



# The Routledge Handbook of German Politics & Culture

Edited by Sarah Colvin  
Assistant Editor: Mark Taplin

# The Routledge Handbook of German Politics & Culture

*The Routledge Handbook of German Politics & Culture* offers a wide-ranging and authoritative account of Germany in the 21st century. It gathers the expertise of internationally leading scholars of German culture, politics, and society to explore and explain:

- historical pathways to contemporary Germany
- the current 'Berlin Republic'
- society and diversity
- Germany and Europe
- Germany and the world.

This is an essential resource for students, researchers, and all those looking to understand contemporary German politics and culture.

**Sarah Colvin** is the Schröder Professor of German at the University of Cambridge, UK.

**Mark Taplin** is a freelance scholar, editor, and translator.

‘It could hardly be more important, and at the same time it could hardly be more straightforward. Anyone who wants to understand the difficult options that face today’s Europe has to understand what makes contemporary Germany tick. And anyone who wants to understand the new Germany will find the *Handbook of German Politics & Culture* an essential toolbox of insights for both of these tasks.’

*Martin Kettle, chief leader writer, Guardian*

‘This is an impressively up-to-date and comprehensive survey of contemporary German political, economic and cultural life. It also offers important insights into Germany’s relationship with Europe and the wider world. The contributions, written by an array of internationally renowned scholars, are lively, interesting, informative and engaged. The book will be of great interest to scholars, students and the general public alike.’

*Professor Bill Niven, Nottingham Trent  
University, UK*

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Sarah Colvin*

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Mark Taplin*

First published 2015  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Routledge handbook of German politics & culture/

edited by Sarah Colvin.

pages cm

Summary: "The Routledge Handbook of German Politics and Culture offers a wide-ranging and authoritative account of Germany in the 21st century. It gathers the expertise of internationally leading scholars of German culture, politics, and society to explore and explain – historical pathways to contemporary Germany – the current 'Berlin Republic' – society and diversity – Germany and Europe – Germany and the world. This is an essential resource for students, researchers, and all those looking to understand contemporary German politics and culture"– Provided by publisher. Germany–Politics and government–21st century. 2. Germany–Social life and customs–21st century. I. Colvin, Sarah.

DD290.29.R68 2014

943.088–dc23

2014017199

ISBN: 978-0-415-68686-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-74704-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo and Stone Sans  
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

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# Preface

Sarah Colvin

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In 2014, the centenary year of World War I, Germany looks back at a troubled hundred years: bellicosity, defeat, and enforced territorial changes. At the same time, since 1945, Germany has been at the centre of notably and remarkably peaceful processes of change, as its postwar transformation into a Federal Republic (now often called the Bonn Republic) and an East German state was followed by a further transformation in 1990 into a larger Federal Republic (now often called the Berlin Republic) at the end of a Cold War that never fulfilled its threat.

The focus of this *Handbook* is contemporary Germany – the Berlin Republic – in the cultural and political context of the ‘two Germanies’ that were unified to constitute it, and of Germany’s difficult history as a nation. This is, after all, a country which was unified as a nation only in 1871, under Bismarck; whose borders changed with relentless regularity throughout the 20th century; and which still today is grappling with the question not only who is and who is not German, but what makes up the mysterious quality of German-ness. It is deliberate that this is a handbook not of politics and society but of politics and culture. Historically, Germany’s self-definition as a nation is peculiarly linked to the idea of culture, and – as the chapters in this *Handbook* collectively and very stimulatingly demonstrate – understanding its politics or society is enabled by understanding that. Germany’s complexity as a nation resides not only, but not least, in its relationship with the idea of culture, which has been read both as a distraction from atrocity or even a licence for it (as Ritchie Robertson outlines) and as a cohesive force in a multicultural society that is historically linked with an ideal of holistic education (*Bildung*) that develops the humane in human beings. There seems to be, for example, a beginning process of empowerment through theatre in the Berlin Republic, which is described in [Chapter 14](#) by Christel Weiler; and certainly the idea of culture and of the *Kulturnation* still informs national and regional policymaking in Germany: Wilfried van der Will and Rob Burns cite a Federal parliament report of 2007 that asserts ‘culture is not an ornament. It is the foundation on which our society rests and on which it builds’. It is also, as both Paul Cooke and Gregory Paschalidis note, a vital element in Germany’s exercise of soft power. The Federal Republic’s foreign cultural policy, writes Paschalidis, is ‘not about “the good, the beautiful, and the true”, but about scientific exchange and the promotion of civil society’; and that is a very significant part of what has led to contemporary Germany’s external ‘recognition as an agent of peace and cooperation’.

Another element in that process has of course been the Federal Republic’s proactive participation in the European project. Ute Frevert cites a poll published in late 2013, in which 84 per cent of Germans viewed their country as a European country (compared with 59 per cent of those questioned in France and just 40 per cent in the UK). Europe, then, has not only

been the Federal Republic's political and economic project, but is part of a national identity. Again, that can and probably should be read both positively and negatively: Germany's 'reflexive multilateralism' in the European context is a useful counterforce to limiting nationalistic approaches, and European identity has enabled Germans to move past the vexed issue of being German after World War II; at the same time, as Fatima El-Tayeb asks, what is the strategic, legitimising, political force of the notion of 'being European' or having a 'shared European identity'? Who is 'in' and who is 'out' when the production of continental identity turns into continental gatekeeping?

Since the US financial crisis of 2008, which in the eurozone became a 'euro crisis', the German/European relationship has been challenged and questioned, both inside and outside the country. Among other things, as Jeffrey Anderson outlines, 'being German' means being part of a country internationally regarded as an economic powerhouse, with a highly distinctive economic model. Both Lothar Funk (in [Chapter 22](#)) and Kurt Hübner (in [Chapter 24](#)) offer accounts of how distinctively German 'ordoliberal' approaches provided a basis for the social market economy (*soziale Marktwirtschaft*) that characterised the postwar Federal Republic. The social market economy, by which the free market is supported in conjunction with social welfare, indicates what might be a characteristically German tendency to make policy on the assumption that 'doing the right thing' can be synergetic with economic success – this is reflected again in Germany's programme of ecological modernisation, as described in [Chapter 23](#) by Rainer Hillebrand. That does not stop Germany from being perceived, still, as an actual or potential hegemon, 'reluctant' (in William Paterson's phrase) or not. But what is a hegemon – primarily an ideological bully, or primarily a practical provider of the resources necessary to enable cross-national cooperation? That question is asked by Beverly Crawford, who suggests that, if the latter answer is true, the eurozone might currently stand in great need of Germany's 'hegemonic leadership', and that the more worrisome question is whether Germany is willing and able to provide it.

Has a 21st-century Federal Republic moved away from its 'European vocation'? For some, Germany's focus on the national self-interest in the context of the eurozone crisis is a sign of 'normalisation' (where national self-interest is held to be a marker of normality). For others Germany's participation in international warfare (described by Hanns Maull and James Sperling) marks a return to 'normality' (where the West German Basic Law of 1949 had forbidden it). But is 'normalisation' in the sense of a political and cultural shift away from the dominant presence of the (Nazi) past something to be welcomed – should the Germans be allowed to forget? That might depend on who one thinks 'the Germans' are. Contemporary united Germany, as Anne Fuchs explains, has acknowledged that it has 'turned into a multicultural society with citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds and belief systems, divergent generational perspectives, and fractured formative experiences'. There is a risk that a 'continuing emphasis on the moral responsibilities of Germans in the post-Holocaust era' will perpetuate, in Mary Fulbrook's words, 'an essentially ethnically defined notion of citizenship', where the idea of citizenship seems to have a dynamic potential beyond that of ethnic or cultural-historical identity. There seems to be a need both to remember (or memorialise) and to avoid fetishising the responsibility to remember as a key marker of national identity.

The 'positives' of normalisation might well be seen to include the normalisation of Germany's citizenship laws seen in the international context (as Helen Williams points out in [Chapter 8](#)), or indeed the effects of high-profile events like the 2006 World Cup, which not only rather 'normalised' the perception of Germany abroad but for many Germans enabled a kind of 'normal patriotism' (as Jonathan Grix describes it) that had not otherwise seemed possible after 1945.

But ‘normality’ is also a problematic concept because it depends, necessarily, not only (in the specifically German context) on relinquishing the strong emphasis on a post-Holocaust responsibility to remember, but also more generally on a counterpart notion of what is abnormal or deviant. It is unavoidably a notion in flux: even those who choose to queer normality – for example, in a contemporary ‘queer Berlin’ that has re-established its identity as a ‘centre for queer sexualities and genders’ (Clare Bielby and Frauke Matthes) – will eventually find themselves inhabiting a queer normality that has its own Others and outsiders. In Andrew Webber’s words, ‘any notion of normality needs to be qualified carefully [. . .], understood as a field of contesting normative and counternormative positions’. One might think that becoming old was the most normal thing in the world (in the standard phrase, rather better than the alternative); in late capitalist Germany, however – in Stuart Taberner’s account of Germany as an advanced exemplar of an ageing society – there seems to be a growing need to account for the position of the elderly in that society. Those who do not provide the reference culture must needs address their place in it, and in contemporary Germany that is true also for those whose identity is East German – being East German in the Berlin Republic is both a geopolitical impossibility and, in Laurence McFall’s words, ‘an emotional and political reality’ that impacts, as Patricia Hogwood demonstrates, on the individual’s sense of wellbeing in society.

A central question any handbook on contemporary Germany and the Germans needs to address, then, is: who or what is ‘German’ in a multi-ethnic, multifaith (Krech), post-communist unified Republic in which a once nationally defining memory of the Nazi past is fast becoming postmemory. Is diversity an aspect of normalisation or antithetical to it? It seems important to recognise, as Alex Street and Randall Hansen among others in this volume argue, that German-ness is a highly differentiated thing – that renders the idea of integration (into what? out of what?) problematic. This *Handbook*, therefore, takes a deliberately differentiated approach, offering a collective perspective on contemporary Germany that is both international and cross-disciplinary. Eminent specialists from politics and international relations, political sociology, economics, literary and cultural studies, German history, European studies, religion, and theatre studies come together in the *Handbook*. That is not to claim that all possible perspectives are covered, but it does mean that the volume as a whole provides a complex and various view of a complex and various nation. When conceiving of it, and ‘arranging’ its chapters, I could not but be aware that one is always telling a story; but it seemed important that the narrative should be multifaceted. I have, therefore, not interfered as editor when contributors’ *interpretations* of contemporary Germany – their reading of its policies, and of its cultural and societal practices – differed. Readers are invited to read across chapters and sections (which will almost inevitably also mean reading across disciplines, and across national perspectives); in that way justice is hopefully done both to the contributors’ unique expertise and to the complexity of contemporary German politics and culture.

The chapters fall into thematic groups not only within the five sections of the volume but across those five sections. Issues of importance in contemporary German Studies recur throughout, and include the idea of culture and the *Kulturation* (particularly in [Chapters 2, 13, and 28](#)), cultural diversity (in [Chapter 18](#) as well as the chapters in [Part III](#)), and cultural activity, including sporting activity, as a form of soft power (particularly in [Chapters 13, 19, and 27](#)); issues around memory, the German past, and memorialisation (in [Chapters 1, 4, 10, and 11](#)) as well as cultural and political approaches to the problem of the past (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) (particularly in [Chapters 3, 11, 25, 26, and 28](#)); Germany’s European ‘vocation’ (in [Chapters 1 and 24](#) as well as the Chapters in [part IV](#)), and its economy and industry (in [Chapters 5, 22, 23, 24, and 25](#)); as well as the 21st-century process of ‘normalisation’ (particularly

## Preface

in [Chapters 6, 9, 10, 20, and 25](#)). The contributors have risen magnificently to the challenge of providing chapters that are both accessible to the lay reader and interesting to experts, and for that, as well as for the extraordinary breadth, precision, and efficiency of my assistant editor Mark Taplin, I am extremely grateful.

