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MODERNITY AT THE LIMIT: RETHINKING GERMAN EXCEPTIONALISM BEFORE 1914

Geoff Eley

'MODERN' AS A CATEGORY OF THE PRESENT

How shall we historicize modernity? To a perhaps surprising extent, *modernism* and *modernity* have become pervasive terms of contemporary social theory and cultural critique. A variety of events have converged on this space, where the category of the modern seems to allow our late twentieth-century preoccupations to be addressed. One is Marxism's disarray as a grand narrative of revolutionary transformation (the projection of a viable and attainable future *beyond* modernity), capable of producing the coherence of the present in epochal terms, with reference to its wider historical and philosophical frontiers. Another is the creeping catastrophe of global ecological change, which has done extensive damage to the self-confidence of modernity's programmatic definition: environmentalism's critique of industrialism, science, and rationalization has prompted social theorists to examine what might still be viable in the classical constructions of modernity, now that the hubris of the triumph of science over nature has been exposed. A third is the collapse of Communism since 1989, which intellectually has decisively released the pressure from the privileging of the West, particularly from those structures of thought concentrated around the importance of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as the crucible of liberalism and of a belief in the progressive logic of history.

But the need to conceptualize modernity also comes from the intellectual challenge posed by the philosophical and cultural discourse of postmodernism. For one thing, postmodernism establishes its own specificity partly by a negative positioning, via the determined othering of an essentialized conception of the modern as what came before. Its main dimensions of critique – of Enlightenment universalism, of the grand narratives of modern historical development, of the coherently centred and rationally acting human subject – are by now familiar. The postmodernist perspective has come to imply a conception of modernity in dissolution or supersession, grounded in a universe of discourse that the otherwise opposing camps of twentieth-century social and political theory held in common (say, *both* the modernization theorists *and* their Marxist critics) – one constructed epistemologically around totalizing notions of transcendent truth and the universalizing meta-narrative of the rise of 'western civilization' and 'Man's' mastery over nature, in a way which allowed the world to be *known* in a scientific, historical, and predictive sense. Such an understanding of modernity implied a strongly centred notion of identity and

agency, of directionality in history, of the power of knowledge to shape the environment, and of the progressive impact of the West on the rest of the world (even where such transformations have proceeded through immediately destructive and exploitative encounters). There is much diversity of perspectives among and within these intellectual traditions, of course – liberal, Marxist, and others – as the triumphalist anti-Marxism of our post-communist era amply and retroactively confirms. But some version of this outlook, which combines assumptions about the reasoning individual with the overarching logics of universal rationalization, economic progress, and the West's expansion in the world, has been constitutive for the main forms of social theory since the end of the last century:

With regard to its economic programme and its cultural organization, this concept of modernity represents an effort to synthesize its progressive and emancipatory ideals into a globalizing, integrative vision of the individual's place in history and society. It rests on the assumption that there exists a legitimate centre – a unique and superior position from which to establish control and to determine hierarchies.¹

1. Nelly Richard, 'Postmodernism and Periphery', *Third Text*, Volume 2, 1978/9, p6.

The most aggressive and apodictic of postmodernist commentaries, therefore, have a strong and clear answer to modernism's historicity: it is the time – whether as a general condition of society, a structure of meaning, a stage of knowledge production, or a system of rules and practices for producing coherence in the world – that no longer works, the time that is past. This hard and elaborated distinction between modernity and postmodernity has achieved greater currency in some national, political, and disciplinary contexts than others. In Britain, the disparate enthusiasms within some sectors of sociology, cultural studies, literary studies, and feminism were convened rather successfully into a generalized discourse of politics during the 1980s, for instance (I'm thinking of *Marxism Today* and the New Times agenda and their widespread effects), whereas the US discussion is shaped far more by a politics of cultural studies in the academy, heavily marked by literary theory, with intermittent explosions into a wider public sphere, under the unstable sign of an identity politics staking its recognition.

