

ELIE KEDOURIE MEMORIAL LECTURE

Special Paths or Main Roads? Making Sense of German History

PETER PULZER

All Souls College, Oxford

IT IS AN HONOUR AND A PRIVILEGE to have been asked to give this lecture in commemoration of an original and influential thinker and a man of great integrity. I first came across Elie Kedourie's writings in the early 1960s and felt instinctively drawn to the tone of rational scepticism in which he expressed himself—a tone more suited to an eighteenth-century *philosophe* than to a child of the era of tyrannies. I did not, however, get to know him personally until he came to Oxford in the late 1980s as a Visiting Fellow of All Souls College. He was not, as those who knew him better than I will confirm, a highly extrovert person, but he was courteous and engaging, happy to listen and to respond in an invariably learned and reasoned way. I hope that the topic I have chosen and the way I have decided to approach it would have appealed to him.

* * *

'The Third Reich formed the climax of the German special development ("Sonderentwicklung") as it was directed against the West. The "German spirit", transformed into a shallow ideology, had reached its lowest point. From now on German special consciousness ("Sonderbewußtsein") lost all its justification. There is no plausible reason for attempting its revival

Read at the Academy 22 May 2002.

Proceedings of the British Academy, 121, 213–234. © The British Academy 2003.

in any form, however purified.¹ The verdict is that of Kurt Sontheimer, for many years Professor of Political Science at the University of Munich. I chose it more or less at random, for the sentiment it expresses represents, if not a near-consensus then at the very least a majority view among the post-war generation of German historians and social scientists. It reveals much about the place of national history in the German public mind, not only now but through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it tells us about the highly political nature of historical interpretation in Germany; about the extent to which disputes about the past, whether recent or distant, are also designed to legitimate or discredit particular constitutional or socio-economic dispensations; and the way these are directed towards influencing the composition of national identity. German historiography, even more than that of other developed countries, is didactic. In so far as it aims at promoting or neutralising particular notions about the place of Germany in the wider world, there is one aspect of the German experience that it emphasises more than any other, namely Germany's relationship with an often ill-defined and contradictorily conceived West.

I want to look at the problems that this approach raises under three headings. I shall consider first of all the content of the debates in Germany over the last two centuries on the character of this alleged special development; secondly the response to this debate outside Germany; and thirdly, what these debates tell us about the way we look at the histories of nations.

Wars, more than any other events, foster the tendency to clothe the pursuit of interest in the language of morality. In modern times, when wars are peoples' wars and when both domestic and foreign opinion become important power factors, the language of morality can take over completely. This language is not necessarily hypocritical. Some causes *are* more just than others and some outcomes of wars preferable to others, but one needs to deduce this from evidence other than the rhetoric of the belligerents. The two world wars of the twentieth century illustrate this

¹ Kurt Sontheimer, 'Der "Deutsche Geist" als Ideologie. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie vom deutschen Sonderbewußtsein' in Manfred Funke *et al.* (eds.) *Demokratie und Diktatur. Geist und Gestalt politischer Herrschaft in Europa. Festschrift für Karl Dietrich Bracher* (Düsseldorf, 1987), p. 45. A number of terms are used to describe the concept of a German exceptional development—*Sonderweg* (special path), *Sonderbewußtsein* (special consciousness), *Sonderentwicklung* (special development) and *Eigenweg* (particular or peculiar path). Though they have slightly different meanings, they point in the same direction and I have therefore, for the sake of simplicity, treated them as synonymous.

point exactly. Whereas Sonthheimer and others conclude that 1945 marked the final discredit of a claim to a special German way, his predecessors in 1914 proclaimed the exact opposite. Looking back on the moral antagonisms that the Great War personified for him, one of the more moderate and scrupulous of the patriotic intellectuals, Ernst Troeltsch, reflected on

our entire ethical-religious being, that is so profoundly different from its English and French equivalent . . . That this is a different idea from that of the West Europeans was something we had known for a long time. How very different is something we have known only since this war. Precisely in this respect the ideas of 1914 are opposed to those of 1789.²

Under the impact of the war, this distinction between what was German and what was Western became ideologised. It became an instrument for proclaiming the superiority of the German way of life over that of the West, whether in mental make-up or political institutions, economic systems or social ideals. It contrasted German idealism with English pragmatism and French rationalism, German social solidarity with the individualism of the West and the German idea of state authority with the superficial egalitarianism and plutocratic parliamentarism of the West. It followed that the basic component, the independent variable that determines what is German, is mentality. Thomas Mann, who changed his mind on this matter as on much else in the course of his life, saw it in simple terms in 1914:

It is no easy matter, being a German. It is not as comfortable as being an Englishman, not by a long way as distinguished and cheerful a matter as living in the French manner. The *Volk* has a hard time, it questions itself, it suffers from itself at times to the extent of self-disgust; but among individuals, as among peoples, those have always been the most valuable who had the hardest time, and whoever wishes that the German character should vanish from the earth in favour of *humanité* and *raison*, let alone *cant*, blasphemes. It is true, the German soul possesses something exceedingly deep and irrational, which appears, in the eyes and judgment of other, more superficial peoples, to be disturbing, disruptive, alien, even repulsive and wild.³

In a widely-circulated pamphlet, *Händler und Helden (Traders and Heroes)* the economist Werner Sombart put the matter in cruder terms:

The World War of 1914 acquires its deeper world-historical significance only as a British-German war. Not who is to dominate the seas is the question now to

² Ernst Troeltsch, 'Die Ideen von 1914' in Troeltsch, *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa. Gesammelte kulturpolitische Aufsätze und Reden* (Tübingen, 1925), p. 49.