Sarah Colvin  
Cambridge, March 2014

## Part I

# Pathways to contemporary Germany

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# The history of a European nation

*Ute Frevert*

*Translation: Mark Taplin*

## What is a European nation?

This chapter's title might come as a surprise, and it does raise some questions. What is a European nation? What makes contemporary Germany into one? And how far back does the concept of a 'European nation' go, in the German case?

We could look for easy answers. A European nation is a nation in Europe, and geography tells us that Germany is placed firmly in the centre of the European continent. We could go on to write contemporary German history as one that starts at the end of World War II, with the division of the continent and the nation into two antagonistic parts. And we could finish with reunification and its aftermath, using Willy Brandt's famous quote of 10 November 1989 as a leitmotiv: 'Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört' (what belongs together will now grow together). We could even present reunified Germany as a model or case study for what has happened in Europe at large: East and West moving towards each other and striving to overcome the rift created by the Iron Curtain during the Cold War period.

But that is not how the history of Germany as a European nation will be told here. For Germany to be called a European nation demands more than geographical evidence: it calls for a deeper and more complex understanding of what Europe actually means. Is there anything like a common understanding of a nation's Europeanness? Has Europe been a national point of reference, and if so, in what way? Has it been used as a historical or political argument, in a strategic or legitimising sense? And have there been attempts to turn Europe into more than an argument by, for example, fostering institutional ties on a decidedly European level? Has Europe been a realm of experience (Koselleck 1989), and has it set the horizon of expectations for German citizens?

Focusing on contemporary Germany, all these questions might easily be answered in the affirmative: yes, today the Federal Republic does consider itself part of a European project defined in political, economic, and cultural terms; yes, politicians and public opinion constantly refer to Europe as a frame of reference and as an argument; yes, there are strong institutional ties on all levels and in many spheres, ranging from student exchanges and city twinning arrangements to financial policies, a common currency, and infrastructural support. Much of this is channelled through the organising power of the European Union, which has developed into a supranational



structure integrating close to 30 European nation states. While the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) was one of six founding members of the EU's forerunner, the European Economic Community (EEC), it is now widely seen as the Union's most important and powerful member state, at least when it comes to economic and financial issues.

That said, contemporary Germany appears as a clear case – even a showcase – of a European nation. As early as 1949, the preamble to the Basic Law (Germany's constitution) stated that the German people not only wished to preserve (or rather, regain) national and state unity, but also strove to support world peace as a 'gleichberechtigtes Glied in einem vereinten Europa' (an equal member of a unified Europe). Germany's new postwar identity and politics were thus clearly situated in a European context. In 1992 parliament added a clause that confirmed the Federal Republic's status as a member state (*Bundesstaat*) of the European Union. Taking a similar, though semantically restricted stance, a Supreme Court judgment from 2009 saw the Basic Law as authorising policies to contribute to and develop a European association of states (*Staatenverbund*).<sup>1</sup> And when asked about their country's Europeanness, German citizens overwhelmingly testify to their affinity for Europe. In an opinion poll published in December 2013, 84 per cent of Germans answered the question 'Is your country today European or not European?' in the affirmative, compared with 59 per cent in France and just 40 per cent in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

## History and memory

How do we explain the striking attachment to Europe – the European identity, even – of the Germans and of Germany today? What experiences lie behind it, what aspirations are linked to it, and what interpretations of history have fed into it? I argue that history is of key importance in helping us to understand Germany's relationship with Europe. By history, I mean not so much the past per se as the ways in which it is interpreted. Two examples will serve to illustrate the point.

### *Example 1: Commemorating the Battle of the Nations in Leipzig*

On 18 October 2013, a ceremony was held in Leipzig to commemorate the bloody battle fought out near the city, over three days, between the army of Napoleon and his allies and their opponents exactly 200 years earlier. In Napoleon's ranks were not just Frenchmen but soldiers from Italy and the Confederation of the Rhine, made up of various German states, while the opposing forces included Russians, Prussians, Austrians, and Swedes. In total, almost 600,000 men took part in the engagement, in which around one soldier in six was either killed or wounded. The battle continued to be remembered not just because of its gigantic scale, but because of its outcome – a decisive defeat for the French Emperor, halting his triumphal progress – which assured it a prominent place in the European history books. In Germany, it represented the culmination of the so-called wars of liberation, which in the 19th century came to be seen as an important factor in the process of German nation-building. Veterans' associations celebrated its anniversary and boasted of their contribution to national unification. At the start of the battle, Prussia had confronted Bavaria and Saxony as enemies, yet by the end the Saxons and Bavarians, too, had gone over to the coalition against Napoleon.

The events of 1813 seemed to prefigure the national unification eventually achieved following the victories at Wissembourg and Sedan in 1870. The date was commemorated as a 'feast day' on which – as the propagandist Ernst Moritz Arndt proposed as early as 1814 – all citizens would assemble for a 'großes deutsches Volksfest' (great festival of the German people)

in honour of the 'erste große Gemeinsame, das uns allen angehört' (first great collective event to which all of us can lay claim). Alongside this national festival, which was to become 'ein starkes und mächtiges Bindungsmittel aller Deutschen' (a strong and powerful unifier of all Germans), Arndt planned a national 'Ehrendenkmal' (memorial) near Leipzig, which he envisaged as 'groß und herrlich' (large and magnificent), 'wie ein Koloß, eine Pyramide, ein Dom in Köln' (like a colossus, a pyramid, or Cologne cathedral) (Arndt 1814: 8–9, 18, 20–1).

But it took time for the colossus to become a reality; its official opening was delayed until the 100th anniversary of the battle, in 1913. At 91 metres high, the monument towered over the flat surrounding countryside and was visible from miles around. It may have been built using modern materials (concrete), but its iconographic scheme was highly traditional. Guarding the entrance was a supersized image of the archangel Michael, patron saint of all soldiers. The circular interior housed a crypt, which served as a symbolic tomb for the fallen and contained four statues, each almost 10 metres high: the *Totenwächter* (Guards of the Dead) representing the four virtues of the German people during the wars of liberation, namely courage, faith, national vigour, and self-sacrifice. The monument was financed through private donations; neither the state of Saxony nor the German Empire (nor the Kaiser himself) was a major contributor. Instead, a patriotic association drummed up support by mobilising the network of sports clubs, singing clubs, shooting clubs, and veterans' associations scattered across Germany. It was, therefore – just as Arndt had intended – an initiative from below, a 'volkstümliche That' (act of the people) through which donors affirmed the 'Geburtstag des deutschen Volkes' (birthday of the German people) in the 'Volkskrieg' (people's war) against Napoleon (Spitzner 1897: 12–13, 33). The project can be seen as a manifestation not just of bourgeois self-confidence, but of the rampant nationalism to be found throughout Europe during this period. The flip side of pride in one's own 'national vigour' was contempt for other nations, especially the French. Even former allies, whose crowned heads attended the opening ceremony in 1913, found themselves sidelined in the iconography for this 'purely German' monument (Poser 2003).

By 2013 all trace of this nationalist reading of history had vanished. This time the celebration was for a double anniversary, commemorating both the battle of 1813 and the unveiling of the memorial 100 years later. And it was organised with a critical eye to history. For many decades, this monumental colossus had been commandeered for national or nationalist purposes. During the Nazi period, huge parades had been staged there, while later, under the German Democratic Republic (GDR), it was the place where new recruits to the East German army (NVA) were sworn in and initiated into the tradition of brotherhood in arms with the Soviet Union (Bauer 1988: 57–9; Johnson 2008: 37–8). Now, however, the dominant theme was European unity. Even back in the 1990s, the director of the Leipzig historical museum (Stadtgeschichtliches Museum) had proposed that it take its place in a 'Verbund von Friedensdenkmälern' (chain of peace memorials) extending from Spain (Guernica) to Russia (Stalingrad). The symbols that commemorated and bore witness to wars waged within Europe were to be reconstituted as monuments to peace, as befitted the self-image of the new Europe, united within the European Union, as a zone of peace. In this context, the city fathers and mothers of Leipzig were able to throw a party for the whole of Europe, with the 'Ball of the Nations' as its climax. There were performances by European choirs and a re-enactment of the battle of 1813 by 6,000 people from both Germany and other countries; services of reconciliation were held in the churches, while young people from 11 European nations read out a message of peace. In his speech for the occasion, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, described the monument as a European place of memory, and expressed delight at the fact that 'fortunately, we in Europe have managed to overcome the ultranationalist mentality' expressed in its original design (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* 2013; Keller 2012).<sup>3</sup>

## Example 2: World War I

Although the phrase ‘ultranationalist mentality’ is perhaps too strong and does not fully reflect the political complexity of the original Leipzig ceremony in October 1913, it is understandable that today people should want to link the event to the world war that broke out only a few months later. However, those present for the unveiling of the colossus could not have known that this was taking place ‘am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges’ (on the eve of the First World War), as the President of the European Parliament put it. It was possible to make such connections only in hindsight – and even then there has been an excessive tendency to see outcomes as preordained. In 1913–14 the people of Europe were not, in fact, clamouring for a new war or doing all they could to bring one about. Every country had its nationalist fanatics, there was the odd journalist ranting on about war as a cure for decadence and feminisation, and some young students were anxious to prove their manhood in the heat of battle, but these groups did not set the tone for society at large. As late as July 1914, anti-war demonstrations in Germany and France were attended by many hundreds of thousands of people. In the following month, we find evidence of a surge of enthusiasm for the war, but the phenomenon seems to have been confined largely to the cities – and even there it did not last long (Verhey 2000; Ziemann 2006). It was this that led the warring governments to set up propaganda departments, which inundated citizens with an unprecedented stream of images and texts. The propaganda they produced, in which the enemy was painted in the blackest colours, seems to have been most effective on the homefront. Many serving soldiers, by contrast, tended to dismiss such caricatures, despite – or, indeed, because of – the direct contact they had had with the enemy (Schmidt 2006; Lipp 2003; Reimann 2000: 178ff.).

Experiences of and discourses about the war also played a crucial political role, especially once the great slaughter had come to an end. The Weimar Republic experienced political fragmentation and social militarisation in which the memory of the war – and the losses suffered by Germany as a consequence – acted as a driving force. Before the war, Germans had felt surrounded by enemies jealous of their country’s success; after 1918, this feeling turned into a cast-iron certainty. The Treaty of Versailles, which labelled Germany as solely to blame for the war and used this to justify the imposition of massive reparations, was regarded as shameful victors’ justice by politicians of all stripes. The country’s political ostracisation, in the form of exclusion from international organisations (the League of Nations, academic associations, etc.) and events such as the Olympic Games, was also universally resented. The humiliating occupation of the Ruhr by French and Belgian troops in 1923 served only to reinforce the sense that Germany was being isolated and treated like a pariah. In the first half of the 1920s, the country was further from being a ‘European nation’ than at any other time.

Fast-forward to 2014, when a huge round of commemorations was scheduled to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the war. Events were planned in almost all European countries, not just in capital cities and at major battlefields but at a local level, in both towns and rural districts. Even before the ceremonies had got underway, the memory of the war was being invoked for the sake of domestic political interests. In November 2013, France’s embattled and much-criticised President, François Hollande, used a formal address in honour of the victims of the world war to call on his compatriots to come together. Echoing the appeal in 1914 to the *union sacrée* of the French people, transcending political, social, and religious differences, Hollande emphasised the need for national solidarity, even though in 2014 the battles to be fought and won were economic rather than military. By remembering their victory in the world war, the French people could gain the self-confidence they desperately needed to overcome their current economic plight (Hollande 2013).

However, Hollande's choice of battle imagery was far from apposite. International economic competition, unlike war, is not about shedding blood or about weakening or even destroying one's opponent. Hollande also risked creating the impression that once again France saw its enemy as lying east of the Rhine, in the economic superpower that is Germany – a country with which, moreover, it is allied within Europe. The French President sought at once to dispel this impression, repeatedly stressing his country's commitment to the project of European unification and to its close relationship 'with our German friends'. What is more, he invited the German Federal President to Paris for 3 August 2014, the 100th anniversary of the start of the war.

