. Political and cultural themes that, owing to their proximity to the Nazi worldview, were formerly kept at arms length now occupy center stage.

Unlike previous eras, in the short run at least, Germany's neighbors have little to fear. The irredentist claims of German expellees (e.g., the politically influential League of Sudeten Germans) have, if anything, abated since the annus mirabilis of 1990. A firm acknowledgment of existing political boundaries was one of the essential

preconditions for the successful outcome of the so-called two plus four negotiations leading to reunification. The misfortunes and horrors visited upon mid-century Europe by an expansionist Germany is a situation no one is anxious to repeat—least of all the Germans themselves, who, as is well known, have since the war's end largely sublimated their once robust political energies along economic lines. Belatedly, Walter Rathenau's celebrated dictum, "economics is destiny," has acquired a ring of truth. At the same time, an ethos of depoliticization has its perils.

Thus, while for the moment risks of European political instability remain few, knowing what in the long run the future may hold is difficult. The key question seems to be, Will the structure of German democracy remain unaffected by its strident neonationalist detractors—that is, by the representatives of the so-called new democratic right and their sympathizers? Will the rightward shift of Germany's political spectrum leave the institutional fabric of the Federal Republic unchanged? Or does the peculiar disjunction between culture and politics presage an unsavory, illiberal political realignment?

In the contemporary German political context to raise the specter of brown-clad ghosts remains irresponsible. Yet, such caveats should not obviate the demands of sober political assessment. There are two structural variables affecting the current political situation that bear consideration.

1. The recent shift of Germany's political capital from Bonn to Berlin is an event fraught with both historical and symbolic significance. It has tempted many observers to conclude that the Bonn Republic was an aberration in the long-term course of German historical development. Thus, with the emergence of a Berlin Republic, some say that one can hark back with impunity to hallowed traditions of the Second Empire—that is, to the traditions of "respectable" German conservatism that the Nazis, as petty bourgeois radicals, ruined. That the Second Empire, for all its "modern" features, was ill-disposed toward the values of pluralism, democracy, and rule of law is a fact that in most accounts remains conveniently omitted.

2. Throughout most of the important political debates of the 1990s the German left has been a negligible presence. To be sure, the left's enfeeblement has not been a phenomenon entirely of its own making. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Helmut Kohl made sure that debate over reunification was defined in narrow terms that emphasized economic stability and political continuity—"Deutsche Mark nationalism."[7] These constricted political parameters precluded public debate on fundamental constitutional questions, ensuring that the left (as well as other critics) were essentially left out (reflections on the value and meaning of "the nation" have never been the left's forté in any event). Nevertheless, the German left has traditionally had its own love-hate relationship with democracy. Since Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1843), its indictments of bourgeois society have usually gone hand-in-hand with a willingness to jettison basic rights and liberal safeguards. This ambivalent anti-parliamentarist legacy was perpetuated by the extra-parliamentary left of the 1960s (the so-called APO) as well as the peace movement in the 1980s. Finally, with the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, the ideological debilities of left-wing "antifascism"—a lukewarm attitude toward the values of liberalism combined with an ingrained reticence to speak out against the evils communism—were finally unmasked. Its dreams of an authentic German socialism at last exposed, the antifascist left was morally discredited.[8] Yet this swan song of the German left had debilitating consequences for German political culture. For it meant that the German right, deprived of its major ideological adversary, was left with the political field virtually to itself.

Who Are the New Right?

The summons to normalize the German past has been led by the so-called New Right, a loosely affiliated group of younger publicists and historians who, for a time, occupied positions of influence at *Die Welt* (a leading German daily) and the Ullstein publishing house. Although, as Josef Joffe has correctly pointed out, the intellectual influence of this group has waned considerably since 1995 (when

the historian Rainer Zitelmann was dismissed from his position as editor of *Die Welt*'s Sunday supplement), to focus narrowly on the fate of individuals instead of larger political and cultural trends would be shortsighted.[9] The New Right's importance is as much *representative* as it is intrinsic: its aspirations toward a new German "normalcy" are symptomatic of attitudes toward German history and politics that are shared by a broader stratum of opinion-leaders: journalists, literati, and politicians.

The German New Right has appropriated a tack from its counterpart in France, the so-called Nouvelle Droite.[10] One of its chief aims has been to counter a perceived left-wing cultural dominance by implementing a "Gramscism of the right," thereby replacing left-wing intellectual hegemony with a right-wing hegemony. The New Right likes to portray itself as an up-and-coming "young" generation, thus playing on the myth of Germany as a "young nation"—historically, a standard trope of German nationalist discourse. Similarly, it styles itself as the "generation of '89," claiming that, unlike its predecessors (in particular, the senescent APO-OPAs of the 1960s), it is the first generation qualified to arrive at an unbiased evaluation of the key events of twentieth-century history.