³ Thomas Mann, 'Gedanken im Kriege' (1914), in Mann, *Essays*, Band 2: *Politische Reden und Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977) p. 36.

be decided for mankind; a much more important question that embraces the fate of humanity is, which spirit will emerge as the stronger: the commercial or the heroic[?]⁴

What we recognise here is the distinction that Kedourie made between ideological and constitutional politics. The type of politics proclaimed by Mann, Sombart and many others, he argued, 'is not concerned with reality. Its solitary object is an inner world and its end is the abolition of all politics; the realisation of the real self is the annihilation of the actual self and of its imperfect freedom.'⁵

In fact the prophets of German peculiarity did have a political programme, though they expressed it in anti-political terms and defined the peculiarity largely in terms of what it was not. For the historian Friedrich Meinecke English freedom was an illusion: 'What is best and most inward flourishes among us in a richer way.'⁶ For the economist Max Sering it was the West, with the plutocratic corruption of its parliamentary parties, that was undemocratic.⁷ Troeltsch saw 'the elements of the corporate and organic notion of community' as superior to 'the artificial and theoretical structure of the West' and 'the freedom of the spirit of community and discipline . . . closely linked with our entire ethical-religious being'.⁸

German freedom [he wrote] will never be completely political, it will always be linked to the idealistic idea of duty and the Romantic idea of individuality. Even in its political capacity it will bear the marks of its essentially spiritual and cultural origins . . . Above all, we do not want this freedom prescribed for us by Western European and American doctrines.⁹

This non-political, even anti-political definition of German freedom served to justify the institutions of the German Empire, above all its army, its bureaucracy and its monarchy. Of all the criticisms levelled against Germany not only by the powers of the Entente but also by some neutral states, that of militarism is the one that stung hardest. Even Thomas Mann felt injured by it: 'Our soldierliness is spiritually connected with our moralism . . . German militarism is in truth the form and image of German morality.'¹⁰ What applied to the army applied to the entire

⁴ Werner Sombart, *Händler und Helden. Patriotische Besinnungen* (Munich, 1915), p. 6.

⁵ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th edn. (Oxford, 1993), pp. xiii–xiv, 80.

⁶ Friedrich Meinecke, 'Die deutschen Erhebungen von 1813, 1848, 1870 und 1914' in Meinecke, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914. Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Leipzig, 1914), p. 35.

⁷ Max Sering, 'Staat und Verfassung bei den Westmächten und in Deutschland' in Adolf von Harnack *et al.*, *Die deutsche Freiheit. Fünf Vorträge* (Gotha, 1918), pp. 48–57.

⁸ Troeltsch, 'Die Ideen von 1914', pp. 48–9.

⁹ Troeltsch, 'Der Geist der deutschen Kultur' in Otto Hintze *et al.* (eds.), *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig-Berlin, 1916) vol. 1, p. 97.

¹⁰ Mann, 'Gedanken im Kriege', p. 31.

constitutional dispensation. The economist Gustav Schmoller spoke for many:

The German bureaucratic-military state has removed or forced back class domination and has enabled the power of the monarchy to create capable organs of state power at the centre and in the periphery; it has brought to an end the economic battles between town and country. There has emerged a strong monarchical power of a type that became exemplary for the whole world . . . To be sure, our institutions are a long way from being perfect. But we consider them to be better than those of the major democratic states, at any rate more suited to Germany's genius and history.¹¹

There are, it will be evident, two parts to the argument I have cited: that German life and structures are different from those of the West and that they are better. One can argue the first without necessarily concluding the second. But if, especially under the impact of an ideologised war, one wished to argue that they were better, one had first to demonstrate that they were different. And if one needed to demonstrate that—namely that German peculiarity was in the logic of history—one had to ask next when that special path began. There are a number of favourite *termini a quo*. Let me, for the sake of brevity, ignore all those who, like the legal historian Otto von Gierke, traced German national peculiarity to the 'Germanic dawn of time',¹² or adherents of what Ralf Dahrendorf has called 'the catchword "Tacitus"'.¹³ These have found two types of echo in the West: among those who, especially during the two world wars, sought evidence that Germans had never emerged from primitive savagery, but also among those who, like the Victorian constitutional historian, Bishop Stubbs, traced English liberties to their Saxon forebears.¹⁴

One of the chosen *termini* was the Reformation, with Luther as the 'founding hero of the modern German'.

Only those who are of his blood and spirit can understand him in the depth of his being [wrote Gerhard Ritter]. He is ourselves: the eternal German. [Through him] the history of the German spirit detaches itself in its distinctly recognisable peculiarity from the general European development.¹⁵

¹¹ Gustav Schmoller, 'Herkunft und Wesen der deutschen Institutionen' in *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, pp. 203, 227.

¹² Otto von Gierke, 'Krieg und Kultur', Zentralstelle für Volkswohlfahrt (ed.), *Deutsche Reden in schwerer Zeit, gehalten von Professoren der Universität Berlin* (Berlin, 1914–15), vol. 1, pp. 97–8.

¹³ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London, 1968), p. 391.

¹⁴ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development*, 5th edn. (Oxford, 1891), pp. 2, 4.

¹⁵ Gerhard Ritter, *Luther der Deutsche* (Munich, 1935; reprint of *Luther, Gestalt und Symbol*, 1928), pp. 15, 179.

Another *terminus* was the response to the French Revolution, an episode that more recent historians have also seen as the critical junction. Thomas Nipperdey began his 1983 history of nineteenth-century Germany with the sentence, ‘In the beginning was Napoleon’.¹⁶ Of the earlier authorities Troeltsch was explicit on this: ‘German politico-historical-ethical thought rests on the idea of the Romantic counter-revolution that . . . attempted to clear away the foundations of West European thought.’ The result was ‘an ever new and living individual embodiment of the historic-productive spirit’ as opposed to ‘an eternal, rationally founded and God-given order that establishes morality and law’.¹⁷ The foundation of the Bismarckian Empire, however, was not one of the turning points in the evolution of national peculiarity in the eyes of German historians of the early twentieth century, because the purpose of their thesis was to legitimate that regime, in contrast with some of the post-1918 and most of the post-1945 historians. For them the Empire was part of the problem and—as I hope to show—possibly *the* critical point in the turn from the Western path. Even so, tracing the origins of a nation’s development over the centuries in this way is a methodologically dubious undertaking. As Kedourie points out in his warning against nationalist categories in the writing of history:

When the peculiar anthropology and metaphysics of nationalism are used in the interpretation of the past, history takes on quite another complexion. Men who thought they were acting to accomplish the will of God, to make the truth prevail, or to advance the interests of a dynasty, or perhaps simply to defend their own against aggression, are suddenly seen to have been really acting in order that the genius of a particular nationality should be manifested and fostered.¹⁸

This subversive truth points to a question that I probably should have addressed before now, namely, whether there is any validity in this historiography of a special path, or at any rate in the particular form that it took in modern Germany. But before I do that there are two other questions that I want to look at: the extent to which the non-German world accepted this version of national history and the impact that the defeat of 1918 had on it.