In doing so, Hollande was continuing a political tradition that had begun in the 1980s. In September 1984, Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President François Mitterrand made a joint visit to the battlefields of World War I. For the first time, a French president set foot in a German military cemetery and, together with the German Chancellor, laid a wreath in memory of the dead. Afterwards they travelled together to the ossuary at Douaumont, home to the mortal remains of 130,000 fallen soldiers of different nationalities. When the Marseillaise was played, Mitterrand suddenly took Kohl's hand. There could be no more powerful way of sending out the message, 'We are reconciled. We have come to an understanding. We are friends'.<sup>4</sup>

While politicians committed themselves to reconciliation, mutual understanding, and friendship over the graves of the fallen, academics worked on a reappraisal of World War I designed specifically to exclude narrow nationalist readings. In the mid-1980s, planning began for a new museum at Péronne on the Somme, where more than a million French, German, and British soldiers were killed or wounded, went missing in action, or were taken prisoner within five months during the summer of 1916. The museum, opened in 1992 as the Historial de la Grande Guerre, looked at the war from the perspective of social history and the history of mentalities, highlighting the close parallels in mindset and attitudes between the warring nations. Rather than focusing on the course of the war and the experience of battles and military combat, it placed the everyday lives of soldiers (and civilians) centre stage: issues such as diet, hygiene, and health care, but also the soldiers' grief at the loss of comrades and the atmosphere before an attack. The philosophy behind both the research centre linked to the museum and the exhibition itself was internationalist. Thus the exhibition was organised by topic rather than by country, while all the items on display had accompanying captions in English and German as well as French. The large number of visitors attracted to the museum, including many families, school-children, and young people, were presented with an image of the war that, without erasing the different histories of the nations involved, sought to bring out the elements of shared experience. These included an intensive and far-reaching campaign of 'intellectual mobilisation' that saw the population supplied with mental 'arms' in the form of nationalist posters, postcards, and cartoons, and enlisted in the struggle against a barbarised foe.<sup>5</sup>

On seeing this prewar and wartime propaganda, no visitor to the Historial could fail to be struck – if they were not aware of it before – by the distance separating them from World War I, even though its traces were all about in the surrounding battlefield landscape. This new era, in which old enmities are gradually fading away, has also had an impact on the way in which battlefield tours are organised and conducted. When I accompanied German history students on a trip to Verdun and Péronne in July 2000, everywhere we went we came across evidence of the war being commemorated across national boundaries. At British war cemeteries we found tokens of remembrance left by German visitors, and vice versa. In the crater-strewn countryside around La Boisselle on the Somme, where on 1 July 1916 nearly 60,000 British soldiers were mown down by German artillery, among the many poppy wreaths laid by British tourists I found one dedicated to Ernst Jünger, a German writer who took part in World War I as a

young lieutenant and later wrote militaristic books about his experiences. French and English translations of these books, which appeared as early as 1929 and 1930, found an enthusiastic readership even among non-German participants in the war (and among later generations, including some of those laying wreaths in 2000). Clearly Jünger had used a language and form of narrative that reflected soldiers' experiences and how they understood them, regardless of nationality.

A hundred years after the start of the Great War, as it is still known in France and Britain, the old stereotypes prevalent before, during, and long after the war have lost much of their potency. Since the 1980s, the war has been commemorated at a European level, and this is reflected in the events to mark its 100th anniversary. For the historian Joseph Zimet, director of the Mission du Centenaire established by the French government, it is essential that Germany and France remember the war in partnership. Even though World War I plays nothing like the same role in Germany's collective memory that it does in France or Britain, having been quickly overshadowed by the losses and experiences of World War II, Zimet sees a *centenaire* without German involvement as impossible: 'Europe cannot commemorate the First World War without Germany'. Rather, in both France and Germany remembrance is 'very closely linked to the idea of Europe' (*Weltweit vor Ort* 2013).

This idea of Europe was also in the background, no doubt, when Mitterrand and Kohl symbolically held hands in 1984, just as it was the inspiration for the researchers, museum experts, and politicians involved in setting up the Historial at Péronne. Yet in 1984 it was clearly still too weak to allow the other 'great war' to be commemorated as a European event. The German Chancellor was not invited to the ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of D-day, the Allied landings in Normandy. Even 10 years later, on the 50th anniversary, the French President did not feel able to ask his friend Helmut to attend. There was also no German representative at the ceremony staged by the British in Portsmouth – the point of departure in 1944 for many of the ships involved in the D-day operations – to witness heads of state and government from countries as far apart as Norway and Greece, Belgium and Canada, and Poland and France celebrate their nations' history of brotherhood in arms. Only with the dawn of the new millennium did it become possible to commemorate World War II, too, in inclusively European terms. On the 60th anniversary of D-day, in 2004, the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was finally allowed to take his place alongside other leaders. Unlike his predecessor Kohl, who had waited in vain for this symbolic gesture, he received an official invitation to Normandy from Mitterrand's successor, Jacques Chirac. Chirac added to the symbolism by welcoming Schröder with an embrace and explicitly mentioning Schröder's father, who had been killed in the war and whose son had never had the chance to get to know him.

The history of commemoration of the two world wars, which brought both massive destruction and fundamental change to Europe during the 20th century, bears witness to a slow but sustained process of rapprochement and reconciliation between former wartime opponents. This did not unfold automatically or 'naturally', but rather as the product of political will and within an institutional framework. The presence of delegations from France, as well as former allies in the resistance to Napoleon, at the ceremonies marking the 200th anniversary of the Battle of the Nations, and the fact that in 2014 the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I is being commemorated in the spirit of 'European integration' (Zimet), while German statesmen are able to celebrate the liberation of Europe from Nazi rule alongside representatives of the country's former enemies, are inconceivable without people's experiences of 'Europe' since the 1950s. For Germany, the effect of those experiences has been particularly dramatic and profound. That is the main reason why today such a high proportion of German citizens – twice as many as in Great Britain – describe their country and themselves as 'European'.

## Europe as will and representation

If a similar poll on the issue of European consciousness or identity had been conducted in the 1920s, it is very likely that it would have yielded different results. We cannot even be sure that people would have understood the question. After World War I, people throughout Europe were busy mourning their own dead and caring for veterans who had returned from the war with severe psychological and physical injuries. Each nation was preoccupied with its own suffering, and each manufactured its own interpretations of the past to honour the victims and justify their sacrifice. This process was particularly difficult for states on the losing side, which also had to cope with serious losses in territory and economic and political power.

Not until the mid-1920s were there signs – slow and cautious at first – of a change in mood; the era of national navel gazing seemed to be coming to an end. At the Locarno Conference in 1925, Germany, France, and Belgium concluded an arbitration agreement and guaranteed the inviolability of their respective borders. This was accompanied by treaties between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia that created a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of all disputes, although these did not extend to a permanent settlement on borders. In 1926 Germany joined the League of Nations and the ban on German academics attending international conferences was lifted.

At the same time, clearly pro-European movements and ideas were starting to gain ground. Those who used Europe as an argument and point of reference in political discourse did so essentially for two reasons. For some, the war and experience of the war were the key factor. They dreamed of establishing a strong and solid ‘European community’ to prevent any further ‘fratricidal wars’. For the liberal academic Arnold Bergsträsser (1896–1964), and others of his generation, ‘the war had made Europe a reality for the first time’; according to Bergsträsser, the ‘Kameradschaft à l’ombre des épées’ (comradeship in the shadow of swords) he had experienced placed him under an obligation to campaign for the ‘Einheit unseres abendländischen Kontinents’ (unity of our Western continent) (Müller 2001: 262; see also Conze 2005). For others, geopolitical considerations were paramount. The weakening of Europe brought about by the war led them to reflect on the means by which it might recover its strength. In 1924 Heinrich Mann predicted, ‘Bevor Europa Wirtschaftskolonie Amerikas oder Militärkolonie Asiens wird, einigt es sich’ (Before Europe becomes an economic colony of America or a military colony of Asia, it will unite) (Mann 1987: 100). If Europe’s decline was to be halted and then reversed, the antagonism and rivalry between European states would have to end. Only a political federation could reinvigorate Europe and equip it for its role as global leader. A supranational construct of this kind would bring with it considerable economic benefits, as it would mean the creation of a large single market and the consolidation of industrial production capacity (Stirk 1996: 26ff.; Ambrosius 1996: 67ff.).

Many different bodies launched initiatives in support of European integration *avant la lettre*. The League of Nations set up a commission of inquiry ‘for the European Union’, which met several times (though to no avail) (Wilson and van der Dussen 1993: 101ff.; Orluc 2000). In its 1926 party programme, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) backed the ‘aus wirtschaftlichen Ursachen zwingend gewordene Schaffung der europäischen Wirtschaftseinheit’ (creation of a European economic union, for compelling economic reasons) and pushed for the ‘Bildung der Vereinigten Staaten von Europa’ (establishment of the United States of Europe). The most enthusiastic advocate of a political federation of European states (though without Britain and Russia) was the Pan-European Union, under the energetic leadership of the Austrian Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. The union had the support of leading figures in politics, science, and the arts (including Konrad Adenauer, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Mann)

and campaigned for the 'spiritual unification of Europe' on the basis of 'Western' traditions and the achievements of European high culture (Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler 2004; Schöberl 2008). And indeed, it was the European arts and music scene that took the lead in reforging the connections severed by the war. The 'golden '20s' saw a lively exchange of ideas, styles, and people between Berlin, Paris, Milan, Barcelona, and Moscow. Men and women from many nations worked together at the Bauhaus school in Weimar and Dessau, and the architects of the modern age were all in close contact.

There were signs of tentative progress even with regard to treatment of the war dead. The Treaty of Versailles had placed a duty on all governments to treat war graves with respect and ensure that they were kept in good repair. Requests for the repatriation of remains were to be honoured, where possible. However, there were significant obstacles to implementing these provisions in practice. The first discussions between the French war graves service and the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) did not take place until 1926. Henceforth the commission had a say in the layout and maintenance of German military cemeteries in France, where it was able to develop its own distinctive designs and symbols, although it took until 1937 for a meeting of all the countries concerned to be organised. Only then did the international cooperation first enjoined back in 1919 finally begin to take shape.

By that point, the national socialist regime in Germany had already rechristened the national day of mourning introduced in the 1920s as 'Heldengedenktag' (heroes' memorial day), infusing it with a triumphalist spirit: it now became a 'Tag der Erhebung' (day of uprising) and 'Hoffens auf das Aufgehen der blutigen Saat' (hope that the seed sown in blood will rise forth anew) (Behrenbeck 1996: 293; Kaiser 2010). This seed did indeed rise forth, with even bloodier consequences than in World War I. From 1939 onwards, Germany plunged nearly the whole of Europe into war. At first the Nazi regime tried to give the impression that it sought only a revision of the terms of Versailles, but the seizure of Prague and Warsaw in 1939 made clear that it had much more expansionist ambitions. Such a policy could not be accommodated even within classic models of a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*, which had been the subject of ongoing debate since the end of World War I. It was clear that this was no attempt to modify the outcomes of that war; this was a new Napoleonic-style landgrab, designed to transform the whole of Europe and to turn Germany into a 'European nation' of a very particular kind.

Europe was surprisingly important as a theme in Nazi arguments. Clearly the impact of the debate on Europe during the 1920s had been sufficiently profound and far-reaching that even the hypernationalist Nazi regime felt the need to continue it. Of course, the annexation of land in the east, in particular, in order to create 'Lebensraum' (living space) for the German people was in no one's interests but Germany's, but there were attempts to give the policy a European gloss. 'Soviet Russia' was portrayed as the biggest danger to the Western world, and Germany as charged with protecting that world, and with it 'Europe', from 'bolschewistischen Angriffen' (Bolshevik attacks). Talk of a European 'mission' was not confined to Adolf Hitler; Franz Justus Rarkowski, the 'field bishop' or senior Catholic chaplain to the German military, used similar language, placing the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 in the medieval tradition of eastward colonisation by military orders of knights and hailing Germany as the 'Herzvolk' (nation at the heart of Europe) that was again, 'wie schon oft in der Geschichte' (as has been the case many times in the past), acting as the continent's saviour and vanguard (Michalka 1985, vol. 1: 188–9; vol. 2: 145). At the same time, the regime's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, noted the popularity in Spain's Francoist press of the image of a 'crusade' by the Christian West against godless Bolshevism: 'In Europe something like a unified front is taking shape. Ideas of a crusade are starting to appear. We can make use of them' (Fröhlich 1987: 713).