One of the New Right's main strategies has been a tendentious rereading of National Socialism. Its exponents believe that the first step to making German nationalism respectable again is to relativize—for the sake of minimizing—the crimes of the Third Reich. In this respect, they are explicitly retracing paths tread by the revisionist camp in the German Historians' Debate of the 1980s: Ernst Nolte's contention that Auschwitz, far from being unique, was merely one among many twentieth-century genocides (moreover, compared to the Soviet Gulag, it was far from "original"); and Michael Stürmer's functionalist definition of history writing: "In a land without history, whoever fills memory, coins the concepts, and interprets the past, controls the future."[11] Thus, for example, Zitelmann's doctoral thesis and first book took pains to distinguish the "positive" aspects of Nazi rule from the "negative." Building selectively on earlier, mainstream historical literature, he sought to emphasize National Socialism's role as a "modernizing" force. "The National Socialist Party was the first German party to achieve a

[political] integration that went beyond class. Modernity was the key to its success, and this modernity formed an essential moment of National Socialist social policy following Hitler's seizure of power."[12] Moreover, by attributing National Socialism's excesses to "modernization" as a type of uncontrollable process that "befell" Germany from on high, as it were, Germany's own responsibility for these excesses is implicitly discounted.

This selective reevaluation of the National Socialist past—systematically neglecting Nazi atrocities and disingenuously highlighting its "progressive" side—has become a standard tactic for the New Right historical revisionism. Moreover, this rereading of German history stands in polemical opposition to the left-liberal social scientific approach of the Bielefeld school (led by Hans-Ulrich Wehler), which predominated during the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas Wehler and company sought to stress the social origins of Nazism, Zitelmann and his followers wish to return to the (compromised) empathic traditions of German historicism: a positive emphasis on the role of the state and its leaders, coupled with a rigorous extrusion of moral judgment—a patently suspect demand in the case of a regime such as National Socialism that committed crimes of unprecedented magnitude.

One of the New Right's most sensational forays into the German public sphere came on May 8, 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of Germany's defeat in World War II. Traditionally, politicians and historians commemorated this date as Germany's emancipation from Nazism. But Zitelmann and friends had a different agenda in mind. In keeping with Stürmer's maxim "whoever interprets the past controls the future," they sought instead to portray the date as the onset of Germany's misfortune: the Red Army's triumphant occupation of eastern Germany, the beginning of the nation's political division, and the loss of sovereignty to the occupying Western powers. Employing a familiar strategy, they sought to portray Germany and the Germans as the real victims in World War II. To drive home this point, they launched a controversial nation-wide campaign in German newspapers—"Against Forgetting."[13] In a manner wholly in keeping with the parochial focus of neonationalism, claims about German suffering were disproportionately highlighted, whereas the

massive and willful suffering Germany had inflicted on others was passed over in silence.

Borrowing a page from the Nouvelle Droite, members of the German New Right disingenuously described themselves as apostles of tolerance and free speech, as defenders of liberty. Conversely, they portrayed the representatives of the reigning left-liberal consensus as intolerant, even "totalitarian." Thus, in their introduction to *Westbindung,* Zitelmann and his fellow editors leveled the following accusation against post-1960s German political culture: "Allegiance to the 'western value community' has attained the status of a political utopia that has penetrated the whole of society *in totalitarian fashion*. . . . This utopia is totalitarian insofar as it is the specific feature of totalitarian systems to exercise total ideological influence over the population of a nation."[14] Zitelmann has gone so far as to equate the years 1933 and 1968: in his view, both dates represent disastrous turning points for the fate of the German nation. Just as in the Historians' Debate, Nolte accused those who questioned his revisionist historical agenda of attempting to stifle free speech and legitimate scholarly debate, defenders of the New Right, who make no secret of their authoritarian political longings, portray themselves as "liberal" and their left-wing antagonists as tyrannical. They repeatedly attempt to score points by playing up their antiestablishment credentials: *they* are the breakers of taboos and challengers of received wisdom, whereas representatives of the left are painted as the repressive guardians of political and historiographical orthodoxy.

The protest against left-wing "political correctness" was one of the New Right's major rallying points. Yet upon reflection their Schmittian search for a worthy foe was risible: in the aftermath of reunification the fortunes of the German left had plummeted, and the *Zeitgeist* turned sharply to the right—at least until the 1998 success of Gerhard Schroder's Red-Green coalition (even then, given Schroder's preoccupation with curtailing social spending, many were left wondering what was "socialist" about the Social Democrats). In particular, feminism—another contested legacy of the 1960s—was viewed as anathema, a dangerous ideological scourge.