¹⁶ Thomas Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800–1866*, trans. Daniel Nolan (Dublin, 1996), p. 1.

¹⁷ Troeltsch, ‘Naturrecht und Humanität in der Weltpolitik’ in Troeltsch, *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa*, pp. 6, 7.

¹⁸ Kedourie, *Nationalism*, p. 69.

Germany's neighbours looked on her ambivalently during our period, if only because at least until 1871 Germany was more of a geographical expression than a recognisable political unit. Until the end of the German Confederation in 1866 about half the Austrian Empire lay inside it and some of Prussia outside it. What one thought depended on whether the reference was to Protestant Prussia or Catholic Bavaria, to liberal Baden or authoritarian Saxony. There was much in the German states that foreigners admired: education, whether in schools or universities, the expert civil service, state support for the arts and, as the century wore on, industrial progress, local government and social welfare. There was less admiration for their politics. James Bryce thought that Germans were 'ridiculously overgoverned'.¹⁹ The social investigator Henry Mayhew gained a similar impression from a trip to Saxony:

The government is left to do as it pleases—to treat the people as though they were literally the *children* of the Fatherland; to deal with them indeed as German nurses do with newly-born infants—bind the poor things in no end of swaddling-clothes, till they have not the power to move either hand or foot.²⁰

Prussian militarism was almost without exception the least admired aspect of German life. George Eliot, who felt nowhere more at home than in Weimar or Berlin, deplored 'the 300,000 puppets in uniform' whom she saw in the streets of Prussia.²¹ The Positivist and political Radical Frederic Harrison went even further in thinking that Prussia's 'people are a drilled nation on furlough; its sovereign is simply commander-in-chief; its aristocracy are simply officers of the staff; its capital is a camp'.²²

It was only with the outbreak of the Great War that the British image of Germany came to mirror that of the German publicists. In their collective work, *Why We Are At War: Great Britain's Case*, the members of the Faculty of Modern History at Oxford saw the conflict 'as fundamentally a war between two different principles—that of *raison d'état* and that of the rule of law'. 'The idealisation of the state', they concluded, 'results in the idealisation of war.'²³ Ramsay Muir, writing from

¹⁹ Cited by Thomas Kleinknecht, 'Die Gründung des Deutschen Reiches 1870/71 aus der Sicht des britischen Gelehrtenliberalismus' in Bernd-Jürgen Wendt (ed.), *Das britische Deutschlandbild im Wandel des 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Bochum, 1984), p. 97.

²⁰ Henry Mayhew, *German Life and Manners as seen in Saxony at the Present Day* (London, 1864), vol. 2, pp. 640–1.

²¹ 9 Jan. 1855, to John Chapman, in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *Selection from the George Eliot Letters* (New Haven, 1985), p. 146.

²² Frederic Harrison, 'Bismarckism', *Fortnightly Review*, 8NS/48, 1 Dec. 1870, 634.

²³ *Why We Are At War. Great Britain's Case*, by Members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History (Oxford, 1914), pp. 108, 112.

Manchester, saw 'in the British Empire and all that it stands for . . . the absolute antithesis of the German ideal: in its belief in self-government, in freedom, in the very antithesis of the German belief in military monarchy, rigid discipline and uniformity'.²⁴ Even those who in earlier days had been the greatest Germanophiles now reversed their views. William Harbutt Dawson, the uncritical chronicler of Bismarck's welfare measures, was convinced by 1915 that 'Germany is out of step with the rest of the world'.²⁵ All these and many other authorities agreed with their German colleagues that Germany was indeed special, peculiar, and disconnected from the Liberal societies which they accepted as the norm, though their verdict from this evidence was, of course, different.

A similar French response to this German self-characterisation began earlier. Given the brutality of the Franco-Prussian war and the consequent loss of Alsace-Lorraine, the military image of Prussia predominated. Gone, during the period of the Third Republic and the *Kaiserreich*, was the plea for the Romantic symbiosis of the two peoples that Madame de Staël had wished for, just as in the decades after 1815 hatred of France, as the home of both the Revolution and Napoleon, was an essential component of the evolving German national identity. Indeed for most of the nineteenth century France was a more significant anti-nation for German nationalists than Britain. French admiration for German culture did continue after 1870, but it was evident that this culture was now subordinated to the jackboot and the *Pickelhaube*. When Romain Rolland made the tragic hero of his novel *Jean-Christophe* a German, many of his compatriots were surprised and some were shocked.

To the trauma of 1870 we owe the notion of the two Germanies, the cultivated and the brutal, first formulated by Elme-Marie Caro in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, where he denounced Immanuel Kant's 'terribles compatriotes, M. De Moltke et M. de Bismarck'. The war he saw as the outcome of the 'obscure and dogmatic' thought of Hegel: 'Quelle tendance équivoque à démontrer que le fait a toujours raison'. As for non-Prussian Germans, they have been overcome by the spirit of Prussia which, for two centuries, has been 'l'esprit de conquête par la force ou par la ruse'.²⁶ In the decade that followed, some Frenchmen simply hated Germany, especially if they came from Lorraine, like Maurice Barrès or

²⁴ Ramsay Muir, *Britain's Case Against Germany: An Examination of the Historical Background of the German Action in 1914* (Manchester, 1914), p. x.

²⁵ William Harbutt Dawson, *What is Wrong with Germany?* (London, 1915), p. 24.

²⁶ Elme-Marie Caro, 'La Morale de la Guerre. Kant et M. de Bismarck', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 90 (1870), 577–94 at 578, 581, 583.