Also useful as propaganda were the ideas concerning the ‘Europa-Frage’ (European question) developed by the German Foreign Ministry as a means of attracting support. Although the ministry left no doubt that the survival of ‘das künftige Europa’ (the future Europe) would depend on ‘einer voll durchgesetzten Vormachtstellung des Großdeutschen Reiches’ (the total supremacy of the Greater German Reich), the key principles for the establishment of a European union of states submitted by its European committee in 1943 were enticing inasmuch as they placed great emphasis on federal structures and a ‘Gemeinschaft souveräner Staaten’ (community of sovereign states). But Germany had long since begun creating facts on the ground through its economic policy. Since 1940, it had been working to construct a ‘europäische Kontinentalwirtschaft unter deutscher Führung’ (continent-wide European economy under German leadership), in which the national economies of the countries under occupation were made totally subservient to the needs of the Greater German Reich. This exposed the contradiction between Germany’s determination to rule over and dominate other European countries and its promise to uphold their sovereignty, severely limiting the appeal of what Goebbels termed Germany’s ‘Europapapare’ (message on Europe) elsewhere (Michalka 1985, vol. 2: 151–2, 155–7, 141; Fröhlich 1987: 738).<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, German and Allied propagandists clashed repeatedly on the issue of the re-ordering of Europe after the war. There were also many plans and projects in circulation among groups active in the resistance and in exile. The ‘White Rose’ student resistance group wanted to create a ‘neues geistiges Europa’ (new spiritual Europe). The participants in the plot to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 called for the establishment of a European union of states dominated by neither Germany nor any other power, and in which borders between European countries might become less and less significant. In documents produced by the dissident group known as the Kreisau circle, there was talk of setting up a political order that respected the individual states and operated with the free consent of all the peoples concerned. The Buchenwald manifesto proposed a European community of states to renew Europe’s cultural mission in the world (‘Europas kulturelle Mission in der Welt’). Collaboration between Germany and both Poland and France, as well as Germany’s entry into the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere, were seen as the preconditions for a new pan-European consciousness (‘europäisches Gesamtbewußtsein’) that was the only means of safeguarding peace between nations (Michalka 1985, vol. 2: 355, 359–60; Lipgens 1968: 153–5; Mommsen 1994; Schilmar 2004; Bailey 2013).

But the definitive plans for the future of Germany and Europe were drafted not in Berlin, Munich, Kreisau, or Buchenwald but in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, where the postwar European order was hammered out between the ‘Big Three’: the USA, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. After its surrender, Germany was the object, not the subject, of political decisions. The country lost its sovereignty and was divided into four Allied occupation zones and spheres of influence. It was only the start of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the English-speaking powers that led to the establishment, four years after the end of the war, of two new states. The three former western zones combined to form the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), while the eastern zone became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). One of the conditions of statehood was that both entities be bound into their respective power blocs. In 1950 the GDR joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), set up the previous year, and in 1955 it signed the Warsaw Pact on ‘Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance’, which set out the Eastern bloc’s common defence policy. This step was mirrored by the Federal Republic’s accession to NATO in 1955. Previously the three western zones had been involved in the establishment of the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) and had benefited from reconstruction assistance under the Marshall plan (Kleßmann 1982).



## Two nations, two Europes

So what became of Germany as a 'European nation'? The question can be answered only in the context of Europe as a whole. No European nation experienced the division of Europe after 1945 more intensely than Germany. The Iron Curtain ran right through the middle of the country, from the Baltic to the Bavarian forest, as well as through the middle of its former capital, Berlin. In 1961 the GDR sealed off its border with the Federal Republic and West Berlin with a wall, barbed wire, and a heavily guarded 'death strip' to halt the flood of refugees from East to West. Despite their public commitment to reunification, both German states settled down more or less comfortably in their respective halves of Europe. From Bonn, the new federal capital on the Rhine, people looked to the West; from East Berlin, the capital of the GDR, eyes were trained on the East. Both the Federal Republic and the GDR became more and more entrenched – politically, economically, and militarily – in the 'alliances' of which they were members. As a result, they belonged to different 'Europes', into which they became increasingly integrated over time.

Of key importance for Western Europe was the fact that its protector – or 'big brother' – was located outside Europe. Whereas in World War I the USA intervened at a late stage, only to withdraw swiftly from the settlement process after 1918, after World War II it established a permanent presence on the European continent. The USA had emerged from what Ernst Nolte describes as the 30-year European civil war as indisputably the world's strongest country. After 1945 Europe's loss of power, which in the 1920s had still seemed reversible, was a fact all European nations had to come to terms with in one way or another.

This was less of a problem for Germany than for France and Britain, which also had to deal with the loss of their colonial empires after the war. Until recently, Germany had been an extremely strong and successful country – in military, technological, and economic terms – so shifts in the centre of gravity within and outside Europe paled into insignificance compared with its own total, devastating loss of power. The fact that it had now surrendered its leadership role to a non-European country – whose support, along with every ounce of its own energy, was needed if it hoped to match the Soviet Union – was less of a blow to national self-regard than the moral 'chasm' ('Abgrund') that, as Hannah Arendt wrote to Dolf Sternberger in Heidelberg in 1948, 'seit Beendigung des Krieges zwischen Deutschen [...] und anderen Völkern geöffnet hat' (has opened up between the Germans and other peoples since the end of the war) (Arendt 2013: 79).

The Cold War provided a welcome bridge over this chasm. Although it served to consolidate and entrench the division of Germany, which had initially been seen as temporary, it also made it easier for the two German states to reinvent themselves as loyal allies of their respective 'protectors'. By taking on the role of buffer states and adopting a mutually antagonistic stance, they quickly managed to earn political credit and to emerge from the shadow of the 'Third Reich'. While the Bonn Government cultivated a close relationship with the USA, its counterpart in East Berlin strove to win recognition from the Soviet Union by behaving as a model pupil. While the GDR outdid other Eastern bloc countries in its zeal and eagerness to conform to the Soviet model, the Federal Republic was among America's most loyal allies.

America's influence was felt not just politically and militarily but in economic and cultural terms. It was an influence that proved impossible to resist, and some longstanding reservations and prejudices against America that had only recently been reinforced under the 'Third Reich' were thereby neutralised and overcome.<sup>7</sup> In the 1920s, there was still massive resistance to what went under the heading of 'Americanisation', but after 1945 there was no alternative in the West to the American model of modernity. Economically, the Marshall plan set its beneficiaries

on a clear capitalist course, and from the 1950s onwards large sections of the West German population came to see the USA's consumer society, which was more advanced than that of Europe, as a hugely attractive prospect. When the Federal Republic was admitted to NATO in 1955 and then permitted to set up its own army, the new uniforms were modelled on those of the American military; the only protest came from a small number of right-wing politicians who thought this shameful and undignified. Most citizens had been won over by an American charm offensive that began with GIs handing out chocolate, continued with the 'raisin bombers' (*Rosinenbomber*) that carried out the dramatic airlift to West Berlin in 1948, and culminated in the formal declaration with which General Eisenhower exonerated the soldiers of the Wehrmacht in 1951: 'The German soldier fought bravely and honorably for his homeland' (Frevert 2004: 260–1). Henceforth serious criticism of the USA was almost non-existent in the Federal Republic; even during the Vietnam War, the political establishment refused to disown its great friend and 'big brother'. That task was left to young left-leaning students, who, rather than resort to crude anti-Americanism of the traditional variety, did so by expressing solidarity with the anti-war movement both internationally and in the USA itself.

The student movement of the 1960s and 1970s provides a vivid illustration of how westernised the Federal Republic had become. For the 'Kinder von Marx und Coca Cola' (children of Marx and Coca Cola) – as the subtitle to the German version of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Masculin, Féminin* (1966) put it – it was natural to look westwards, not just to Paris and Milan but to Berkeley and New York (della Porta 1998; Schmidtke 1998; Davis *et al.* 2010; Horn 2008; Gildea *et al.* 2013; Doering-Manteuffel 1999). Even the New Left did not model itself on the Soviet or East German version of Marxism, drawing inspiration instead from Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, or Herbert Marcuse. Politically and ideologically it was much closer to 'eurocommunism', which had its origins mainly in Italy and Spain, than to the 'actually existing socialism' on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

This affinity with the West (both Europe and America) was not confined to politics. It was also about more than just the economic integration of the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, and the Benelux countries, a process that had been gaining momentum since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. Eventually this would develop into a comprehensive blueprint for Europe, with far-reaching consequences, but in the short to medium term cultural influences and contacts had a much more profound impact. In Bonn, Munich, and Frankfurt, people wore fashions designed in Paris, Milan, or London; they listened to music imported to Hamburg from Liverpool, and ate the gyros, pizza, spaghetti, and paella introduced to Germany by Greek, Italian, and Spanish *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers; see [Chapter 12](#)). The works of French existentialists were read in West German schools, while plays by Ionescu and Beckett were staged in West German theatres. Visits and exchange programmes took young people to the UK, where, like Karl Heinz Bohrer in 1953, they came to know and value British institutions, the British way of life, and especially kindness, that 'untranslatable English quality' ('unübersetzbare englische Eigenschaft') (Bohrer 2012: 284). From the 1960s onwards, the Franco-German Youth Office (Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk) arranged exchanges for millions of German and French young people – often hosted by local families – that allowed them to practise their language skills and learn about the culture of their neighbours over the border. Twinning arrangements between municipalities brought both local politicians and ordinary citizens into contact across national boundaries. Students jumped at the chance to spend a year or a semester at a university in another European country, a trend boosted by the introduction of the Erasmus programme in 1987.

All these experiences helped strengthen West Germans' sense of themselves as Europeans. In polls carried out in the late 1970s and the 1980s, around two thirds of those surveyed agreed

with the idea of Europe as a 'Vaterland' (homeland); 67 per cent were 'entirely' or 'mostly' proud to be Europeans. Among younger people, in particular, national pride was outweighed by pride in European identity: in 1984 only 56 per cent of 16 to 29-year-olds reported that they were 'entirely' or 'mostly' proud to be German (Weidenfeld and Piepenschneider 1987: 26–31). This reflected a widespread suspicion of national, patriotic, and, especially, nationalistic affirmations and symbols. After the excessive nationalism of the 'Third Reich', people were extremely cautious about the use of flags, public declarations, and anthems. For many, the *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism) advocated by Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas seemed more appropriate to a democracy than identification with an ethnically or historically defined nationality. As German history afforded few positive points of reference, it made more sense to commit oneself emotionally to the values and institutions enshrined in the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) than to membership of some mythical German 'Volk' (Sternberger 1990; Habermas 1992: 632–60; Müller 2010).

This created space for a 'European' sense of identity that found expression not just in polls on people's attitudes towards Europe but in high levels of support for European unification. In this context, 'Europe' usually stopped at the Elbe: when asked whether the eastern European states and the Soviet Union should be included in a united Europe, in 1984 the vast majority of people answered no. Older people, who had lived through the 'hottest' phase of the Cold War, were particularly resistant to this idea, but even those aged between 30 and 50 were for the most part unwilling or unable to contemplate a partnership extending beyond the countries of Western Europe. Also, the mere existence of two German states seemed set in stone, the less people saw (western) European unification as an obstacle to German unification, which now seemed a very distant possibility (Weidenfeld and Piepenschneider 1987: 28, 38). In the 1950s, the German Social Democrats had bitterly resisted the integration of the Federal Republic into the West on the grounds that it would entrench the division of Germany, but 30 years later such hopes or fears were a thing of the past.