Feminism represented a clear and present danger to German manhood, the constant threat of emasculation. In the words of one of the contributors to the popular New Right anthology, *The Self-Confident Nation,* feminism is "the sexist virus that splits our society"—a characterization that betrays a obsession with the attributes of masculinity and virility, classic *topoi* of fascist ideology.[15] (One will also note the recourse to the language of virology, a rhetorical staple of the discourse of biological racism.) According to fascist scribe Ernst Jünger, father figure and economic patron of the New Right, "The 'elemental,' toward which we strive, is for the first time perceptible in the jaws of war. Only when the play of perpetual emptiness of normal life is swept away will what is natural and elemental within us—a genuinely primitive dimension that is otherwise hidden—erupt with blood and seed."[16] Similarly, for Carl Schmitt, "The hallmark of authentic politics is the moment when the enemy emerges in concrete clarity as the enemy."[17] According to the conservative revolutionary worldview, the nihilism and decadence of contemporary Europe are a direct result of the triumph of liberalism, whose political values—discussion, compromise, egalitarianism—are in essence *effeminate.* Only a renewed social Darwinist emphasis on virility and risk, guaranteed by a strong and well-armed state, might redeem Germany and Europe from a fate of liberal vacillation and indecision.

The German New Right is fond of characterizing itself as the "democratic right." By strategically distancing themselves from the far right (e.g., neo-Nazis), its members are cleverly able to present themselves as intellectual and political moderates, thereby stealthily interjecting their revisionist views into cultural mainstream. If, as Jürgen Habermas has suggested, the singular accomplishment of the Federal Republic has been Germany's reorientation toward the civic political culture of the West, the German New Right has done all it can to call this value commitment radically into question.[18] Thomas Mann once remarked that the West needs a European Germany rather than a German Europe. As staunch antiuniversalists, the followers of the New Right are vehemently opposed to Germany's participation in the European Union, which they are fond of

satirizing as the "*Monstrum vom Maastricht.*" Instead, their political program draws on a standard arsenal of 1920s national revolutionary positions: ethnic homogeneity, the nation as a "community of fate" (Schicksalgemeinschaft), "geopolitics" (suggesting that Germany foreign policy is dictated by its geographical position in the European center), and a strong state that must be able to compensate for the centrifugal tendencies of (liberal) "society." In all these respects New Right intellectuals trace their spiritual pedigree back to the authoritarian political doctrines of Carl Schmitt.[19] As one New Right critic has observed, "Thus we can see a 'Schmittian' constellation extending from the *FAZ* [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*] and conservative politicians like Edmund Stoiber, Peter Gauweiler, Wolfgang Schäuble, and Alfred Dregger, on the one hand . . . to the *Junge Freiheit* and Franz Schönhuber's 'Republican' ideology, on the other."[20] The ubiquitous appeals to Schmitt's legacy have facilitated a blurring of the traditional distinctions between extreme and center right, black and brown, democratic and antidemocratic conservatism.

The Ghost of Carl Schmitt

Post-communist political instability and refugee problems have in intellectual and political circles abetted a "fortress Deutschland" mentality. And as the restrictive immigration law passed by the Bundestag in 1993 demonstrates, such developments have facilitated a measure of permeability between the New Right and the political mainstream. Even intellectuals on the left, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, for instance, have jumped on the neoisolationist bandwagon, decreeing that, since cosmopolitan dreams of "perpetual peace" are dead, the best that one can do is to cultivate one's own garden by safeguarding national borders and interests.[21] The dramatist Botho Strauss shares Enzensberger's despair, which he purveys in apocalyptical terms appropriate to an Ernst Jünger novel. In his vitriolic diatribe, "Anschwellender Bockgesang" ("swelling song of the goat"), he duly enumerates the following "seismic indicators of great distress": "world historical turbulence, a celestially decreed powerlessness, the violation of taboos . . . the destabilization and

deterioration of intimate life, the arrival of times of famine in the biblical sense."[22] Strauss's fatalistic ruminations on planetary catastrophe betray a characteristic conservative revolutionary fascination with the "emergency situation" (Ausnahmezustand). Extreme situations call for extreme political measures. The conservative revolutionary diagnosis of the times dovetails perfectly with its preferred antidemocratic political prescriptions.

The conservative revolutionary standpoint has made inroads among a wide spectrum of politicians and opinion leaders. The "mercy of late birth," coupled with the obvious political and cultural capital to be gained by playing the nationalist card, has given rise to a new insouciance about breaking taboos. Wolfgang Schäuble, a leading CDU politician, has shown few inhibitions about portraying the nation as a "community of protection and of fate" (Schütz- und Schicksalgemeinschaft).[23] Intended to appeal to the nether regions of German national sentiment, this characterization insinuates that the existential needs of the national community trump considerations of principle. Conversely, one of Kohl's favorite slogans was "A good German is a good European." In support of his attempts to reanimate a romantic definition of the Volk, Schäuble approvingly cites the following remarks from the poet Joseph von Eichendorff: "The Volk lives neither by bread nor concepts alone. It wants something positive to love and to care for, in order to reinvigorate itself. It wants above all to have a *Heimat* in the full sense, that is, its own sphere of basic ideas, inclinations, and disinclinations, which vitally penetrate all its relationships."[24] Thus, whereas a previous generation of political leaders based foreign policy on an unflinching commitment to anchoring Germany firmly within Europe and NATO, a new generation, represented by men such as Schäuble, "do not even bother to conceal their primary allegiance to German nationalism pure and simple."[25]