Raymond Poincaré; others turned German virtues into vices. Paul Valéry, for instance, argued that the exercise of the many worthy German qualities required individuals of ‘une véritable médiocrité’:

An Englishman and a Frenchman can submit to discipline; that has been proved. But they always have other preferences. For them it is a second-best, a temporary necessity or a sacrifice. For the German it is life itself . . . [In Germany] every step is supported by the participation of the mass—a mass disciplined in the nature of things. The fundamental social evil of thinking, namely lack of discipline, is thereby removed. And so we have a wonderful tool: disciplined thinking.²⁷

As the Great War approached, French patriotism became more confident. Characteristic French qualities, too, became ideologised. As Julien Benda impartially observed, German historians tended to distort history to glorify the nation, French historians to glorify a regime; while German historians waged a national war, their French *confrères* waged a civil war.²⁸ For the great national educator Ernest Lavissee, ‘In defending France we are acting for the whole of mankind; for France has, since the Revolution, spread the values of justice and humanity throughout the world.’²⁹ As in Britain, the evaluation of special paths conflicted; their existence remained unquestioned. 1789 was a symbol for both sides, positive for one, negative for the other.

Given the politicisation, indeed the ideologisation of history east and west of the Rhine, the collapse of the Empire in 1918 created a crisis not only in politics, but in the historical profession. The Empire that German scholars sought to legitimate and their Western colleagues sought to discredit was, like most regimes, a product as much of contingencies, as of developmental logic. Its principal defect was that it lacked the instruments for peaceful change; one looked in vain for what Americans call a living constitution. The Empire presented a mixture of democracy, checks and balances and autocracy. It was a federation of twenty-five states, but not a federation of equals, as Prussia, the largest state, accounted for two-thirds of the population and had a *de facto* veto on policy. The Reichstag was elected by universal male suffrage and could legislate and pass the budget. But the head of the government, the Reichskanzler, was appointed by the Emperor and was not subject to the confidence of the Reichstag. The

²⁷ Paul Valéry, ‘Une Conquête Méthodique’ (1896), *Oeuvres*, Editions de la Pléiade, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957), pp. 981, 983, 976.

²⁸ Julien Benda, *La Trahison des Clercs* (Paris, 1927), p. 89, n. 1.

²⁹ Ernest Lavissee, ‘Le devoir Patriotique’ (1912), cited by Pierre Nora, ‘Ernest Lavissee, Instituteur National’ in Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de la Mémoire*, vol. 1: *La République* (Paris, 1984), 284.

Reichstag shared its powers with the Bundesrat, which represented the governments of the states and these rested on highly unequal franchises that were only partly reformed by 1914. For this reason there could be no cabinet government and Imperial ministers were not recruited from parliament. Above all, foreign policy was beyond the remit of the Reichstag and the army was under the direct command of the Emperor, a state within the state.

Explaining the defeat of such a polity by the democracies of the West posed a challenge. One group of scholars in the middle ground of politics cut their losses and accepted the new democratic Republic on pragmatic grounds. But their criticism of the old order was limited. For Meinecke, one of the principal *Vernunftsrepublikaner*, the 'rational Republicans', 'it was not the real Prussian system, but its decadent form, that disintegrated'. William II had failed to follow the precept of Frederick the Great 'to maintain general political considerations over military ones'.³⁰ He also blamed Heinrich von Treitschke for infecting German opinion with an un-German Machiavellianism.³¹ To the right of the *Vernunftsrepublikaner* were those who could not reconcile themselves to defeat. Germany, they maintained, had not been militarily beaten, but stabbed in the back by Liberals, Socialists, agents of the Entente, and you-know-who. Rather more interestingly, on the Left there emerged a principled and systematic critique of the vanished regime.

It was to be found among Marxists, like Arthur Rosenberg, who saw the fatal flaw of the Empire in the unwillingness or inability of the bourgeoisie to exercise decisive influence on policy and institutions.³² This critique was not, however, restricted to the radical Left, though much of what Liberals and Social Democrats wrote belonged to the 'if only' school. Both Veit Valentin, in his still unsurpassed history of the 1848 revolution, and the liberal publicist Otto Becker argued that 1848 had had an undeservedly bad press. In writing its history, Valentin argued, the victors of the counter-revolution had 'spread in the German people the conviction that they lacked political abilities . . . Since 1848 Germany has suffered from a political inferiority complex.'³³ Becker thought that the constitution elaborated in Frankfurt showed more maturity than that of

³⁰ Friedrich Meinecke, 'Die geschichtlichen Ursachen der deutschen Revolution' in Meinecke, *Nach der Revolution. Geschichtliche Betrachtungen über unsere Lage* (Munich, 1919), pp. 18, 16.

³¹ Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (Munich, 1924), pp. 488–510.

³² Arthur Rosenberg, *Entstehung und Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1955), p. 20–2.

³³ Veit Valentin, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution von 1848–49* (Berlin, 1930), vol. 2, pp. 549–50.

the Empire; that the Empire was not a German nation-state at all, but merely an extended Prussia; and that it was not the personality of the Kaiser, but the undue prestige of the army that caused the destructive imbalance in Germany's institutions: 'Under a different constitution the Kaiser would have behaved and developed differently and would not have been in a position to cause such harm.'³⁴

This historiography was as didactic as its predecessors. It was designed to build support for the Republic by showing that it, too, was a legitimate successor to German political traditions, indeed a more deserving one than the Empire had been. But its advocates were on weak ground, politically if not intellectually. In one sense they, too, accepted the special path thesis by taking the collapsed Empire as their starting point. But their preferred scenario was a counter-*Sonderweg*. They argued that Germany had been mistaken in detaching itself from the general development of Europe and saw the Weimar Republic as a return to the better path. In doing so they offended not merely political Conservatives who resented the Republic as the child of defeat and as a cuckoo's egg laid by Woodrow Wilson, but all those members of their guild who continued to deny that there were universal laws of political development and to insist that each nation followed a course peculiar to itself. Commenting on Marx's and Engels's condemnation of the failings of the German bourgeoisie, Hermann Oncken observed that they had fallen in the trap of regarding England and France as a universal norm because they had spent too long in England,³⁵ in much the same way as Heinrich Heine had, a century earlier, been suspect as a crypto-Frenchman.

These disagreements, which constituted neither the first nor the last historians' dispute in Germany, demonstrate what ought to be obvious by now, namely that there is more than one narrative to be written about any European nation and that any narrative, however scholarly, turns out also to be a political tract that mines the past for evidence. This truth does not, however, tell us why such disputes have been particularly intense in and about Germany and here I come to what I hope is the core of the argument I want to present. It is not just that the German past was contested because so many of the events of the last one-and-a half centuries had been contested by their contemporaries. The Empire of 1871 required a *Sonderweg*

³⁴ Otto Becker, *Deutschlands Zusammenbruch und Auferstehung. Die Erneuerung der Staatsregierung auf Grund der Lehren unserer jüngsten Vergangenheit* (Berlin 1921), pp. 15, 33, 36.