West Germans had made a success of life in their part of Europe and felt increasingly at ease there. Looking back, Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed that the idea of Europe had provided them with 'eine zweite, entlastende Identität' (a second, liberating identity) (Enzensberger 1994: 501), offering them the prospect of a bright future in which the things that bound Europeans together would count for much more than their differences. Against this background, it became possible to take a more critical look at the nation's past. In the 19th century, if not earlier, it was argued, Germany had deviated from the standard Western European course of development, with disastrous consequences; what Friedrich Meinecke dubbed the 'deutsche Katastrophe' (German catastrophe) was the result of having taken this 'special path' ('deutscher Sonderweg'). The task now for Germany was to complete its long, all too frequently interrupted and abandoned 'Weg nach Westen' (journey to the West; Heinrich August Winkler) and to touch down safely in the Western democratic camp – and, if possible, to blaze new trails for democracy beyond the narrow bounds of the nation-state.<sup>8</sup>

But what was happening in the GDR, the second of the two German states founded after the war? What ideas and behaviours linked the citizens of the GDR to 'Europe'? How closely was the state integrated into the eastern European economic and military alliances laid down by the Soviet Union? What cultural influences and connections were at work in this part of Europe? And how did the GDR understand its own history and relationship with 'Europe'?

In eastern Europe, the situation was different in one striking respect: unlike the West's 'protector', the USA, the Soviet Union was geographically part of Europe, although it also included areas east of the Urals that extended far into Asia. It was literally close by, sharing borders with Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic States, then under

direct Soviet rule. This allowed it to impose a political and military hegemony that prevented the countries of eastern Europe from enjoying any sort of autonomy or pursuing an independent course. The nature of these relationships was reflected in political language. When in the GDR people talked about their socialist 'Bruderstaaten' (brother states), they meant to include the Soviet Union only in a limited sense. Rather, the Soviet Union was, in Stalinist parlance, the 'fatherland of all workers', or the 'motherland and advance guard of socialism' (*Neues Deutschland* 1963).<sup>9</sup> Regardless of whether it was termed a father or a mother, the Soviet Union was seen as an authority figure that was owed obedience and gratitude by its 'sons'. At official level, the notion of friendship served to gloss over the dependence and subordination this entailed. With 6 million members in 1985, the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (founded in 1949, the successor organisation of the *Gesellschaft zum Studium der Kultur der Sowjetunion* of 1947), was one of the largest mass-membership bodies in the GDR, organising study visits, holiday camps for children, and cultural encounters. Yet such programmes had only limited appeal. The propaganda effort that went into promoting them was out of all proportion to the success they enjoyed at grass roots, among the general population.

Even less successful were the many other friendship societies and committees that made up the *Liga für Völkerfreundschaft* (International Friendship League). The GDR had loose ties, at best, with its 'brother states' in eastern Europe. GDR citizens did visit the 'befreundetes sozialistisches Ausland' (allied socialist countries), spending their holidays on Lake Balaton in Hungary or at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Even work-related migration was not unheard of in the Eastern bloc states, which were at different stages of development, but it occurred at levels well below those achieved in Western Europe. The 'brother states' of Comecon were much more cut off from one another economically, socially, and culturally than the countries of the EEC; right to end, they remained more 'national' – and nationalist – societies (Wilson and van der Dussen 1993: 156ff.; Stirk and Weigall 1999: 182ff.; Judt 1996: 64).

This was especially true of the GDR, which – precisely because its political system was in competition with that of the Federal Republic – went to great lengths to reinvent itself as a socialist German state. The East Berlin Government set much greater store than its counterpart in Bonn on rituals and symbols that both reaffirmed the GDR's sovereignty and connected it to positive aspects of the German past. Patriotic tub thumping of a sort that hardly ever featured in the Federal Republic was *de rigueur* in the GDR. It could be seen at the military parades staged to mark national holidays, at flag-raising ceremonies and in banner displays, and in the goose-stepping of the guards at the Neue Wache, the main memorial in East Berlin to the victims of war and fascism. The GDR quickly developed a view of history that placed it on the side of the victors; unlike the Federal Republic, it did not see itself as the legal successor of the 'Third Reich' and refused to accept any responsibility for the consequences of Nazi policies. Instead, its leaders endlessly repeated the mantra that, thanks to Soviet help, imperialism, capitalism, and militarism had been eradicated root and branch, leaving the GDR free to confront the challenges of the future unburdened by Germany's 'dark' past.

At the same time, the GDR sought to cobble together a 'bright' past it could be proud of – and that could be usefully deployed against the rival German state. While the Federal Republic was seen as the embodiment of everything nasty and contemptible in German history, the GDR assumed the mantle of Germany's 'progressive' traditions, from the Peasants War of the early 16th century, now characterised as an 'early bourgeois revolution', through German classicism, down to Karl Marx and the 19th-century socialist workers' movement. Proclaiming itself the rightful guardian of this 'legacy', the GDR used it to strengthen its sense of national identity (Assmann and Frevert 1999). Political legitimisation of the GDR, in competition with the Federal Republic, was central to its positive reappropriation of German history: the new socialist state

wanted to present itself to its citizens not as a Soviet import, but as the triumph and fulfilment of the best German traditions.

This self-understanding was one of the main drivers for the GDR's peaceful revolution of 1989. When Easterners changed their slogan from 'Wir sind *das* Volk' (We are *the* people) to 'Wir sind *ein* Volk' (We are *one* people), they were evoking a sense of historical shared identity that had almost disappeared in the Federal Republic. At the same time, their call for reunification reflected the continuing appeal of West Germany, which – as East Germans could see every day on television – was able to offer a far higher standard of living, greater freedoms, and a more cosmopolitan outlook. The inhabitants of Leipzig, Magdeburg, or Rostock had always paid much more attention to developments in the West than to those in the East. After 1990, they looked not just to Hamburg, Frankfurt, or Munich, but to Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris as well. Russian, which had been a compulsory subject in the GDR, was cast aside as they began to learn and speak English, the lingua franca of the late 20th and 21st centuries.

Conversely, in the old West people began to take a much closer look at what was happening in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest. After the fall of the Wall and the Iron Curtain, the newly unified Germany lobbied enthusiastically for the eastwards expansion of the European Community. By embracing closer European unity as laid down by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), the Federal Republic also sought to dispel any remaining doubts about its commitment to Europe and European identity. Having just become the largest, most populous, and most economically powerful nation state in Europe, dominating the heart of the continent, it was anxious to demonstrate that it had no intention of once again going it alone or taking a 'special path'. Quite the reverse: the Federal Republic chose to act as an engine of European integration. It was even prepared to give up its only true national symbol, the German Mark, as a confidence-building measure (Küsters and Hofmann 1998: 638).

There is no doubt that Germany has benefited – and continues to benefit – hugely from this positive approach to Europe. German exports have soared thanks to both the opening up of eastern European markets and the adoption of the euro as a common currency. However, in recent years attitudes towards 'Europe' have become more ambivalent, and eurosceptic movements are now on the rise. The louder the clamour from foreign observers for Germany to take on a leadership role in the financial and euro crisis that began in 2008, the more reluctant the federal government has been to do so. The austerity that it has promoted in Italy, Cyprus, and Greece may reflect German experiences and sensibilities, but it has stirred up anti-German feeling – with the German Chancellor being branded 'Hitler Merkel' – and exposed political and intellectual fault lines in the European project that were thought to have long since healed (Garton Ash 2013; Minton Beddoes 2013). In the current crisis, the tendency throughout Europe is for people to want to revert to national models and traditions and to lick their own wounds. For a 'European nation' such as Germany, which has carefully cultivated an international sense of mission over a long period, a return to nationalism of this kind is harder to contemplate than elsewhere. Yet Germany cannot resolve the European crisis on its own. To quote Timothy Garton Ash, one of the leading foreign experts on Germany, 'Only together can we generate the policies and institutions, but also that fresh breeze of poetry, to get the European ship sailing again'.

Yet 'visionary leadership', accompanied by 'pulse-quickenning oratory', is not necessarily the only way to generate the 'breeze of poetry' Garton Ash seeks. An alternative approach – possibly with more lasting results – is through historical memory that avoids the pitfalls of national chauvinism and provincialism and uses the dramatic conflicts, enmities, and catastrophes Europe has suffered as a reason and incentive to seek peaceful, continent-wide solutions to problems. This can take a variety of forms, from official commemorative ceremonies of the sort planned

for 2014, large-scale popular celebrations like those to mark the bicentenary of the Battle of Leipzig, and the naming of cities as European capitals of culture, through to Europe-wide history competitions such as those run by *eustory*, the history network for young Europeans, since 2001. Unsurprisingly, this project is the brainchild of a German institution, the Körber Foundation.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See [www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/es20090630\\_2bve000208.html](http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/es20090630_2bve000208.html) (accessed 6 December 2013).
- 2 See <http://opinium.co.uk/sites/default/files/opin-inouteurope.pdf> (accessed 13 December 2013).
- 3 For the German text of Schulz's speech, see [http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/the-president/en/press/press\\_release\\_speeches/speeches/sp-2013/sp-2013-october/html/leipzig-1813-1913-2013-jubilaum-v-lkerschlacht-und-v-lkerschlacht-denkmal-rede-von-martin-schulz-prasident-des-europaischen-parlaments](http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/the-president/en/press/press_release_speeches/speeches/sp-2013/sp-2013-october/html/leipzig-1813-1913-2013-jubilaum-v-lkerschlacht-und-v-lkerschlacht-denkmal-rede-von-martin-schulz-prasident-des-europaischen-parlaments) (accessed 11 February 2014).
- 4 See [www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraberstaette/consenvoye.html](http://www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraberstaette/consenvoye.html) (accessed 17 December 2013).
- 5 See the Historical's website, [www.historical.org](http://www.historical.org) (accessed 17 December 2013), and the many works published by its research centre (e.g. Harel 1998; Huss 2000).
- 6 On its positive reception by the Vichy regime in France, however, see Bruneteau (2003); Mazower (2009): 553–75.
- 7 Although traces of these attitudes remained, as events from 2003 onwards were to demonstrate. When Germany opposed American foreign policy for the first time over the Iraq war, the pleasure that it took in dissociating itself from the US was unmistakable; anti-American stereotypes and clichés were also quick to resurface.
- 8 On the long debate concerning the German 'Sonderweg', see Kocka 1999 and Schulze 2002.
- 9 *Neues Deutschland* was the official mouthpiece of the ruling Socialist Unity Party and the GDR's most important and influential daily.
- 10 See [www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/education/eustory.html](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/education/eustory.html) (accessed 31 December 2013). The 'Report on Historical Memory in Culture and Education in the European Union', drafted by a committee of the European Parliament in August 2013, argues that historical 'memory, nurtured among other things by educational activities and cultural events, will reinforce genuine reconciliation between nations and authentic European integration'. See [www.euoparl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARE&reference=PE-516.702&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=01](http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARE&reference=PE-516.702&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=01) (accessed 31 December 2013).

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# *Humanität, Bildung, Kultur*

## Germany's civilising values

Ritchie Robertson

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Present-day Germany is a society in which culture enjoys high status: theatres and libraries are generously (even if with difficulty) subsidised by governments; the utterances of Günter Grass receive far more attention than those of any British or American writer could expect in their countries. It can also claim to be one of the world's most successful democracies and economies, with a prudent foreign policy that has largely avoided the military involvements of some other Western nations. *Kultur* and associated concepts provide a set of threads linking the Germany of today to its conflicted past.

Although the terms *Humanität*, *Bildung*, and *Kultur* are notoriously hard to translate, together they denote, very broadly, a conception of humanity that can be developed by education (*Bildung*) and finds expression in culture. This cluster of ideas emerges from the Enlightenment, and may be called the legacy of the specifically German Enlightenment (Reed 2009). Their spokesmen, often grouped together under the label 'Weimar Classicism', include Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835).

The value of this legacy, however, has been challenged, especially in the light of German history between 1914 and 1945. In the 1930s the concentration camp Buchenwald was set up just outside Weimar. When some woods were being cleared to put up camp buildings, care was taken to preserve an oak tree under which Goethe used to sit with his friend Charlotte von Stein (Roth 1939). Was this not proof that the values of Weimar Classicism were ineffectual against 20th-century inhumanity? Worse still, that they could even on occasion license inhumanity? Hence the critique to which the legacy of Weimar Classicism has been subjected (Wilson and Holub 1993; Dörr and Hofmann 2008).