2. An exception is Patrick Joyce, who has marked out an important place for such a discussion during the last few years. See most recently, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, and 'The End of Social History?', *Social History*, Volume 20, Number 2, 1995, pp73-91.

Among historians the popularity of this framework is rather low.² Moreover, when we turn to the history of Germany, we find this effect especially clear. In the German intellectual context more generally there is in any case far less scepticism about Enlightenment traditions: 'western values' remain much more strongly centred, and the field of meanings of the 'postmodern' is far less in play. The former have no shortage of critics – both from a Green political and cultural perspective on the left, and from the partisans of a regenerative German identity on the right. But on the whole, it is still the strong orientation towards the values of the West that holds the centre of public debate, from the market-oriented ideology of the Free Democrats and the CDU centre, to the remaining welfare statism of the SPD, and the obdurate rationalism and

wer of knowledge to shape the of the West on the rest of the proceeded through immediately There is much diversity of al traditions, of course – liberal, Marxism of our post-communist e version of this outlook, which individual with the overarching ic progress, and the West's e for the main forms of social

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philosophical modernism of most liberal and social democratic intellectuals. In Germany, of course, the unavoidable context of discussion (although after the dramatic events of the collapse of the GDR and German unification, this is now in flux) remains the experience and legacy of the Third Reich. For Jürgen Habermas especially, an explicit, systematic, and continuously reaffirmed allegiance to the 'political theory of the Enlightenment' has become the unavoidable antidote to Germany's baleful pre-1945 past. In this case, an abstract and normative constitutionalism deriving from the historic break of 1945-49 – the necessity of a 'constitutional patriotism', or a post-conventional identity based on rationalist adherence to an idealized construction of the liberal political community of the West – had become for Habermas the only permissible form of a German collective identity, because more traditional appeals to history and nation ('identity' and 'meaning', as privileged in the discourse of the intellectual right) had become morally forfeit due to the years 1933-45. The sense of a new beginning, of strict demarcation against certain older German continuities or traditions – political romanticism, decisionism, diverse illiberalisms and anti-modernisms – has been crucial to Habermas's political thinking, which during the 1980s staked out the terms in which the sustaining of postwar German democracy needed to be thought. As he insisted during the so-called 'historians' conflict' almost ten years ago:

The only patriotism that will not alienate us from the West is constitutional patriotism. Unfortunately, a commitment to universal constitutional principles based in conviction has only been possible in German national culture since – and because of – Auschwitz. Anyone who wishes to expunge the shame of this fact with facile talk of 'guilt-obsession', anyone who wants to recall the Germans to more conventional forms of national identity, destroys the only reliable basis of our tie to the West.³

Thus for Habermas certain ideas are profoundly disqualified by their associations with the past, and this connotative chain precludes the opening of contemporary debate towards the discourse of postmodernism. For him, critiques of Enlightenment are inseparably linked – logically and historically – to politically destructive and reactionary agendas. His worst fear is that the late twentieth-century crisis of modernity – which is otherwise freely acknowledged, and rightly defined by the catastrophe of scientific domination over nature – will open the door to political irrationalism and a rehabilitated tradition of the anti-democratic right. This vigilance on Habermas's part in the 1980s had a variety of important fronts, including his difficult and obscure positioning in relation to the reception of Foucault; the more general polemics against French poststructuralism and postmodern philosophy, whose German advocates he stigmatized as 'Young Conservatives', with the intended evocations of fascist intellectualism from the 1920s; the holding of the line against the rehabilitation of Heidegger and Carl Schmitt; and the challenging of historians such as Ernst Nolte in contexts such as the *Historikerstreit*

3. The *Historikerstreit* raged in West German public life during 1986-87, in response to an article by Habermas in *Die Zeit*, where he attacked several conservative historians (Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, Michael Stürmer) for a dangerous apologetics. In the name of rebuilding a healthy German patriotism, he argued, such voices wanted to bury the issue of continuing German responsibility for Nazism, and thereby vitally disavowed the moral-political foundations of West German democracy since 1945. See Geoff Eley, 'Nazism, Politics and the Image of the Past: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit*, 1986-1987', *Past and Present*, Number 121, 1988, pp171-208.