³⁵ Hermann Oncken, 'Friedrich Engels und die Anfänge des deutschen Kommunismus', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 113 (1921), 239–66 at 258, 260–1.

justification because it was a novice among European nation-states with rather eccentric *ad hoc* constitutional arrangements. It therefore needed a genealogy and like many a genealogy for the *arriviste* it had to be spiced with fantasy and fiction. The Weimar Republic was, as we know, contested politically and intellectually from the moment it was born and what Karl Dietrich Bracher called the ‘great crisis of orientation’ that affected both its intelligentsia and the mass of its citizens was one of the causes of its collapse.³⁶ And here we come to the central reason why we ask so many persistent questions of German history: why was it the only economically advanced state, the only state with a universally literate population, the only state with an extended period of citizen self-government that descended not merely into dictatorship, but into a regime of unparalleled destructiveness and genocide? This question has obsessed German historians since 1945, those outside Germany for even longer.

The first reaction of shocked patriots among the older scholarly generation was to see the Third Reich as something un-German, or at least not specifically German. For Friedrich Meinecke, writing in 1946, ‘National Socialism . . . was not a phenomenon to be derived primarily from German developmental forces, but . . . possesses certain analogues and precedents in the authoritarian systems of neighbouring states.’ As for the political and cultural evil of our day, it ‘was created by all the imperialist movements of the peoples of the Occident’.³⁷ Indeed, in spite of its German components, Meinecke saw the Third Reich as a form of foreign occupation (‘Fremdherrschaft’).³⁸ His contemporary, Gerhard Ritter, too, saw the Third Reich as a form of ‘total satanism’, as something that had happened to Germany as much as to the rest of the world: ‘It would be premature and unjust . . . to proclaim National Socialism and its outrages as a kind of hereditary vice of the Germans. It belongs, rather, to an epoch of general cultural decline, lack of faith and moral nihilism.’³⁹ Three decades later Ernst Nolte, in an article that triggered another historians’ dispute, tried to revive this thesis by categorising the

³⁶ Karl Dietrich Bracher, ‘Wertorientierung als Problem der deutschen Demokratie’ in Wilhelm Bleek and Hans Maull (eds.), *Ein ganz normaler Staat? Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren Bundesrepublik* (Munich, 1989), p. 21.

³⁷ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden, 1946), pp. 9, 40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁹ Gerhard Ritter, *Die Dämonie der Macht. Betrachtungen über Geschichte und Wesen des Machtproblems im politischen Denken der Neuzeit* (Munich, 1948), p. 158; Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage. Betrachtungen über die geschichtliche Eigenart des deutschen Staatsdenkens* (Munich, 1948), p. 199.

Holocaust as an 'Asiatic deed', a response to the prior example of the Gulag.⁴⁰ But by the mid-eighties it was too late to gain support for such a thesis. Even less successful was the attempt by a number of conservative historians to re-interpret post-war German history following the unification of 1990. A number of them argued that it was the Bonn Republic's integration in the west that constituted a deviation, the real *Sonderweg*, and that a German nation-state in the centre of Europe signalled a return to normality.⁴¹ A new generation of scholars had created a consensus that the Third Reich was a German problem to be explained in terms of German history. Hans-Ulrich Wehler spoke for them when he talked of the necessity of explaining this breach in civilisation ('Erklärungsbedürftigkeit dieses Zivilisationsbruches');⁴² Heinrich August Winkler did so when he asserted that 'how Hitler came to power remains the most important question of German history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, if not of all German history'.⁴³ Let me formulate the challenge of placing Hitler in the context of German history slightly differently. We do not need to ask, 'Without Hitler, would there have been a Third Reich?' The answer is self-evidently 'no'. We have therefore to ask, 'How is it that even with Hitler there was a Third Reich?' I do not mean the proximate causes of his appointment, the comings and goings in January 1933, rather what factors encouraged the emergence of such a political movement, its triumph and the acquiescence of large sections of the German elite in its policies. How far back do we go? To 1919—to Versailles, with its humiliating war guilt clause and reparations regime? To the creation of the Bismarckian Empire and a constitution that blocked further reform? To the rise of Romantic nationalism in response to the Napoleonic conquest? That was certainly one of the explanations offered in the West, as instanced by Peter Viereck's *Metapolitics. From the Romantics to Hitler* of 1941. Further back still? Luther featured in the

⁴⁰ Ernst Nolte, 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 1986, in Ernst Reinhard Piper (introd.), *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987), p. 45.

⁴¹ Rainer Zitelmann, Karlheinz Weißmann and Michael Großheim (eds.), *Westbindung. Chancen und Risiken für Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country. German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 222–5; Peter Pulzer, 'Nation-State and National Sovereignty', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, London*, 17/3 (Nov. 1995), 5–15.

⁴² Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3: *Von der 'deutschen Doppelrevolution' bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges, 1849–1914* (Munich, 1987), p. 1251.

⁴³ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, vol. 1: *Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 2000), p. 2.

demonology of Germany's opponents, just as much as he was a hero to the nationalists of the Empire. 'Germany is the Germany of Luther to this day', A. J. P. Taylor wrote in 1944.⁴⁴

The Reformation, or rather the wars of religion, undoubtedly delayed the emergence of a German nation-state, i.e. a path to European normality, but how direct is the line between Luther and the Germans' alleged subservience to the state, given the early triumph of liberal institutions in the rest of the Lutheran world? And did the Reformation really cut Germany off from the European mainstream? Latin did not cease to be a learned language and the legal codes were strongly influenced by Roman Law. The thesis of the German separation from the West strikes me as an instructive half-truth. I can claim no primacy in pointing this out. Troeltsch, for all his devotion to German peculiarity, did not deny English and French influences on German notions of freedom;⁴⁵ others regarded it as absurd to pretend that Erasmus or Descartes were irrelevant to German intellectual history.⁴⁶ It would be closer to the mark to regard German history after the end of the wars of religion and the Peace of Westphalia in terms of a dialectic between the pull of the West and that of the European Middle. The Calvinism of the rulers of Brandenburg was a Western import and the German Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was part of an international movement. True, most of its German luminaries were state employees—reformers, not radicals. They knew their Montesquieu and their Locke, but they took from Montesquieu his message on the spirit of politics, not on the contents of the laws; and they read Locke for his views on education, not on civil government.⁴⁷ Still, there was hardly a great divide here between the West and the rest.