It has, further, been claimed that the concept of 'Enlightenment' – and hence the others that emerge from it – is corrupted by an inbuilt dialectic, so that innovations designed to benefit humanity end in devastation (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). The conquest of nature, it is said, leads inexorably to the massacre of conquered populations, whether in European colonies or in the mid-20th-century Europe that witnessed the Holocaust and the gulags. However, this thesis not only rests on very slight historical knowledge about the Enlightenment, but identifies it narrowly with scientific progress. The thesis denies human agency and sees life as subject to an inexorable logic. Against this, I assume historical contingency, not philosophical necessity.

History results from the intersection and clashing of people's actions, and there is always room for the unexpected. Horkheimer and Adorno illustrate a version of the cultural pessimism which flourished in Germany – understandably – in the early and mid-20th century, and of which we shall presently meet a representative in Oswald Spengler (1880–1936).

Weimar values do indeed have weaknesses, which will be acknowledged in the following account. But they also form a valuable and still living tradition. Their proponents' rich and diverse body of thought and literature cannot be reduced to a formula. Nevertheless, the following principles can be distinguished:

- 1 Humanity is deeply embedded in nature, though it may still have a divine or supersensible component.
- 2 Immanent in nature is a plan whereby all beings are to realise their potential.
- 3 Humanity's purpose is to move ever closer to perfection – the realisation of its full potential (*Humanität*) – albeit over an unimaginably long period and with innumerable setbacks.
- 4 It does so through education, which is an active, creative process of *Bildung*: self-formation or self-cultivation (Bruford 1975).
- 5 Crucial to *Bildung* are the aesthetic categories of unity and harmony.

Further: the development of *Humanität* entails an ongoing critique of one's own current culture, in the light of ideals pointing towards a better future. In this sense, the cultural critiques delivered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his two *Discourses* of the 1750s can be seen as landmarks in the exploration of *Humanität*. 'Rousseau deserves the place at the gateway to the new intellectual world', wrote one of *Humanität's* classic expositors, 'because he first reflects on what we may call the *self-criticism of modern culture*' (Spranger 1928: 11).

## Herder and *Humanität*

Among his many achievements as scholar, theologian, literary and cultural critic, and philosopher, Herder formulated conceptions of *Humanität*, *Bildung*, and *Kultur* that had a lasting impact on the Weimar Classicism that centred on Goethe and Schiller. He presented them most comprehensively in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1784–91). He presupposes that the organic world forms a great unity, powered by a single vital energy, with no sharp distinction between spirit and matter, mind and body, humans and animals. All are linked in the chain of being, a recurrent image that Herder borrows especially from Leibniz. The analogy between the growth of a human being from an embryo, and of a plant from a seed, illustrates this unity.

Human life has a purpose: the realisation of our *Humanität*, our full humanity. This may sound tautologous, but is not, for *Humanität* comprehends seven main human attributes (Herder 1989: 154–64). The first is peacefulness, for our physical form is not designed for aggression. Second comes the sexual urge, which finds its best expression in marriage based on mutual consent. Third, our ability to hear what other people say grounds our sympathy with others. Fourth, maternal love, combined with a child's long period of dependence on parents, is the foundation of social life. Fifth, our relations with others are kept on an equal footing by our sense of fairness (Herder prefers the tolerant-sounding *Billigkeit* to the severe *Gerechtigkeit* [justice]). Sixth comes *Wohlanständigkeit* (decency and comeliness of appearance), which brings out the beauty and shapeliness of the human body, instead of disfiguring it with the elaborate hairdos of some members of the upper classes or the piercings and mutilations reported by travellers beyond Europe. Finally, true humanity includes religion, which is essentially the hope for immortality.

*Humanität* can only be realised in the individual; otherwise it would be a meaningless abstraction. Each individual is situated in a particular place, connected via the family with a wider people (*Volk*), whose national character is expressed in its language. The individual is further connected with the rest of humanity through the chain of cultural transmission. This cultural chain enables us to be rational. For Herder, reason is not, as for early Enlightenment rationalism, a timeless, quasi-logical faculty; it means refining and applying the sedimented wisdom of previous generations ('das fortgehende Werk der Bildung des menschlichen Lebens') (Herder 1989: 144). Chains of tradition and sympathy always converge here and now in the unique individual: 'What each person is and can be, must be the purpose of the human race; and what is this? *Humanität* and happiness in this place, to this degree, as this particular link in the chain of *Bildung* that stretches through the entire race' ('Was also jeder Mensch ist und sein kann, das muß Zweck des Menschengeschlechts sein; und was ist dies? *Humanität* und Glückseligkeit auf dieser Stelle, in diesem Grad, als dies und kein anderes Glied der Kette von Bildung, die durchs ganze Geschlecht reicher') (Herder 1989: 342).

In history, each people makes its own contribution to *Humanität* through its distinctive culture. No people is wholly without culture. Herder writes about 'primitive' people with sympathy and defends them against their detractors. Cultural diversity expresses the richness of *Humanität*. History recounts the progress, even the perfectibility, of our species. Herder is no cloudy-headed optimist: he acknowledges atrocities, massacres, long periods of despotism in history, calling them 'errors and failures' (Herder 1989: 633). But, like storms in the atmosphere, violent passions and conflicts are necessary in history and spur us on. Even war generates new inventions. The increased deadliness of weapons means that only potentates, not marauding chieftains, can now wage war, and increases the chances of peace. Thus progress is indirect, irregular, like a mountain torrent, or even like humanity's basic action of walking:

The whole course of culture on our earth, with its broken corners and rough edges, hardly ever resembles a gentle stream, but rather a torrent plunging down the mountains. [. . .] As our gait is a constant falling to right and left, and yet we advance with each step, so also is the progress of culture in human generations and entire peoples.

(Überhaupt zeigt der ganze Gang der Kultur auf unsrer Erde mit seinen abgerissenen Ecken, mit seinen aus- und einspringenden Winkeln fast nie einen sanften Strom, sondern vielmehr den Sturz eines Wildwassers von den Gebürgen. [. . .] Wie unser Gang ein beständiges Fallen ist zur Rechten und zur Linken und dennoch kommen wir mit jedem Schritt weiter: so ist der Fortschritt der Kultur in Menschengeschlechtern und in ganzen Völkern.)

(Herder 1989: 655)

These ideas, expressed with Herder's infectious enthusiasm, are inspiring, but also liberal and generous. Since he finds some value in every culture, Herder is no nationalist, although his ideas may subsequently have been misused by 19th- and 20th-century upholders of German supremacy. Nor is he a complete relativist for whom different cultures are incommensurable (Berlin 1976: 153; see also Sikka 2011; Maurer 2012). His conception of *Humanität* offers normative standards by which cultures may be judged. All cultures contribute something, but not all are equally valuable: Herder praises the peaceful Egyptians, the inventive Greeks, and the industrious Phoenicians, but deplores the Romans' urge for conquest. Yet Herder's standards are also very broad: monogamy, for example, may take a variety of institutional forms. *Humanität* is a work in progress that cannot be defined in a narrow, restrictive way.

Some incoherence arises from Herder's concern for the individual. He opposes the idea, put forward by Kant in 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' (1784), that while individuals must fail, in a greater or lesser degree, to fulfil their potential, the potential unrealised in the individual would ultimately be realised in the species; thus hope was transferred to future earthly history (Kant 1991: 41–53). Herder objects to having *Humanität* deferred to a remote future, and claims that each individual realises *Humanität* in a unique way. Yet since clearly many lives are blighted and wasted, the theologian Herder falls back on the unprovable claim that our potential will be fully realised in a future existence – a claim surprisingly often made in late 18th-century Germany, when orthodox Christianity had become largely incredible to critical thinkers (Kurth-Voigt 1999). While Herder attacked Kant, Kant criticised the *Ideen* in two reviews for relying on dubious analogies and mixing natural science with metaphysics. Their public controversy embittered both thinkers.

## Goethe and *Bildung*

Goethe worked closely with Herder, first as a student at Strasbourg in 1770, later from 1783 to 1786 in Weimar, where Herder was superintendent of the Lutheran clergy. Both were fascinated by natural science, conceived of nature as an organic unity, and believed in continuous development, not revolutionary disruption, in both geology and politics. Thus Goethe preferred the 'Neptunian' theory that minerals originated from a slow process of sedimentation and from the gradual withdrawal of the oceans, to the 'Plutonian' theory of volcanic catastrophes; and he was among the few German intellectuals who (like Edmund Burke in Britain) rejected the French Revolution from its very outset. Goethe himself perceived the analogy between geological and political cataclysms (David 1974).

Goethe's conception of development, or *Bildung*, found expression in his novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795–6). This is commonly considered the exemplary *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development, though the term *Bildungsroman* was not used till the 1870s, when the cultural needs of the new German Empire required a specifically 'German' type of novel, focused on the hero's inner life (Steinecke 1991). Although the concept of the *Bildungsroman* screens out the large body of realistic fiction produced in 19th-century Germany, it reminds us how widely *Meister* was read as a pedagogical work showing how a young man matures into a useful member of society. In retrospect, however, such a reading seems inadequate to the complexities of Goethe's novel.

Discussion of *Meister* as *Bildungsroman* often starts from the letter Wilhelm writes to his friend Werner, declaring that his middle-class status denies him the 'harmonious development of my personality' (Goethe 1989: 175) ('harmonischen Ausbildung meiner Natur') (Goethe 1986–2000: 9, 659) for which he longs, and that since in his Germany only aristocrats can develop a rounded personality, he as a born *Bürger* can develop himself only by acting as a nobleman on the stage. By this time, Wilhelm and his travelling theatrical troupe have spent time at a noble mansion, where the nobility have cut distinctly unimpressive figures, and his own acting talents have been shown to be limited. So his letter can hardly express his real goal. Soon afterwards, Wilhelm visits another mansion that turns out to be the seat of the Society of the Tower (*Turmgesellschaft*), which has been monitoring his progress through life. His apprenticeship over, he is admitted to a society where each individual's talents contribute to a greater whole. 'All men make up mankind and all forces together make up the world. These are often in conflict with each other, and while trying to destroy each other they are held together and reproduced by Nature' (Goethe 1989: 338) ('Nur alle Menschen machen die Menschheit aus, nur alle Kräfte zusammengenommen die Welt. Diese sind unter sich oft im Widerstreit, und indem sie sich zu zerstören suchen, hält

sie die Natur zusammen und bringt sie wieder hervor') (Goethe 1986–2000: 9, 932–3). Here again we see the influence of Kant's 'Idea for a Universal History', particularly of Kant's idea that society progresses through conflict. Man is a social animal, but also seeks to develop his individuality. Hence our social life is always conflicted, but our conflicts press us to develop our natural capacities. We therefore need 'a society which has not only the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can coexist with the freedom of others' (Kant 1991: 45).

The Society of the Tower may be seen as foreshadowing such a society. To get there, Wilhelm has himself developed. But his *Bildung* has not been smooth. His psychological course veers between depression and ecstasy. He has fathered an illegitimate child, whose mother Mariane has, unknown to him, died in misery. He has misused his father's money to finance an acting troupe in hopes of a theatrical career for which he is ill suited. Was this a waste of time? Or worse? Yet without his theatrical adventure he would not have met Natalie, his perfect partner, to whom he finally becomes engaged. Nor would he have met the strange child Mignon, who first arouses his paternal emotions. And in assuming responsibility for his own child, he acquires all the virtues of a good citizen, not through instruction, but through the promptings of nature. Hence the Society declares his misguided actions to be not crimes or sins, but necessary aberrations, and tells him not to torment himself with futile guilt: 'You will not regret any of your follies, and will not wish to repeat any of them. No man could have a happier fate' (Goethe 1989: 303) ('Du wirst keine deiner Torheiten bereuen und keine zurück wünschen, kein glücklicheres Schicksal kann einem Menschen werden') (Goethe 1986–2000: 9, 873–4).