mentioned above. For Habermas, postmodernism is an 'aestheticist pseudo-radicalism', which in embracing the cultural critique of modernity simultaneously abandoned the ground of democracy, or at least surrendered the ground from which democracy could be convincingly reaffirmed:

The farewells sung to cultural modernity and the veneration of capitalist modernization can only confirm those who, with their blanket antimodernism, want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. If modernity had nothing to offer but what appears in the commendations of neoconservative apologetics, one could well understand why the intellectual youth of today should not rather return to Nietzsche via Derrida and Heidegger and seek their salvation in the portentous voices of a culturally revived, an authentic Young Conservatism not yet distorted by compromise.⁴

It is worth pausing with this field of German difficulty for a moment, in order to understand how powerfully an authorized reading of history and its ethico-political claims – in this case the construction of the pre-1945 German past as a story of failed modernization – can draw the intellectual agenda against certain possibilities of discussion, establishing persistent protocols for what can and cannot be thought. To give Habermas his due, the contours of a new conservative agenda have been visible enough since the early 1980s. At an intellectual retreat sponsored by the CDU in 1983 soon after returning to government, on the theme of 'German Identity Today', the philosopher Günther Rohrmoser counterposed to the Enlightenment what he called a specifically German 'answer to ... modern society and the problems of human alienation connected with it'. In the late twentieth century, Rohrmoser argued, the Enlightenment tradition's moral hegemony could no longer persuade. The 'project of modernity' had entered its crisis, and now an older heritage of German critique should come back into play: 'Is it really the case that the answers of an ideologically exhausted liberalism and a socialism that has failed in all its variants are better than those we can derive from the memory of the greatest philosophical and cultural achievements of the Germans?' In fact, the post-1945 determination to treat 'the difference between the Germans and all the ahistorical-abstract traditions of the West founded on natural law' as 'nothing but an error' has produced only 'the neuroticization of our national self-understanding', and it was time to reappropriate nineteenth and early twentieth-century German thought without worrying about Nazism's retroactive association.⁵ Here the seamless unity of political romanticism, appeals to identity, and historical apologetics feared by Habermas – the harmful logic of departing from the Enlightenment tradition – seems clearly at work.

This is a field of undoubted complexity. The earlier *Wende* in West German politics, which marked an authoritarian constriction of public life between the 'German autumn' of 1977 and the 1982 return of the CDU to office, began a slow and remarkably effective reoccupation of the public sphere by the

intellectual right, most vis-à-vis *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German publishing operations, but respectability and influence right. Academics such as the political scientist Bernhard public intellectuals employed and on the fringe of the CDU pragmatics and strategic 'w'. Such voices construct a self-avowedly 'fascist' (but equal Italian and French Fascist) Philosophers of the 1970s, Jünger's secretary from the crucial handbook, *Die Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1950; new ed. 1999) and intellectually coherent nationalist desire within a demarcated *against* the CI capital 'C', and its passage is an important realignment. The nihilism of Lyotard and Baudrillard's Enlightenment critique see the postmodern after all, precisely.

In this respect, Habermas's historical opinion, basic departures of the 1960s. Mommsen and other so-called Mommsen, labor historian and other members of the so-called to say? Can we really lump it about the Enlightenment negatively as *danger*, a re-emergence after 1945, so that 'precisely the enlightenment has formed fringes meet?', as Habermas the merits of current philosophy after all, many others on the enthroning the Enlightenment historical account of the complexity of the process of change is flattened. Moreover, 'the political theory of suppressions, so that the field became predicated on the

4. Jürgen Habermas, 'Neoconservative Cultural Criticism in the United States and West Germany', in Habermas, *The New Conservatism, Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, p.45. The phrase 'aestheticist pseudoradicalism' is taken from Richard Wolin's Introduction, p. xxv.