With the outbreak of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars the divide becomes clearer and the gulf deeper. Not only France, but the mind of France becomes the enemy. Hatred of France and above all of the mind of France becomes an ever more significant component of

⁴⁴ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History. A Survey of the Development of German History since 1815* (London, 1944), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, 'Die deutsche Idee von der Freiheit' in Troeltsch, *Deutsche Zukunft* (Berlin, 1916), p. 38.

⁴⁶ Hajo Holborn, 'Protestantismus und politische Ideengeschichte. Kritische Bemerkungen aus Anlaß des Buches von Otto Westphal: "Feinde Bismarcks"', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 144 (1931), 15–30 at 25.

⁴⁷ Rudolf Vierhaus, 'Montesquieu in Deutschland. Zur Geschichte seiner Wirkung als politischer Schriftsteller in 18. Jahrhundert' in Vierhaus, *Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert. Politische Verfassung, soziales Gefüge, geistige Bewegungen* (Göttingen, 1987), p. 28; Vierhaus, 'Aufklärung als Lernprozess' in *ibid.*, p. 86.

German identity—so much so that Treitschke could boast in retrospect that Germany had been the first nation ‘to overcome the *Weltanschauung* of the eighteenth century entirely’.⁴⁸ Yet the pendulum continued to swing. Much in the debates of the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly derived from the wisdom of the West. One after another the speakers invoked Rousseau, Mirabeau and the Abbé Sièyes, Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.⁴⁹ The Radicals saw in the American combination of republicanism and federalism their favoured model. Moderates cited de Tocqueville. The aged Ernst Moritz Arndt argued that Germany ‘should be a mirror of England’; others drew on the examples of Belgium and Switzerland.⁵⁰ But the defeat of the revolution was a defeat for attempted Westernisation and the defeat of the Prussian Liberals over the control of the army in the 1860s a further defeat. It was at this point, so the Liberal historians of Weimar argued, that Germany finally took the wrong turn. For Johannes Ziekursch the Bismarckian constitution ‘ran contrary to the spirit of the times’; the search for an ‘allegedly specific German form of the state’ was ‘in decisive contradiction to the Western European constitutional ideal’, an ideal that ‘had up to then been the Germans’ aspiration’.⁵¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that the attempted re-Westernisation of political life after 1918 led to an intellectual civil war, nor that Joseph Goebbels should tell his radio audience on 1 April 1933 that with the Nazi accession to power ‘the year 1789 is being expunged from history’,⁵² or that the assembled school teachers of Germany should learn some weeks later that ‘the German people have left the path of Western civilisation’ in reply to the Treaty of Versailles.⁵³

We now know better. After 1945 Germans more than anyone else had reason to wonder what had gone wrong and why. ‘Why’, Thomas Mann

⁴⁸ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1927), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Veit Valentin, *Die erste deutsche Nationalversammlung. Eine geschichtliche Studie über die Frankfurter Paulskirche* (Munich-Berlin, 1919), pp. 90–1; *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen der deutschen constituierenden Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt-am-Main*, Herausgegeben . . . von Prof. Franz Wiegand (Frankfurt am Main, 1849), vol. 6, p. 4435, vol. 7, pp. 5285, 5290.

⁵⁰ Valentin, *Nationalversammlung*, pp. 80–1, 92; Arndt: *Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 3, p. 2059; de Tocqueville: *ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 2560–1.

⁵¹ Johannes Ziekursch, *Politische Geschichte des neuen deutschen Kaiserreichs* (Frankfurt am Main, 1925–30), vol. 1, pp. 3, 226–7.

⁵² Joseph Goebbels, ‘Wider die Greuelhetze des Weltjudentums’ in Goebbels, *Revolution der Deutschen* (Munich 1933), p. 155.

⁵³ Cited by Elaine S. Hochman, *Architects of Fortune. Mies van der Rohe and the Third Reich* (New York, 1989), p. 335, n. 4.

now asked himself, 'does the German urge for freedom always lead to inner unfreedom?'⁵⁴ Gerhard Ritter acknowledged the need to understand 'the deeper reasons why we Germans appear in the Western world as a nation that is both difficult to understand and threatening'. The explanation for him lay in 'the antagonism between West European and German political thinking'.⁵⁵ A generation later Germany's public preceptors had become more confident: 'The unconditional opening of the Federal Republic towards the political culture of the West is the great intellectual achievement of our post-war years', Jürgen Habermas noted in 1986.⁵⁶ In the same year Wolfgang Mommsen was one of many others who were relieved at 'Germany's option for political models as presented to us by Western Europe and in particular the United States'. It had now become acceptable to declare publicly that the defeat of Hitler benefited the Germans as much as the rest of Europe.⁵⁷ Indeed, by the 1980s the *Sonderweg* thesis had become an essential component of German political pedagogy. 'To abandon the German *Sonderweg* thesis', Kurt Sontheimer noted in 1982, 'is to break the back of German political consciousness in the period since the Second World War.'⁵⁸

Is there anything in all this evocation of difference? Is the current liberal historiography anything more than a re-hash of the old *Sonderweg*, with the verdict reversed on appeal? Does the title of Heinrich August Winkler's *magnus opus*, *The Long Road to the West*, not suggest another effort at regime legitimation, a pat on the Federal German back, especially the recently re-united German back?⁵⁹ The *Sonderweg* thesis has certainly been under attack, both explicitly and by the direction that recent research has undertaken. For the most explicit critique we can go to the various essays of Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, published in the 1980s. Theirs was a dual attack, both methodological and empirical. Where, they asked, is the Western paradigm from which Germany is supposed to have deviated? Where the normality that defines Germany as

⁵⁴ Mann, 'Deutschland und die Deutschen' (29 May 1945), *Essays*, p. 289.

⁵⁵ Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, pp. 8, 10.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung', *Die Zeit*, 11 July 1986, in *Historikerstreit*, p. 75.