This is an optimistic message. It recalls Herder's view that the horrors of history are mere 'errors and failures'. Goethe and Herder, accordingly, both rejected Kant's belief, expressed in his *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793), in 'a radical innate evil in human nature' (Kant 1996: 80; emphasis in original). Yet the novel, with the honesty of fiction, shows that Wilhelm's path, despite his good intentions, is strewn with corpses (Mariane's and Mignon's). Narrative irony exposes Wilhelm, not as a criminal, but as emotionally unstable, a blunderer, and even a bore. Although Wilhelm is nominally integrated into society, Goethe, even in the sequel, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* (*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, 1829), never got round to showing Wilhelm and Natalie as a married couple. Goethe's confidence in nature is undercut by darker suggestions that only a determinedly upbeat reading could ignore.

## Schiller: freedom through art

The progressive optimism favoured by many intellectuals was challenged by the French Revolution. The fall of the Bastille, the formation of the National Assembly, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen aroused enthusiasm abroad. But the subsequent execution of the king and queen, and the reign of terror in which, executions aside, some 10 per cent of the French adult population spent time in prison, aroused horror like that produced by the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. What had gone wrong?

This question prompted Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1795–6). There had, in Schiller's view, been a brief opportunity to replace traditional authority with law, reason, and freedom. But it was not taken, because the people to whom it was offered were morally unprepared for it.

The lack of moral freedom reflects a wider problem of modern society, of deep concern to Weimar Classicism: that of the division of labour (Pascal 1962). Schiller notes that there are thinkers who know nothing of practical life, and practical men, men of affairs, who despise

ideas. Up to a point this antagonism of opposing forces is a necessary conflict, an instrument of *Kultur*. Like Kant and Herder, Schiller thinks that progress happens through productive conflict. But such conflict is not itself *Kultur*. The development of culture requires that these antagonisms be softened and eventually overcome.

To explain how, Schiller resorts to anthropology in its late 18th-century sense – the study of human nature. Having in his youth studied medicine, he posits three psycho-physical drives in humanity. The ‘sensuous drive’ (*Stofftrieb* or ‘sinnlicher Trieb’; Schiller 1967: 79) springs from our physical, sensual nature and enables us to deal with particular objects. A person dominated by the *Stofftrieb* lives from moment to moment. The ‘formal drive’ (*Formtrieb*) springs from our rational nature and is concerned with abstractions, with principles, with what is timelessly true. These two principles are not in direct conflict. We need both. But they have to be held in balance, and to do so is the task of culture (*Kultur*). Life should not be dominated either by sensuality or by rationality.

The balance between the formal drive and the sensual drive is maintained by the *Spieltrieb* or urge to play. This drive is basic to humanity. It shows itself as soon as primitive people begin to decorate their bodies, to practise rituals, to organise their spontaneous movements into rhythmic dances. When people imagine their gods not as terrible tyrants who need to be propitiated, but as beautiful beings, the aesthetic sense opens the way for further intellectual and moral development, as with the Greeks, who, as the most civilised society, idealised their gods by imagining them as constantly at play, enjoying leisure on Mount Olympus. The experience of beauty, which may take various forms, brings the sensual person closer to abstraction, and brings the abstract thinker closer to the sensory world. Schiller then argues that there is an intermediate state between matter and form, between passivity and activity. In this state, the mind is active, yet not under constraint; it is a state of free activity. Schiller calls it the aesthetic condition. In this condition, all our faculties are called into play, but by an object that is not real.

Schiller is not here talking about the external effect that art may have on us. He is describing how the play-drive and the experience of beauty can modify human nature by bringing about the aesthetic condition within us. Through the aesthetic condition, humanity moves from a subjection to physical needs and to brute force towards a condition of freedom in which people can voluntarily obey the demands of morality and reason. The aesthetic condition is a psychological one that also corresponds to a stage in the development of society. At this stage, our dealings with one another acquire an aesthetic element; roughness yields to politeness; kindness and consideration become the social norm. Schiller attacks those critics of culture (meaning mainly Rousseau) who deplore modern politeness as mere insincerity. Beauty is essential to sociability: it shapes the way we live together in society.

And here the *Aesthetic Letters* are revealed as a profoundly political text. The French Revolution failed because people tried to leap straight from a condition of coercion to a society based on reason. Yet neither coercion nor reason can make people good. The state should not try to educate people morally, because it merely limits their freedom. Only aesthetic experience, by transforming human nature and making people capable of freedom, can open the way to true sociability and to the civic virtue that Schiller, following the republican tradition, thought the best foundation for the state (Beiser 2005: 125).

Schiller’s *Letters* exercised an immense influence not only on the social critique offered by his contemporaries and by the Romantic generation that immediately followed, but also on the Marxist tradition. Karl Marx, like Schiller, saw the division of labour as a social evil that forced each person into a single sphere of activity. Only in communist society, Marx thought, could this confinement be overcome, because there ‘society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning,

fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd or critic' (Marx 1977: 169). The Western Marxists of the Frankfurt School drew from Schiller a different utopian conception in which art provided a realm of freedom and a vantage-point from which to reveal the alienation of capitalist society (Jameson 1971: 83–116).

## The Greeks

The ideal of harmony that runs from Schiller to Marx and beyond was often thought to have been best embodied in the ancient Greeks. While the Renaissance concentrated on rediscovering Latin literature, 18th-century Germany exalted Greece above Rome, Homer above Virgil, Sophocles above Seneca. The art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) held up Greek art as an unsurpassable ideal that the moderns should imitate. Goethe took the Greeks, especially in his classical drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, as the model for his human-centred worldview: 'The Greeks sought not to render the gods human, but to render humankind divine' (Goethe 1986–2000: 20, 293). Schiller's poem 'The Gods of Greece' ('Die Götter Griechenlands') contrasted the Greek view of nature as populated by divine beings with the disenchanted, mechanical universe of modern science. Friedrich Schlegel extolled the Greek achievement in poetry, politics, social life, and science:

Only the development of pure humanity is true *Bildung*. Where has free humanity attained such pervasive dominance in the mass of the population as among the Greeks? Where else was *Bildung* so genuine, and genuine *Bildung* so public?

(Nur Entwicklung der reinen Menschheit ist wahre Bildung. Wo hat freie Menschheit in der Masse des Volks ein so durchgängiges Übergewicht erhalten als bei den Griechen? Wo war die Bildung so echt, und echte Bildung so öffentlich?)

(Schlegel 1970: 174)

Friedrich Hölderlin's mature poetry celebrates Greek civilisation as inspired by the gods. In his novel *Hyperion* (1797) the hero denounces, by contrast, the fragmentation of the modern Germans, who may be artisans, thinkers, priests, but never 'Menschen', whole human beings (Hölderlin 1969: 1, 433). Marx struggled to explain how Greek art could still provide unattainable models when Greek society had been at such an early stage of development, and concluded, implausibly, that though the Greeks inhabited the childhood of society, they were normal and hence delightful children (Prawer 1976: 278–88).

This Graecomania was occasionally qualified. Herder, in the chapter of *Ideen* celebrating the Greeks, also criticises them for their constant internecine wars and their harsh treatment of defeated enemies (Herder 1989: 535). Although Goethe read Homer constantly and made a close study of the *Iliad*, he also said, presumably with its atmosphere of perpetual warfare in mind, that it helped one to imagine hell (letter to Schiller, 13 December 1803). Late in the 19th century, the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt presented a critical picture of Greek civilisation, bringing out the Greeks' cultivation but also their pessimism, malevolence, and misogyny, and finding in the shortcomings of Athenian democracy a warning for his own day (Burckhardt 1998). However, a conception of ancient Greece as both exemplary and culturally homogeneous, underplaying the Greeks' debts to Egypt and Asia (Bernal 1987), was to be institutionalised in the educational system.

## The institutions of *Bildung*

Herder is suspicious of the state, considering it at best a necessary evil. The institution required by nature is the family. The state closest to nature is therefore an extended family whose members all belong to the same *Volk*. Large states, in which different peoples are mingled, are therefore contrary to nature, and so are all established social ranks, since they hamper people's freedom to develop. Rulers, who all owe their power originally to war and conquest, offend nature as soon as they try to regulate their subjects' lives. 'As soon as a ruler seeks to occupy the place of the Creator and, whether from caprice or passion, make the creature into something God did not intend, this heaven-defying despotism becomes the father of disorder and inevitable misfortune' (Herder 1989: 370).

In a similar spirit, the young Wilhelm von Humboldt argued in *A Proposal to Determine the Limits of State Action* (*Idee zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen*, 1792) for a conception of the state that now seems astonishingly minimalist. The state should require no positive duties from its citizens. It should limit their liberty only by forbidding such actions as might reduce the freedom of others. It should permit no hindrance to the free development of the individual. 'The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole' (Humboldt 1969: 16) – a passage later quoted admiringly by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859). The individual needs not only freedom, however, but also variety, for monotony impedes one's development. Yet if one follows a variety of pursuits, one may dissipate one's energies and achieve little. The answer to this problem is first, that each person should combine his diverse faculties in order to reach his goal; and second, that he should join together with other people, each of whom is developing his particular abilities, in a common endeavour. The basic form of such a union is the alliance between a man and a woman; beyond that, the associations and societies, founded on personal friendship, which we find especially among the ancient Greeks. The state cannot legislate for such endeavours, but should leave them to voluntary associations. It should not even institute a national system of education, but should leave education to parents and to private schools. For any national system of education will impose some uniformity on the pupils and thus hinder their free development. This ideal conception of the minimalist state ignores the fact that the German principalities all had large bureaucracies ensuring public order and amenities in the name of the *Polizeistaat* or 'police state', a term that had not yet acquired its 20th-century authoritarian meaning (Raeff 1983); the state apparatus would grow throughout the 19th century in all European countries. It may be considered a weakness of Weimar Classicist thought that it failed to address the relation between the individual and the actually existing state.

Ironically, Humboldt in 1809 found himself in charge of Prussia's schools and universities when, in the wake of Prussia's defeat by Napoleon, the ministers leading the Reform movement got him appointed director of the Section for Religion and Public Instruction within the newly reorganised Ministry of the Interior. He sought to institutionalise the principle of free *Bildung*. Vocational education, while necessary, should be strictly separated from the teaching that sought to enlarge people's humanity by arousing their intellect and imagination, and that should be available to all classes. For young children Humboldt prescribed the teaching methods of the Swiss Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), who encouraged children to learn actively, to deal with realities rather than abstractions, and to develop their individuality. At secondary level, the 'Latin schools' with their dreary and ineffectual teaching should be replaced by *Bürgerschulen* whose pupils should study Latin, history, mathematics, and technical subjects, specialising



according to their talents, and by Humboldt's great innovation, the humanistic *Gymnasium*, which prepared pupils for university. The *Gymnasium* centred on classical languages, together with history and mathematics, and aimed – though practice often fell short of precept – to teach those languages not in a dry-as-dust way, but as a means of understanding both the form of a language (Humboldt was among the founders of linguistics) and the spirit of the ancient world.

Humboldt's best-known achievement was founding the university at Berlin that now bears his name. In planning a university, Humboldt shared the conviction, first formulated in the inaugural lecture delivered by Schiller at Jena 20 years earlier, that university study was not for the 'Brotgelehrte' (scholar earning his bread) who simply sought a professional qualification, but for the 'philosophical mind' selflessly devoted to knowledge and to seeking its underlying principles (Schiller 1958: 4, 750–3; Ziolkowski 1990: 237–52). In contrast to the specialised *grandes écoles* established by Napoleon, the university should form the pinnacle of the nation's 'moral culture' ('moralische Cultur') and provide its denizens with *Bildung* in both intellectual matters and social ethics (Humboldt 1964: 4, 255). While the school presents its students with already established knowledge, university students and faculty together should pursue knowledge as something not fixed but always in the process of being discovered and elaborated. The school should develop all its students' abilities harmoniously, so that those impelled towards higher study can discover their vocation and pursue it at university, both through solitary study and through cooperation. For this, the institution of the seminar, pioneered by the classical philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne at Göttingen from 1764, permitted an ideal union of teaching and research (Clark 2006: 158–79). Humboldt admitted that only a few students would devote themselves to the highest intellectual ideals, but expected them to exert a wide influence. Although reality was inevitably more mundane, he established a model for the university that had wide influence, especially in the United States, and contrasts both with the long-established view of the university as a means of professional training and its more recent assimilation to a business model.