Perhaps nowhere has the rightward shift in German political culture been more evident than in the medium of print journalism. In 1993 *Der Spiegel*—before reunification, a bulwark of liberal opinion—incited an uproar by publishing Strauss's illiberal tirade "Anschwellender Bockgesang"—an event described by one critic as a "caesura in the political discourse of the Federal Republic."[26] The

following year *Spiegel* editor Rudolf Augstein provoked renewed outrage by allowing the historian Ernst Nolte a platform to air his revisionist political views. In an interview entitled, "Was Hitler Right from a Historical Standpoint? Ernst Nolte on National Socialism, Auschwitz, and the New Right," Nolte bemoaned that Nazism's world-historical potential—that of a "third way" between communism and capitalism—still remained historically unrealized. Nor did Nolte hesitate to express his conviction that the so-called Auschwitz-lie—the denial of the gas chambers—contained "a small kernel of truth." Even false ideas, Nolte continued, must be objectively researched, for they are "often helpful in bringing more truthful ideas to light."[27] Leaving no doubt that the piece had the imprimatur of *Spiegel*'s editor-in-chief, Augstein personally conducted interview.

Undoubtedly, the leading offender in recycling the clichés and nostrums of neonationalism has been Germany's most prestigious daily, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. As John Ely has remarked, "Empirical observation of right intellectuals and their discourse reveals an overlap in themes and rhetoric between newspapers such as the *FAZ* and publications of the far right . . . from 'Prussian virtues' (Baring) and mythologies of Caesarism to the 'arcades of power' at Sans-Souci (Stürmer), Ernst Jünger, and right wing postmodernism."[28] Since reunification, the *FAZ* has moved steadily to the right: belittling the legacy of '68, pandering to the claims of historical revisionism, glorifying the virtues of national homogeneity, celebrating tainted literati such as Ernst Jünger, and pontificating about geopolitical imperatives of the German *Mittellage*. The *FAZ* has published—unremarked—lavish death notices for former Hitler-deputy Rudolf Hess and irredentist letters from Sudeten Germans declaring that they, too, should have a say in determining the future of the Czech Republic. A Schmittian, anti-liberal, *étatiste* approach to politics has become commonplace. Thus, with a swipe at Habermas's theory of discourse ethics, an editorial from the early 1990s begins, "Some things in the German system of government appear almost as a caricature of a domination-free discourse: everything gets said, and nothing is decided."[29]

Increasingly, the *FAZ* has sought to rehabilitate a crude version of "national liberalism"—the proverbial "German idea of freedom"

(Leonard Krieger). Historically, the German idea of freedom accorded little weight to considerations of individual liberty. Instead, freedom was associated with the nation's autonomous capacity for action (one of Germany's traditional political deficits as a "belated nation"), which trumped the rights and interests of the individual. Since the idea of national liberalism mandated that the individual exists for the sake of the state rather than vice versa, an air of illiberalism constantly haunted the doctrine. In *Idealism and Nation* the Schmittian political philosopher Bernd Willms aptly describes the national liberal standpoint when he observes: "Insofar as the national idea is realized in the consciousness of every individual, the nation is the objective connection not only of state and people but also of individuals to one another." Thus, concludes Willms, "the national is also the presupposition of conscious freedom."[30]

Border-Crossers and Spiritual Reactionaries

One of the most significant aspects of 1990s German political culture has been the number of former left-wing intellectuals and writers who have crossed over to the right. This shift entails a conventional identification with the "the nation" and its existential prerogatives. Like many other aspects of post-reunification German political culture, this neonationalist awakening was already noticeable during the 1980s, especially during the course of the "peace movement" debates.[31]

In part, the left-right shift was predictable: once the totalitarian nature of "really existing socialism" was exposed (a process that predates 1989), intellectuals on the left were deprived of a utopian alternative. To many, the idea of "the nation" seemed like the best available means to achieve analogous ends.

What were those ends? Historically, the extreme left and extreme right have shared a visceral hostility to bourgeois society. For the revolutionary left the bourgeoisie was defined as the "class enemy." Conversely, the conservative revolutionary distaste for *Der Bourgeois* was always tinged with an aristocratic and aestheticist bent that, at a later point, resurfaced in the phrases of left-wing Kulturkritik

(e.g., the Frankfurt School). The bourgeois was vulgar, unrefined, the stereotypical social climber or parvenu. Of course, a strong dose of "geopolitics" is always mixed in with this assessment: Germany's traditional political rivals England and France (and later, America) were perceived as the bourgeois nations par excellence. They were (to quote Werner Sombart) the nations of *Händler* (traders) rather than *Helden* (heroes). In *Confessions of an Unpolitical Man* (1917) Thomas Mann contrasts the bourgeois unfavorably with the artist. After the Great War, Ernst Jünger upped the polemical ante, lionizing the risk-seeking "warrior-type" in contrast with the timorous bourgeois, for whom security and material well-being were ultimate values.