⁵⁷ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 'Weder Leugnen noch Vergessen befreit von der Vergangenheit', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1 Dec. 1986, in *Historikerstreit*, pp. 316, 319.

⁵⁸ Kurt Sontheimer, 'Der historische Sonderweg—Mythos oder Realität?' in Karl Dietrich Bracher *et al.*, *Deutscher Sonderweg—Mythos oder Realität?* (Munich, 1982), pp. 31–2.

⁵⁹ Philip Grasset, 'Die Bundesrepublik, Europa und der Westen' in Jörg Baberowski *et al.*, *Geschichte ist immer Gegenwart. Vier Thesen zur Zeitgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 67, 72. I owe this reference to my colleague Jan-Werner Müller.

abnormal? Are not the differences between France and Britain and between them and the USA as significant as those that separate them from Germany?⁶⁰ In the aftermath of the Second World War, when the Third French Republic had visibly failed and the Fourth seemed not to be doing much better, Anglo-American scholars were indeed tempted to regard Anglo-America alone as the norm. In a seminal paper of 1956 Gabriel Almond of Stanford University made a straightforward distinction between 'Anglo-American' and 'Continental' political systems.⁶¹ In the slightly later *The Civic Culture* he and Sidney Verba wrote, 'We have concentrated on the British experience because the whole story of the emergence of the civic culture is told in British history.' While Britain's and America's 'basic patterns are similar, . . . in France, Germany and Italy . . . the civic culture is present in the form of aspiration, and the democratic infrastructure is still far from being attained.'⁶² Though they exempt Scandinavia from general continental backwardness, it is evident where the civilisational divide ran for Almond and Verba: non-democrats begin at Calais.

More recent research in Germany and beyond has thrown doubt on these simplicities. Eley and Blackbourn, and not only they, have asked whether the German middle class was really as passive, conformist, and authority-fixated in the nineteenth century as earlier orthodoxy had insisted. Just how different were German industrialists and professionals from their British and French analogues? Was not urban life in Germany pervaded more and more by middle-class norms and values? One scholar after another has stressed the continuing regional differences in political development, the often hidden influence of women on public affairs and above all the growth of participatory politics and bottom-up policy initiatives in the form of election campaigning, populist demagoguery, new party formation, and a proliferation of lobbies.⁶³ In particular, we now

⁶⁰ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984), in particular, Introduction, pp. 1–35 and 'Societal Bearings: The British Model', pp. 62–74.

⁶¹ Gabriel A. Almond, 'Comparative Political Systems', *Journal of Politics*, 18/3 (Aug. 1956), 391–409.

⁶² Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in five Nations* (Princeton, 1963), pp. 7–8.

⁶³ See *inter alia* Dirk Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks. Parteien und Verbände in der Spätphase des wilhelminischen Deutschlands* (Cologne, 1970); Richard J. Evans (ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978); Lothar Gall and Dieter Langewiesche (eds.), *Liberalismus und Region. Zur Geschichte des deutschen Liberalismus im 19. Jahrhundert. Historische Zeitschrift, Beiheft neue Folge 19* (1995); Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser's Voters. Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 1997); Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy. Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 2000).

know more than we did about the often enlightened policies pursued by Liberal oligarchies in major German cities.⁶⁴

I can acknowledge all these valuable findings and yet feel that they do not answer the question I have posed. There remains, I would argue, an inner core of peculiarity. It has to do with constitutional life, attitudes to open society and concepts of citizenship. Discussing the alleged 'missing bourgeois revolution' of Germany, Richard Evans points out that 'on a European scale, there was nothing very archaic about . . . the Imperial German constitution', but that there was compared with Britain.⁶⁵ To that I would add that it was equally archaic compared with all the post-medieval states of Europe, including France, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Scandinavia. Whatever the differences between them, all had an executive accountable to an elected parliament, all had established civilian control over the military. They shared, admittedly with local variations, a citizen-based view of the state. In none of them were there protective tariffs that privileged the owners of land and heavy industry at anything approaching the German level, or was policy made to the same extent by extra-constitutional coalitions of lobbies and bureaucrats—procedures that, in raising producers' expectations of the state, bequeathed an unredeemable mortgage to the much weaker Weimar state. In none of them would anyone seriously have thought of initiating a debate on the restoration of the guilds. It would have been unthinkable for any Conservative member of the House of Commons, even as a joke, to echo Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau in suggesting that the monarch should have the power to order any lieutenant to take ten men and close down parliament. The third Marquess of Salisbury may have had his misgivings about democracy, but he could envisage no alternative to a parliamentary system of government. Nor did the widened political participation noticeable after 1890 contribute to the liberalisation of the German Empire. The Social Democrats, who now grew rapidly, were in

⁶⁴ James J. Sheehan, 'Liberalism and the City', *Past and Present*, 51 (1970), 116–37; Werner Jochmann and Hans-Dieter Loose, *Hamburg. Geschichte der Stadt und ihrer Bewohner*, vol. 2 (Hamburg, 1986); Jan Palmowski, *Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany, Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914* (Oxford, 1999); Till van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer. Die Beziehungen zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925* (Göttingen, 2000).

⁶⁵ Richard Evans, 'The Myth of Germany's Missing Revolution' in Evans, *Rethinking German History. Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London, 1987); 'German Historians and the Problem of Bourgeois Revolution', 'German Peculiarities' and 'Economy and Society: A Silent Bourgeois Revolution' in Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*, pp. 51–74, 159–205.

constitutional matters a liberal opposition, but the early separation of the bourgeois and working-class Left made the emergence of a viable political alternative difficult, in contrast with Lib.-Lab. pacts in Britain, the inclusion of the Socialists in the Republican consensus in France, and the New Deal coalition in the United States. The most important of the new advocacy groups, like the Navy League and the Pan-German League, were chauvinist and authoritarian, as were a number of economic interest groups, such as the Agrarian League and the Commercial Employees' Union. Like the majority of university student associations and corporations these last two were strongly anti-Semitic.