### ***Bildung* and *Kultur* from the Napoleonic Wars to World War I**

In the repressive political climate that followed the defeat of Napoleon, when the Karlsbad Decrees of 1819 required even university lectures to be submitted to censorship, the *Bildung* envisaged by Humboldt had little chance to transform public life. *Bildung* was a possession of many individuals, and sometimes primarily a sign of social status, embodied in editions of Goethe and Schiller that gathered dust in glass-fronted bookcases but attested to their owners' membership of the *Bildungsbürgertum* or educated middle class. Humboldt's conception of the state as confined to safeguarding individual freedom was contradicted by the steady growth of administration and government in Germany's numerous states and, from 1871, in the German Empire.

The new Empire's appropriation of *Kultur* and *Bildung* was most vehemently opposed by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who also demanded a reinterpretation and revaluation of these concepts. He attacked the chauvinist illusion that Prussia's victory over France had resulted from the supposed superiority of German *Kultur*. In fact, Nietzsche charged, the triumphalist new Empire threatened to destroy the German spirit (*Geist*). The new Germany had produced the cultivated philistine (*Bildungsphilister*), who trumpeted the excellence of 'German culture' but had no idea what culture really meant. Culture, according to Nietzsche, is not book-learning, but a way of life, characterised by 'unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people' (Nietzsche 1982: 5). It could be found in Renaissance Italy or among the ancient Greeks, but not in present-day Germany, which offered only a hotchpotch of different styles from diverse periods and countries. The Greeks could no longer provide a model, because the German

universities did not supply *Bildung*, but only knowledge about *Bildung*. To a modern student, the Greeks would probably seem uneducated, while to them, with his head stuffed full of knowledge, his awkward body and ugly clothes, he would appear like a walking encyclopaedia, bearing the title 'Handbook of inward culture for outward barbarians' ('Handbuch innerlicher Bildung für äußerliche Barbaren') (Nietzsche 1982: 79). To the degraded versions of *Bildung* and *Kultur* that he found all around him, Nietzsche opposed a heroic ideal of self-development towards what he defined as the basic idea of *Kultur*: 'to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature' (Nietzsche 1982: 160).

The broad tendency of Nietzsche's later writing is to separate aesthetics firmly from morality and politics. 'Nietzsche', wrote Thomas Mann in 1947, 'is the most uncompromisingly perfect aesthete in the history of thought' (Mann 1958: 172). In *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus spoke Zarathustra*, 1883–5) *Bildung* is again mocked as a sterile conglomeration of incompatible fragments, while the state is denounced as 'the coldest of all cold monsters' (Nietzsche 1969: 75). By inquiring, especially in *The Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887), how morality itself came into being, Nietzsche seeks to inaugurate a world without morality, beyond good and evil, governed by 'the innocence of becoming' (Nietzsche 1968: 65). In his heady visions of humanity's future, two figures can roughly be discerned. One is Zarathustra, the solitary prophet, mocked by the shallow populace, who denies the supernatural, affirms life on this earth, loves humanity for its potential, and practises a noble self-discipline unknown to the hypocritical moralists of the present. Zarathustra foretells the advent of the *Übermensch* (Superman or Overhuman), a terrifyingly strong-willed, dominating figure, generous, warlike, and cruel, who rejects compassion and is prepared to shape humanity through violence, like a sculptor working on recalcitrant material. Here again the world is seen as an aesthetic phenomenon. Humanity will be reshaped with the ruthless detachment of the artist. *Kultur* has been made absolute.

In the less exalted discourse of late 19th-century Germany, *Kultur* became a heavily charged word. In contrast to the universal implications of French 'civilisation' and to Matthew Arnold's insistence that 'the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, must be a general expansion' (Arnold 1969: 48), *Kultur* retained the implication of personal development. To liberals, it offered an alternative to a nationalist politics that claimed support from biology for doctrines of racial superiority. In this liberal, anti-biological sense, the German-Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas, who emigrated to the USA in 1886, took the concept of *Kultur* with him (Kuper 1999: 60–2). Resisting the biological and racial paradigms that still dominated their discipline, Boas and his followers, especially Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, analysed distinct 'cultures' (in the plural), and 'culture' in this sense – a body of social practices based on implicit shared assumptions – survives in diluted form whenever we talk about 'dependency culture' or 'research cultures'.

Back in Germany, *Kultur* was increasingly played off against *Zivilisation* (Elias 1964: 3–9, 1976: 1–7). *Zivilisation* was material, technical, external, and associated with Britain and especially with France. While the material progress of *Zivilisation* threatened to make the world boringly uniform, *Kultur* expressed the specific character of a nation, and Germany's *Kultur* was inward, profound, artistic, and philosophical.

*Kultur* was mobilised as a slogan in World War I. While British and French publicists proclaimed a war for civilisation, their German counterparts called it a war for *Kultur* (Kramer 2007: 159). In September 1914, 93 eminent German intellectuals, describing themselves as representatives of German scholarship and *Kultur*, published an 'Appeal to the Cultured World' ('Aufruf an die Kulturwelt'), denying German responsibility for the war and protesting against allegations

of German atrocities in Belgium. Yet, as historians have confirmed, the German invaders not only treated civilians with deliberate brutality, but also destroyed monuments of culture, notably Louvain University Library and Rheims Cathedral (Horne and Kramer 2001). In a much-read patriotic pamphlet, the distinguished economist Werner Sombart took the glorification of *Kultur* to extremes by identifying militarism with the pinnacles of German culture: 'Militarism is *Faust* and *Zarathustra* and a Beethoven score in the trenches' (Sombart 1915, 84–5).

This discrepancy resulted not from some fault implicit in the concept of *Kultur*, but from historical contingencies. The cultural achievements of the age of Goethe were appropriated to help legitimise the German Empire. At the same time, Germany had a military system that was more self-contained, immune to intervention by civilian politicians, than in Britain or France (Hull 2005). Military methods became ends in themselves, and were pursued to extremes without political, practical, or humanitarian considerations. The insistence on total victory, which was achieved in the Franco-Prussian War, let soldiers discard all restraints when fighting rebellions in Germany's African colonies. In World War I, rigid military thinking encouraged troops to continue fighting futilely long after the war was lost, and also to terrorise the populations of occupied territories by shooting suspected resisters indiscriminately, mercilessly requisitioning food and possessions, deporting many for forced labour, and treating prisoners of war with extreme harshness. To point this out is not to demonise Germany, nor to revive the obsolete thesis of a German 'special path' ('Sonderweg') (Blackbourn and Eley 1984), but to draw attention to unpalatable but well-attested historical facts that cast a long and dark shadow over succeeding decades.

## Thomas Mann

Welcoming war in 1914, Thomas Mann played off a full-bodied though often bloody *Kultur* against a bloodless *Zivilisation*:

Culture is unity, style, form, attitude, taste, is some spiritual organization of the world, however eccentric, grotesque, savage, bloody and frightful it may be. Culture can include oracles, magic, pederasty, Vitzliputzli [an Aztec god], human sacrifice, orgiastic cults, Inquisitions, *autos da fé*, St Vitus' dance, witch-trials, poisoning, and the most colourful atrocities. Civilization, however, is reason, enlightenment, mildness, morality, scepticism, dissolution – spirit.

(Kultur ist Geschlossenheit, Stil, Form, Haltung, Geschmack, ist irgendeine gewisse geistige Organization der Welt, und sei das alles auch noch so abenteuerlich, skurril, wild, blutig und furchtbar. Kultur kann Orakel, Magie, Päderastie, Vitzliputzli, Menschenopfer, orgiastische Kultformen, Inquisition, Autodafés, Veitstanz, Hexenprozesse, Blüte des Giftmordes und die buntesten Greuel umfassen. Zivilisation aber ist Vernunft, Aufklärung, Sänftigung, Sittigung, Skeptisierung, Auflösung, – Geist.)

(Mann 2002b: 27)

Thus the ancient Greeks, the Aztecs, the Middle Ages, the Italian Renaissance, whatever their excesses, possessed culture, whereas modern civilisation by comparison was safe, bland, and dull.

In his self-justifying book *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 1918) Mann still upheld a German *Kultur*, represented especially by the trinity of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche, against French and Italian *Zivilisation* associated with the un-German values of democracy and socialism, and embodied in his left-wing brother Heinrich. Reading

Oswald Spengler's huge treatise on world history, *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918–22), Mann was pleased to learn that history was a succession of mutually independent cultures ('Kulturen'), each including *Zivilisation* as a phase of decline. The decline of the West, in Spengler's view, had set in with the technical, philistine, commercial *Zivilisation* of the 19th century (Spengler 1972: 44). Spengler's cultural pessimism matched the mood of a defeated Germany.

In the aftermath of the war, Mann painfully rethought his position. The outcome was his great novel *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924), arguably a *Bildungsroman* whose covert subject is the author's own education (Reed 1974: 226–74). It dramatises a debate between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in which *Kultur* narrowly gains the victory. But this cannot be simply the benevolent but shallow, enlightened, progressivist worldview professed by Mann's fictional Italian humanist Settembrini. A modern conception of *Humanität* must acknowledge the undeniable facts of illness, bodily decay, and mortality. Hence Mann sets his novel in a Swiss sanatorium, where death is constantly present. And though *Bildung* may have degenerated into superficial book-learning, as Nietzsche charged, Mann puts his hero through a course of scientific reading, especially in biology and physiology, and thus provides a modern counterpart to Herder's concept of humanity as embedded in organic nature.

Although *The Magic Mountain* is a novel of ideas, the ideas are embodied in colourful characters and in fictional experiences. Settembrini's vision of 'homo humanus', inspired by the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, is contrasted with the image of 'homo Dei' put forward by his antagonist Naphta, a Jesuit who foretells that the unity of the Christian Middle Ages will soon be restored by a communist autocracy. While the trained dialectician Naphta scores many points and exposes the hypocrisy mixed in Settembrini's liberalism, the values that he lives, as opposed to those he professes, are clearly animated by hatred, and inferior to the kindness apparent in Settembrini. Thus Mann, without moralising, responds to Nietzsche's aestheticism by discreetly reintroducing the question how we are to live with one another.

The most problematic part of the novel is the symbolic hallucination that the protagonist, Hans Castorp, experiences when lost in the Alpine snow. First he envisions a Mediterranean coast where good-looking young people are playing sports and showing civilised respect for a nursing mother. From this paradise of healthy bodily culture and friendly intercourse – Mann's homage to German Graecophilia – his gaze turns to a grim temple, in whose recesses he finds two hags conducting a human sacrifice. This vision seems to reconcile the antithesis Mann had presented ten years earlier between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*: the dark side of humanity, denied by *Zivilisation* but acknowledged by *Kultur*, must somehow be incorporated into a fully human way of life, without impairing the kindly sociability shown by the young people in the vision. Castorp draws the (typographically emphasised) conclusion: '*For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts*' (Mann 1995: 588) ('*Der Mensch soll um der Liebe und Güte willen dem Tode keine Herrschaft einräumen über seine Gedanken*'; Mann 2002a: 748). Death must be faced – the whole novel is an exploration of death – but it must not be allowed to dominate our lives as it would in the Christian theocracy extolled by Naphta.

Thomas Mann remains a probing commentator on German culture and politics. His famous statement on emigrating to the USA – 'German culture is where I am' ('Wo ich bin ist die deutsche Kultur') (quoted Reed 1974: 1) – was not a boast, but a denial that the Third Reich could lay any claim to the German cultural tradition. His novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947) addresses this issue in a more nuanced way, suggesting an analogy between the barbarism of the Nazis (and of proto-Nazi intellectuals) and the single-minded devotion to *Kultur* at the expense of *Zivilisation* shown by the transgressive modernist composer Leverkühn, who is observed with partial comprehension by the 'good German' Zeitblom.