The thesis of "fraternal enmity" between left and right suggests that, at certain pivotal ideational junctures, *les extrêmes se touchent*. Excoriated by both right and left as a carrier of the iniquities of modern *Zivilisation*, the bourgeoisie, in the discourse of both groups, assumes a negative totemic status: were one to eliminate its influence, the shortcomings of modern society would magically disappear. Since the worldviews of both the extreme left and extreme right harbor a deep-seated and fundamental antipathy to capitalist society qua "technological Moloch," one can interchangeably appropriate aspects of either position for the sake of reaching analogous critical and political ends. Perhaps the best-known historical instance of left-right ideological crossover is the case of the National Bolsheviks, who during the 1920s were convinced that Germany should ape the Soviet model of economic planning and political dictatorship to surmount the "crisis of liberalism."[32] Insofar as National Bolshevism's best-known exponent, Ernst Niekisch, was an ardent foe of Nazism (he was persecuted by the regime), this outlook—purportedly free of political taint—appears highly serviceable for the ends of New Right. That the national revolutionary standpoint was staunchly antidemocratic and bellicist seems to be no great stumbling block to its enthusiastic adoption among New Right intellectuals.

Among the German cultural potencies who have foresworn their allegiance to the political left to ally themselves with the post-

reunification "national awakening," one may include filmmakers Edgar Reitz and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, the novelist Martin Walser, dramatist and essayist Botho Strauss, the Germanist Karl-Heinz Bohrer, and the late DDR playwright Heiner Müller.[33] They have been collectively dubbed Germany's new "spiritual reactionaries," insofar as their interventions have centered on cultural as opposed to explicitly political themes. By and large they share the conservative revolutionary diagnosis of the age: Kultur and *Innerlichkeit,* Germany's traditional spiritual strengths since the age of romanticism, are under threat from the superficial blandishments of mass society—consumerism, advertising, Hollywood, and, more generally, the "culture industry"—in sum, "Americanism." As Botho Strauss observes in "Anschwellender Bockgesang":

> Whoever allows himself to be laughed at in a private conversation by millions of onlookers harms the wonder and dignity of dialogue, of face to face discourse, and should be punished with a lifelong proscription from the intimate sphere. The regime of telecratic publicity is the ultimate form of violent, if bloodless, domination and the most all-encompassing totalitarianism known to history. . . . The reign of the transient holds sway, against which all forms of protest remain impotent.[34]

Strauss's "Bockgesang" outburst had a long prehistory. Since the 1980s he has bemoaned the modern triumph of technology and reason; in their stead he has recommended a return to the values of the sacred and "myth." Strauss believes that culture not predicated on an aesthetic experience of the sacred is destined to disintegrate into formlessness—precisely the risk run by modern civilization. Whereas works of art, qua secular myths, place us in contact with the miraculous, reason never penetrates to the essence of things. "The self-determined individual," declares Strauss, "is the most blatant lie of reason."[35] Myth, conversely, provides us with an experience of the ineffable. Denigrating modernity's attempts to legitimate itself via Enlightenment ideals such as popular sovereignty and subjective "rights," Strauss wishes instead to promote an *aesthetic* justification of existence. "Life as a work of art that gives birth

to itself," proclaims Nietzsche in the *Gay Science.*[36] Thereby Strauss seeks to revivify a political ideal first celebrated by the German romantics: the ideal of the "aesthetic state."[37] The aesthetic doctrines articulated in Strauss's 1992 work, *Beginninglessness,* inform the cultural politics of "Bockgesang." Against the backdrop of neo-Nazi violence, which during 1992–93 resulted in some 25 deaths, Strauss invoked René Girard's idea that violence founds the political community. According to Girard, "The rite is the repetition of an original spontaneous lynching which guarantees order in the community." Strauss glosses this claim as follows: "Racism and xenophobia are 'fallen' cult practices that originally had a sacred, order-establishing meaning." "The stranger, the traveler is captured and stoned," he continues, "when there is unrest in the city. The scapegoat as the target of violence is never just an object of hate, but also a thing of worship . . . a metabolic vessel."[38] Since scapegoating is intrinsic to the demands of social order—without it, the community would violently feed on itself and implode—Strauss in effect delivers a post facto justification of neo-Nazi racism. "In our liberal-libertarian self-enclosedness we no longer understand why a people is prepared to defend its way of life against others and is ready to perpetrate *blood-sacrifice;* we consider it false and objectionable."[39] The provocative discussion of sacrifice links seamlessly with Strauss's aesthetic and cultural views. For the flipside of Germany's mass media-induced stupefaction is its incapacity to experience tragedy (the "goat-song") as a violent aesthetic rite that binds the community.