5. Cited by Jürgen Habermas, 'The New Intimacy between Politics and Culture: Theses on Enlightenment in Germany', in Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, p. 199.

intellectual right, most visibly tracked through the pages of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German paper of record, and a variety of high-profile publishing operations, but also proceeding via the slow advent to mainstream respectability and influence of journals such as *Criticon* and *Mut* on the extreme right. Academics such as Rohrmoser, the historian Helmut Diwald, and the political scientist Bernhard Willms, with a variety of journalists and other public intellectuals employed in research foundations, policy making agencies, and on the fringe of the CDU-CSU, have successfully challenged the centrist pragmatics and strategic 'westernism' of Christian Democracy's official culture. Such voices construct a self-consciously 'Conservative' lineage for themselves, avowedly 'fascist' (but equally explicitly *not* Nazi), and drawing systematically on Italian and French Fascist intellectuals of the 1930s, the French New Philosophers of the 1970s, and especially Ernst Jünger, with Armin Mohler, Jünger's secretary from the late 1940s and early 1950s, and the author of the crucial handbook, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1928-1932* (Stuttgart, 1950; new ed. 1989), as the *spiritus rector*. An extremely sophisticated and intellectually coherent set of positions, shaped by political elitism and nationalist desire within formal rhetorics of democracy, this was long demarcated *against* the CDU by the latter's refusal of Conservatism with a capital 'C', and its passage into political respectability in the late 1980s marks an important realignment. The explicit inclusion of the philosophical postmodernism of Lyotard and Baudrillard by Mohler and others in this anti-Enlightenment critique seems to vindicate Habermas's hostility to theories of the postmodern after all, providing welcome grist to his mill.⁶

In this respect, Habermas speaks for a considerable body of German historical opinion, basically those responsible for the main progressive departures of the 1960s and 1970s historiographically, including Hans Mommsen and other so-called 'structuralist' historians of Nazism, Wolfgang Mommsen, labor historians, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka, and other members of the so-called Bielefeld network.⁷ But is that really all there is to say? Can we really lump together all the present hesitations and reservations about the Enlightenment tradition in all its dimensions and mark them negatively as *danger*, a re-emergence of tainted German traditions from before 1945, so that 'precisely in [Germany] a "grand coalition" of critics of enlightenment has formed, a coalition in which the brown, black, and green fringes meet?', as Habermas has (very tendentiously) put it?⁸ Quite apart from the merits of current philosophical and theoretical critiques themselves (which, after all, many others on the left have found compelling), the commitment to enthroning the Enlightenment so intransigently also leads to a highly synthetic *historical* account of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the complexity of the processes which actually moved progressive or democratic change is flattened. Moreover, as feminist and post-colonial critics have taught us, 'the political theory of the Enlightenment' also involved silences and suppressions, so that the founding moments of modern democratic advance became predicated on the gendering of political capacities, the social

6. My argument here is based on a systematic reading of *Criticon*, *Mut*, and other organs of the intellectual Right since the late 1970s. For a useful introduction, see John Ely, 'The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and Contemporary National-Conservatism', *German Politics and Society*, Number 13, pp81-121.

7. For a helpful summary of this historiographical context, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Historiography in Germany Today', in Jürgen Habermas (ed), *Observations on 'The Spiritual Situation of the Age'*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, pp221-59.

8. Habermas, 'The New Intimacy between Politics and Culture', p199.

qualification and limitation of citizenship, and the exploitative domination of some peoples by others. Social improvement and cultural goods involved similar privilegings and exclusions, in which certain constructions of value, agency, and interest were centred at the expense of others. The great movements of modern reform since the French Revolution were constituted from fields of contradiction in this way.⁹

If that is so, then Habermas's connections look less automatic. Once we accept that the story of the Enlightenment tradition is one of contradictory movement and effects, so that the ideals of progress, rationalism, secularism, and science may be treated problematically as well as affirmatively, then the issue of negative continuities (which Habermas wants to locate in political romanticism and right-wing anti-Enlightenment oppositions) can be very differently posed. Such dangers can be found not only in new conservatism and right-wing anti-Enlightenment critique, but also – and more insidiously – working away at the heart of the Enlightenment ideas themselves. It is this point – which destabilizes the rationalist unity of economic and cultural progress Habermas wishes to hold together, and problematizes the postwar 'anti-totalitarian consensus' on which he believes West German political culture to have been based – that Habermas's affirmative centring of 'western values' tends to obscure.