True, an artistic *avant-garde* scene flourished in Berlin, Munich, and Dresden, but it remained politically and socially marginal. In Britain the Conservative Prime Minister, A. J. Balfour, attended Bernard Shaw's first nights⁶⁶—can one imagine Bernhard von Bülow or Theodor von Bethmann Hollweg at a performance of Gerhard Hauptmann, let alone Arthur Schnitzler or Frank Wedekind? When a citizenship law was passed for the Empire in 1913, the basis for nationality was *ius sanguinis*, i.e. descent, as opposed to *ius soli*, or place of birth, as was usual in the West, including the United States. I can add a footnote here from my own area of research, on the civic status of the Jews. Characteristically the European debate on this topic was opened by an enlightened Prussian civil servant, Christian Wilhelm Dohm, in 1781. Though Wilhelm von Humboldt warned that piecemeal emancipation would aggravate the problem by constantly drawing attention to it and the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848 proclaimed civil equality, all these attempts at Westernisation came to nothing. It was not until 1867 that legal disabilities were finally removed and then more in form than in substance. It was almost impossible for a Jew to become a civil servant or an army officer before 1918 and difficult to become a university professor outside the natural sciences without converting—in contrast not only with the states of Western Europe, but also the Habsburg Monarchy.⁶⁷

Let me in the remaining minutes lay my cards on the table. What is *my* didactic agenda? It is to try to present some worthwhile conclusions about the writing of national history in the light of the points I have been making.

Not all history needs to be that of individual states or nations: much economic, diplomatic or intellectual history would not make sense if it

⁶⁶ David Schoenbaum, *Zabern 1913. Consensus Politics in Imperial Germany* (London, 1982), p. 7.

⁶⁷ Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State. The Political History of a Minority, 1848–1933* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 88–96, 106–120.

were. But there is a continuing legitimate demand for the grand narrative that tells the story of how a particular people, whether ethnically or culturally defined, has evolved over the decades and the centuries. Ongoing research continually modifies this narrative. Given the recent excellent monographs on German regions and cities, on particular industries and the sub-cultures of society, many of the generalisations that were confidently made only a generation ago are no longer valid. German history, it turns out, is highly kaleidoscopic. But that makes it more, not less desirable to impose some conceptual order on the detail, and not to abandon the grand narrative. Out of this arises a second challenge: how to construct the chain of events that make up the narrative, how to identify the origins of the present and the recent past.

To bring that about, let me use the device of path dependency, which tells us how particular events and decisions limit future choices. Let me start with the Reformation. Luther's translation of the Bible gave Germans a literary vernacular—a unifying device—but the outcome of the wars of religion split the German nation denominationally in a way that would not otherwise have happened. It thereby reduced the chances of a Western-style nation-state development, but hardly excluded it. Nor can it be said that Luther's emphasis on the sanctity of worldly authority for ever prevented the emergence of a culture of citizen self-government. The bureaucratic and absolutist character of the German Enlightenment further encouraged the notion that good government should come from above, but hardly did so in an irreversible way. So far we have hints, but no more than hints of a special path. Matters become clearer with the Napoleonic wars and the Romantic nationalist reaction to them. It is at this stage, and not earlier, that German national identity is increasingly defined in anti-Western terms, but the triumph of this trend is not yet final. The constitutionalism of South-West Germany, as exemplified by the liberal tone of the *Staatslexikon* of Rotteck and Welcker, and the aspirations of many of the Frankfurt parliamentarians show that the contest is still undecided.

The defeat of the revolution and the creation of the Empire by the Prussian army, with the majority of the Liberals in tow, delineate a special path more clearly still; when, in 1878–9, Bismarck abandons his Liberal allies and reduces them to permanent minority status the prospects of further evolution in a Westerly direction become very dim indeed. It is at this stage that we come to the by now familiar question of Germany's missing middle-class revolution. The terms of this debate, as conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, now have a period air about them, of

interest only to consenting Marxists in private. They rest on the assumption that the key to the answer lies in the character of Germany's economic development and once this has been shown not to be so radically different from that of her neighbours the problem of a *Sonderweg* is solved. I would not deny that German capitalists were much like capitalists elsewhere or that the German bourgeoisie was very bourgeois. What I would deny is that this tells us why Germany was, by 1914, governed in a substantially different way from its Western neighbours, or why, quite apart from the obvious objective causes, no democratic consensus could emerge in favour of the Weimar Republic. To put it differently, we shall not arrive at an explanation through the concept of historical materialism in any of its varieties—that is to say, by assuming that the relations of production constitute the base and that political forms are epiphenomenal.⁶⁸ What set the German bourgeoisie apart was not so much the way it made its profits, but the way the majority within it thought. Joseph Schumpeter pointed out some decades ago, 'We almost always find that actual group or national behaviour more or less departs from what we should expect if we tried to infer it from the dominant forms of the productive process.'⁶⁹ The history of Germany up to 1945, like that of the former Soviet bloc since 1990 or China for rather longer, demonstrates, on the contrary, that it is political and legal structures that form the base on which the economic superstructure rests. To put it as simply as possible, '*It is not their social being that determines the consciousness of men, but their consciousness that determines their being.*' If there was a *Sonderweg* (special path) it took the form of a *Sonderbewußtsein* (special consciousness).

In arriving at this conclusion I might be accused of falling into the trap that so many historians of Germany are accused of, that of being hypnotised by twelve particular years and assuming that they constitute the central problem of interpretation, so that all that comes earlier or later needs to be related to them. I hope I have made it clear that I do not regard the history of Germany to be a one-way road to Auschwitz, but equally that Auschwitz was not a contingent event. When we look for the factors that shape a national narrative, we have to establish from what point we are looking back. The search for continuities in the German past can yield different clues, depending on whether the search starts in 1890, 1914 or 1945—or in 1968 or 2002. What can Luther or Frederick the

⁶⁸ G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History. A Defence*, expanded edn. (Oxford, 2000), pp. 364–88, esp. 367–9.

⁶⁹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 2nd edn. (London, 1947), pp. 12–13.

Great or Bismarck tell us about the Berlin Republic, the first German polity in which the nation-state and democracy are not in conflict and in which the army is one of the least admired institutions? The old Federal Republic had many of its roots in pre-Bismarckian Germany—more Catholic, more decentralised, even provincial, with fewer aspirations to power status than any of the three preceding regimes. The new Federal Republic shares many of these roots, but not the Catholicism and a little less of the abjuration of power. A Kedourie Lecture in 2022 would no doubt discover yet another past, but I hope a no less coherent one.