Throughout the essay Strauss's fealty to the national revolutionary worldview, historical and contemporary, is to the fore. He complains that the Federal Republic's left-leaning cultural consensus has "mocked Heidegger and demonized Jünger." He laments the fact that "ten million German television viewers are unlikely to become Heideggerians [sic]" and openly endorses Jünger's Armageddon-tinged prophecy of a "return of the gods."[40] His identification with the thematics of New Right cultural politics could hardly be more explicit:

> *To be on the right with one's entire being* means . . . to experience the superior power of remembrance that seizes the individual, isolates

> and confounds him in the midst of modern, enlightened society where he leads his customary existence. It is a question of an act of rebellion against the total domination of the present that robs the individual of every moment of fulfillment [*Anwesenheit*] contained in the unenlightened past, that seeks to cancel and eliminate historical becoming and mythical time.[41]

Were Strauss's violent reactionary musings the voice of a misanthropic loner, there would be little cause for concern. But he has been joined by a veritable chorus of dyspeptic German literati and *régisseurs,* transforming the fissure between culture and politics into a veritable chasm. Thus, in a remarkable treatise, *On the Misfortune and Fortune of Art in Germany After the Last War* (1990), the director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg bemoaned the familiar debilities of postwar German cultural life—Americanization, depthlessness, an insufficiently "national" focus, or, as Syberberg puts it, "art without *Volk*." "We have been taken over by the plastic world," Syberberg protests. "When we climb into a car, a plane, aboard ship, when we purchase today's kitchen, let ourselves into today's TV world, from the studio and substance to the image of the world, we enter the world of artificial chemical universes. . . . Our thought, our memories [are] the simulation of life."[42] The German director thereby updates the paranoid idiom of Spenglerian Kulturkritik to suit the demands of the information society. His remarks illustrate how the discourse of spiritual reaction excels in exaggerating—and thereby exploiting—legitimate fears about globalization and mass culture. Whereas historically the left has criticized the same phenomena in the name of the precepts of democracy and autonomy, the spiritual reactionaries use them as a pretext to undermine liberalism in the name of the values of German particularism.

To the idiom of spiritual reaction Syberberg adds a sinister, though predictable, anti-Semitic twist: "One could make a career out of consorting with Jews or leftists, forming bonds that had nothing to do with love, or understanding, or even inclination. Jews must have put up with this since they wanted power."[43] Although Syberberg's distasteful remarks met with opprobrium in most quarters of respectable German society, in the words of one commentator,

"The chorus of protest . . . led to the suspicion that one of their own had simply come out into the open."[44]

In 1993, the year of Strauss's "Bockgesang" tirade, the novelist Martin Walser complained that skinhead violence was due to a deficit of national thinking rather than a surfeit of the same, or to a dearth of civic consciousness, as most observers would reasonably suppose.[45] The official political response to these neo-Nazi excesses, a draconian revision of the federal asylum law in July 1993, suggested that the foreigners themselves were to blame for their own persecution. In 1998 Walser created a scandal when accepting a literary award at the Frankfurt Book Fair. He complained of the instrumentalization of the Holocaust as a "moral cudgel" with which to beat down and intimidate Germany, thus echoing the familiar New Right trope of German victimization. Auschwitz, commented Walser, should not become a "routine threat, a tool of intimidation, a moral cudgel or just a compulsory exercise." He objected to plans for a Berlin Holocaust memorial as a "monumentalization of shame" in the heart of the German capital. One of the immediate targets of Walser's remarks seemed to be the rash of demands on the part of Holocaust victims and slave laborers for compensation. Yet, in the course of his speech, Walser displayed little concern with distinguishing between licit and illicit, genuine and false, appeals to historical memory. One came away from his speech instead with the sense that virtually *all* contemporary allusions to the fate of the Jews were misappropriations.

Walser's Book Fair tirade was one in a long line of voluble outcries demanding that post-reunification Germany be treated as a "normal nation" again. Rushing to Walser's defense, the writer Monika Maron proclaimed, "For me, young Germans are as little incriminated as young Danes or young French."[46]

A nation that must repeatedly and demonstratively declare itself "normal" inevitably raises suspicions. What might its denizens be trying to hide? As the historian Saul Friedländer has inquired, "Is a normal society a society without memory, one that tries to conceal tragedy, one that turns away from its own past in order to live only in the present and the future?"[47] That German "normalcy" would be so vigorously proclaimed at a time of escalating neo-Nazi

extremism, along with worrisome electoral inroads of far-right parties such as the Deutsche Volksunion, cannot help but raise doubts with respect to motives. According to a recent Emnid poll, 43 percent of Germans believe that National Socialism had good and bad sides; 40 percent believe that without the war and the extermination of the Jews, Hitler would have been a "great statesman."[48] Since reunification, acts of violent right-wing extremism have mushroomed: between 1992 and 1993, nearly five thousand such acts were reported. Although since the high-water mark of the early 1990s, such incidents have declined, they still remain significantly above 1980s levels. Since the early 1990s, anti-Jewish incidents have risen sharply, from 627 in 1992 to 1,155 in 1995. During the same period, desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues have averaged over fifty per year—a 66 percent increase since the mid-1980s.[49] None of these trends inspire democratic confidence. As Habermas has appropriately remarked, the myth of German normalcy is the second "life-lie" of the Federal Republic:

> Anyone who replies to the signals of desolidarization with an appeal to the "self-confident nation" or by calling for a return to the "normality" of the reestablished national state, is using the devil to drive out Satan. For these unsolved global problems reveal precisely the limits of the nation-state. From the somber drumroll of national history emerge war memorials with limited vision. Only as a critical authority does history serve as a teacher. At best it tells us how we ought *not* to do it. It is from experiences of a negative kind that we learn. That is why 1989 will remain a fortunate date only so long as we respect 1945 as the genuinely instructive one.[50]

The debate over German normalcy has been mistakenly cast. Walser and his supporters claim that Germans who were born after the war (the so-called mercy of late birth) should no longer have to feel guilty concerning their forebears' misdeeds. But it is less a question of guilt than one of historical responsibility. Claiming that Germans today are somehow "guilty" is foolish. But it is also insincere to deny that present-day Germany continues to bear a measure of responsibility for a legacy of conquest and expansion whose exceptional brutality has, in the annals of modern history, acquired

emblematic status. Insofar as these acts of aggression were international in scope, the parameters of remembrance, too, transcend national boundaries. They cannot be dictated by the functionalist imperatives of national identity formation. Germany's victims, too, deserve to have a say, for the dialectics of ethical life suggest that forgiveness is the prerogative of those who were wronged; it cannot simply be proclaimed unilaterally by the perpetrators or their heirs. An awareness of the way one is perceived by others is an indispensable self-correcting mechanism.

One of Walser's major misgivings concerns the alleged instrumentalization of the Holocaust for so-called ulterior ends. Here, the solution is relatively simple. Rather than drawing a curtain on the German past (the proverbial *Schlusstrich*) as the new nationalism suggests, concerned citizens should strive to ensure that the commemorations of the past are genuine and meaningful rather than merely perfunctory. The plans for a new Holocaust monument in Berlin, on a 4.9 acre site that will include a million volume library, point precisely in this direction.[51]

As Tocqueville once remarked, "As the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity."[52] Throughout the postwar era, German political culture has been distinguished by a remarkable capacity for enlightened self-criticism. It is disturbing that following reunification a new national consensus would emerge suggesting that this capacity for self-criticism was excessive, or that a new, less reflective posture—one more in step with the demands of "normalization"—is needed. It makes one wonder whether the earlier gestures of contrition were sincere.[53] After fifty years of democratic stability, it would be foolish to overreact by suggesting that Germany is at risk of regressing to dictatorship. Yet the new nationalism raises the specter of Germany going its own way: the rejection of a cosmopolitan-European identity in favor of a renewed German provincialism. It indicates the dangers of Germany's uncoupling itself from the West in favor of a new identity oriented toward the conservative precepts of realism, Machtpolitik, and the geopolitical demands of the German *Mittellage*.

105. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Volk und Geschichte im Denken Herders* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1942), 23.

15. Felix Stern, "Feminismus und Apartheid," in *Die Selbstbewusste Nation,* ed. Ulrich Schacht and Heimo Schwilk (Frankfurt am Main: Ullsetin, 1994), 291 (italics added).

16. Ernst Jünger, "Der Kampf um das Reich," cited in Pflüger, *Deutschland driftet,* 35–36.

17. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* trans. G. Scwhab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 67; see also the German edition, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1963), 67: "Die Höhepunkte der grossen Politik sind zugleich die Augenblicke, in denen der Feind in konkreten Deutlichkeit als Feind erblickt wird." The English translation omits the allusion Nietzsche's concept of "great politics."

18. Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism,* 249–268. According to Ernst Frankel, "Nothing better characterizes the change in German consciousness than the difference in overtones that surface today when discussion turns to 'the Western democracies'. . ." Cited in Klaus Naumann, "'Neauanfang ohne Tabus': Deutscher Sonderweg und politische Semantik," in *Extremismus der Mitte,* ed. H.-M. Lohmann, 70.

19. For a detailed discussion of Schmitt's influence on the New Right, see Klaus Kriener, "Plettenberg-Freiburg—Potsdam: Über den Einfluss Carl Schmitts auf die Junge Freiheit," in *Das Plagiat: Der völkisiche Nationalismus der Jungen Freiheit,* ed. H. Kellershohn (Duisberg: DISS, 1994), 181–212.

20. John Ely, "The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and National Conservativism," *German Politics and Society* 13(2) (Summer 1995), 83.

21. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Aussichten auf dem Bürgerkrieg* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993).

22. Botho Strauss, "Anschwellender Bockgesang," in *Die selbstbewusste Nation und weitere Beiträge zu einer deutschen Debatte, ed. H. Schwilk and U. Schacht (Berlin: Ullstein, 1994),* 26 (first published in *Der Spiegel* 46, 1993).

23. Cited in Klaus Naumann, "'Neauanfang ohne Tabus,'" 76.

24. Wolfgang Schäuble, *Und der Zukunft zugewandt* (Berlin: Siedler, 1994), 220ff.

25. Andrei Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 25.

26. Pflüger, *Deutschland Driftet,* 38.

27. "Ein historisches Recht Hitlers"? Der Faschismus-Interpret Ernst Nolte über den Nationalsozialismus, Auschwitz und die Neue Rechte. *Spiegel*-Gespräch mit Rudolf Augstein." *Der Spiegel,* Nr. 40 (Oct. 10, 1994), 83–103.

28. John Ely, "The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and National Conservatism," 106–107.

29. Cited in ibid., 88.

30. Willms, *Idealismus und Nation* (Paderborn: Schoningh, 1986), 17. Cited in ibid., 90ff. See also, Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

31. See Jeffrey Herf, *War By Other Means* (New York: Free Press, 1991); and Hans-Georg Betz, *Postmodern Politics in Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

32. For more on National Bolshevism, see Herzinger and Stein, *Endzeit-Propheten,* 126–143; see also Louis Dupeux, *National Bolchevisme,* 2 vols. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1979).

33. See David Pan, "Botho Strauss: Myth, Community, and Nationalism in Germany," *Telos* 105 (Fall 1995), 57: "Since the end of communism and the reunification of Germany, writers from both the former East and West Germany have sounded the alarm against the materialism of German culture, the dangers of capitalist homogenization, and the decline of values. An entire generation of 'left-wing' writers, including Heiner Müller, Botho Strauss, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Martin Walser have attempted to defend German culture against the perceived threat of American capitalism and Western rationalism."

34. Strauss, "Anschwellender Bockgesang," 31.

35. Strauss, *Beginnlosigkeit* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992), 107.

36. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 796.

37. For an excellent treatment of this problem, see Hans Reiss, ed., *The Political Doctrines of German Romanticism;* and Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

38. Strauss, "Anschwelleder Bockgesang," 39.

39. Ibid., 21.

40. Ibid., 28, 31, 34.

41. Ibid., 24 (emphasis added).

42. Syberberg, *Vom Unglück und Glück der Kunst im Deutschland nach dem letzten Kriege* (Munich: Matthes and Seitz, 1990), 114.

43. Ibid., 14.

44. Dieter Diederichsen, "Spiritual Reactionaries After German Reunification: Syberberg, Foucault, and Others," *October* 62 (Fall 1992), 66.

45. Cited in Pflüger, *Deutschland Driftet,* 11.

46. For a summary of the debate, see Roger Cohn, "Germany Searches for Normalization," *New York Times,* November 29, 1998, section 4, 10.

At one point the dramatist Heiner Müller gleefully joined the chorus: "It has to do with a tragedy that has so far been completely covered up—the

tragedy of the German people and the end of the German nation. All of that has been suppressed. That is why there is no good German literature about the Second World War. The right is now pushing into this vacuum."

47. Saul Friedländer, "Die Metapher des Bösen," *Die Zeit* 49, November 26, 1998, 50.

48. Pflüger, *Deutschland driftet,* 89.

49. See Werner Bergmann, "Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany Since Unification," in *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany Since Unification,* ed. H. Kurthen et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21–38.

50. Habermas, "1945 in the Shadow of 1989," in *A Berlin Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 180–181. See also Habermas, "Die zweite Lebenslüge der Bundesrepublik: Wir sind wieder 'normal' geworden," *Die Zeit* 51 (December 18, 1992).

51. "Schröder Backs Design for a Vast Berlin Holocaust Memorial," *New York Times,* January 17, 1999, A6. For a good discussion of the controversial history of this project, see Michael Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

52. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. G. Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 703.

53. See Daniel Goldhagen, "Modell Budesrepublik: National History, Democracy, and Internationalization in Germany," *Common Knowledge* 6(3) (1997), 11: "Two parallel, indeed surprising, developments characterize the Federal Republic: the emergence of a relatively non-nationalist and remarkably self-critical, national history and a relatively non-nationalist, internationally responsible nation state."

Notes to Chapter Four: Left Fascism

1. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Moderne: Ein unvollendetes Projekt," in *Kleine Politische Schriften,* I–IV (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 444–464. The essay originated as a lecture delivered by Habermas on the occasion of his receipt of the Adorno prize awarded by the city of Frankfurt on September 11, 1980. It has appeared in English in *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981) under the title, "Modernity vs. Postmodernity," 3–14; as well as in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), edited by Hal Foster, under the title, "Modernity: An