BACKWARDNESS AND MODERNITY IN GERMAN HISTORY

Since the 1960s, a powerful structure of interpretation has dominated perceptions of nineteenth-century German history, with implications for how we see the entire period up to 1933. This entails a familiar deep-historical perspective of the origins of Nazism, stressing how the interests of traditional elites and their pre-industrial, pre-modern mentalities prevented the democratic modernizing of the political system and allowed 'authoritarian and anti-democratic structures in state and society' to endure.¹⁰ This argument from political backwardness also attributes an experience of successful modernization to the histories of Britain, France, and the USA, or 'the West', which then becomes the measure of Germany's allegedly peculiar path, the *Sonderweg*. On the one hand, the *Kaiserreich* (in the political system of the Empire between 1871 and 1918) is 'authoritarian' in the generally agreed typology of nineteenth-century regimes. But on the other hand, authoritarianism's victory in the shaping of the Imperial-German state is considered an exceptional case, an abnormal interruption of the democratization process that proceeded successfully elsewhere, as a political logic accompanying economic growth.

This interpretation hinges on the weakness of German liberalism. In Germany, the argument runs, a 'truly realistic' appreciation of what a lasting and consistent modernization would require was precluded after the 1870s by a profound shift in the dominant ideological orientations, resulting from a conjuncture of factors – from the liberals' changed access to government influence once Bismarck had turned decisively to the right in 1878-79, from

the discrediting of liberal and political life' in the post-conservatism of German Empire, and from the de-carrierism and advancement of civic pride. This key ideological political values for the 'German constellation', in the words from its previous integrative liberalism and liberal bourgeois consciousness (intended to see it) responded to anxieties produced by the growth and the fears of social change by the political managers and successors at the turn of the century (Tirpitz).¹¹

It is hard not to be impressed by this account. 'Modernization' forms of pluralist democracy, the structures of economic divergence from this model surprisingly been thrown by 'blockages', and 'mistaken modern society attempting change' logically require democracy.¹² Conversely, the institutional expression of modernization-obstructing radical disjunction is post-modern basis of the industrial arrangements which the bourgeoisie away. In the long run, the 'modern' institutional arrangements – that is, by replacements for 'the rule of social groups centring around. Otherwise, the inescapable industrial economy could not integration', which Wehler imperialist accumulation. backward state there arose artificially bridged by modern solution of 'modernizing' (

9. Recent examples of this kind of critique would be Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Knopf, New York 1993; and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, Routledge, London and New York 1992.

10. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1968, p.15.

the discrediting of liberal economics and the general 'deliberalizing of public and political life' in the post-1873 depression, from the growing aggression and conservatism of German nationalism as a new integrative ideology for the Empire, and from the degeneration of the ideal of *Bildung* into a culture of careerism and advancement, divorced from notions of civic responsibility and civic pride. This key ideological watershed amounted to a new structure of political values for the German bourgeoisie – 'this fundamental change of constellation', in the words of Hans-Ulrich Wehler – which displaced liberalism from its previous integrative role, or the 'triangular constellation of *Bildung*, liberalism and liberal nationalism' that dominated the 1860s. The new bourgeois consciousness (or 'false consciousness', as German historians have tended to see it) responded to a powerful combination of new developments: anxieties produced by the depression, with its irregularities of economic growth and the fears of social unrest, but also the manipulation of those fears by the political managers of the 'old elite' (first Bismarck, and then his successors at the turn of the century, like Bernhard von Bülow and Alfred von Tirpitz).¹¹

It is hard not to be impressed by the powerful teleology running through this account. 'Modernization' here is avowedly abstracted from the present-day forms of pluralist democracy in the West. As such, it is thought to be built into the structures of economic growth, and to explain why German history diverges from this model until after 1945. German historians have not surprisingly been thrown back on to a vocabulary of 'wrong turnings', 'failures', 'blockages', and 'mistaken development'. As Wehler has baldly put it, 'any modern society attempting to be equal to the demands of constant social change' logically requires a constitutional framework of parliamentary democracy.¹² Conversely, the authoritarianism of the Imperial state becomes the institutional expression of the 'pre-industrial traditions' and their modernization-obstructing dominance in the pre-1914 political culture. Thus a radical disjunction is postulated between 'wealth' and 'power', between the 'modern' basis of the industrial-capitalist economy and the 'traditional' political arrangements which the bourgeoisie in Germany proved incapable of sweeping away. In the long run, stability could only be secured by developing more 'modern' institutional arrangements for containing and handling social conflicts – that is, by 'welfare-statist' and parliamentary-democratic replacements for 'the rule of an authoritarian leadership and of privileged social groups centring around the pre-industrial elites of the aristocracy'.¹³ Otherwise, the inescapable dictates of power legitimation in the developed industrial economy could be satisfied only by artificial forms of 'secondary integration', which Wehler has argued may be conceptualized as 'social imperialism', or the diversion of tensions outwards into expansionist drives for imperialist accumulation. Thus between the modern economy and the backward state there arose destabilizing contradictions, which could only be artificially bridged by manipulative techniques of rule, so long as the 'real' solution of 'modernizing' democratic reform was not embraced. In this view,

11. The quoted phrases are taken from two essays by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Industrielles Wachstum und früher deutscher Imperialismus', and 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das Deutsche Kaiserreich?', in Wehler, *Aus der Geschichte lernen?* Essays, Beck, Munich 1988, pp269, 213, 215, 212, respectively.

12. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Industrial Growth and Early German Imperialism', in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, Longman, London 1972, p84.

13. Wehler, 'Industrial Growth', p78 (*Industrielles Wachstum*, p261).

14. Wehler links this argument explicitly to Jürgen Habermas's theory of legitimation. See especially Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Cologne 1969, p500.

15. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, '30 Januar 1933 – ein halbes Jahrhundert danach', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 29 January 1983, pp53, 52.

16. Heinrich August Winkler, 'Die "neue Linke" und der deutsche Faschismus: Zur Kritik neomarxistischer Theorien über den Nationalsozialismus', in Winkler, *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus: Zur Revision des Historischen Materialismus*, Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, Göttingen 1978, p83.

the unreformed Imperial state was incapable of reproducing itself other than by an escalating procession of crises, culminating eventually in the miscalculated risk of July 1914.¹⁴

Of course, this structure of interpretation is rationalized by the need to explain Nazism: backwardness and traditionalism are found so easily in the *Kaiserreich's* political culture because the difference of '1933' seems to require clear and unambiguous divergences from the histories of other countries (in the West) earlier on. If Germany produced fascism, and the other developed capitalist countries experiencing the world economic crisis of the early 1930s did *not*, then deep historical peculiarities must be in play. The most influential approach to the place of 1933 in German history now proceeds from a strong conception of authoritarian handicaps descending from the nineteenth century, whose legacy of traditionalism was far more important than the dynamics of capitalist crisis *per se* in determining the outcome of the events of 1929-33: 'Prussian militarism ... Junker cliques ... veneration of the state by clergy and professoriat ... preponderance of heavy industry in the political decision-making process'. Fascism resulted from a blockage of modernization in this sense, from the failure of liberalism to sweep such vectors of backwardness away. It was produced by the pathology of an only partly 'bourgeois' society: 'In Germany there was no "bourgeois dominance" based in successful industrial capitalism that tipped over into fascism' (i.e. supposedly the Marxist interpretation), but precisely its opposite, namely, 'a deficit of civility [*Bürgerlichkeit*], of bourgeois parliamentarism, and of firmly anchored bourgeois political culture, that opened the way to the abyss'.¹⁵ And:

The reasons why democracy was liquidated in Germany in the course of the world economic crisis and not in the other developed industrial societies have less to do with the course of the crisis itself than with the different pre-industrial histories of these countries. The conditions for the rise of fascism have at least as much to do with feudalism and absolutism as with capitalism.¹⁶

In this way, German history forms one key element in the contemporary discourse of modernity since 1945, recharged since 1989, where it forms the negative historical counter-case (the modernity *not* attained) to the liberal positivity of the 'West'. The twentieth-century resistances to democracy, the right-wing defence of privilege, exclusivity and elitism, coercive and authoritarian systems of political rule, police repression, attacks on civil liberties, and everything out of keeping with an idealized construct of western liberal democracy in the world since 1945, become aligned on the 'traditional' side of the backwardness/modernity opposition – as histories destined to be overcome, rather than problems or possibilities persisting in the structures of modernity itself. While they persist, in fact, they are *ipso facto* evidence of a crisis-proneness that only fundamental liberalization can lay to rest. The pathologies of German history were modernity's absence. Thus the failure of

political modernization uncrisis', whose effects desc succeed:

Without a transformative relationships, without so possible ... The fatal which the political pre maintained in the per: clearly between 1914 as time, the politics had smoothed the way for N.

This is the specifically German difference from the *Sonderweg*.

ANTI-MODERN

There is a further dimension German liberalism entered supporters gave up on the imperfections of the pre-industrial elites, withdrawal and self-assertion in the culture became constructed antithesis separation could simultaneous status quo. On the one hand; on the other hand highest good, a superior mundane and pragmatic affected. The aspirations project – from an activist social emancipation, to cultivation bounded by private a retreat to the private cultivation. It produced a sense, but also for civic responsibility.

This syndrome is what 'unpolitical German'. It formed an outlook on the past an older set of non-political nineteenth century, the rise the mass market and the failure gave this pulling back from

political modernization under the *Kaiserreich* entailed a 'permanent structural crisis', whose effects described a space in which Nazism could eventually succeed:

Without a transformation of the social structure and the traditional power relationships, without social emancipation, modernization seems not to be possible ... The fatal consequences of the government politics through which the political predominance of the pre-industrial elites was to be maintained in the period of high industrialization were revealed quite clearly between 1914 and 1929, when these structures crumbled. By that time, the politics had helped create the dangerous conditions which smoothed the way for National Socialism.¹⁷

17. Wehler, 'Industrielles Wachstum', p269.

This is the specifically German master narrative of the origins of Nazism, of German difference from the West, of German exceptionalism, of the German *Sonderweg*.

ANTI-MODERN

There is a further dimension to this critique of the German bourgeoisie. As German liberalism entered its crisis, it is usually argued, its bourgeois supporters gave up on their desire for political power and adjusted to the imperfections of the parliamentary constitution and the dominance of the pre-industrial elites, withdrawing to depoliticized forms of social achievement and self-assertion in the cultural sphere. In the process, 'culture' and 'politics' became constructed antithetically, as discrete realms of value and action. Such a separation could simultaneously relativize and legitimate the constitutional status quo. On the one hand, *Kultur* compensated for political disappointments; on the other hand, it subtly supplanted political engagement as the highest good, a superior realm of emancipation and freedom, from which the mundane and pragmatic world of politics could be judged, but not directly affected. The aspirations of *Bildung* transmuted from a public into a private project – from an activist ethic of moral improvement, civic virtue, and general social emancipation, to a restricted and unpolitical ideal of individual cultivation bounded by property and privilege. The flight from society became a retreat to the private sphere of family, aesthetic value, and individual cultivation. It produced a disregard not only for politics in the party-political sense, but also for civic responsibility and the public life.

This syndrome is what Fritz Stern called 'the political consequences of the unpolitical German'. It foreclosed the emergence of a modern and publicly minded outlook on the part of the German bourgeoisie, and kept it wedded to an older set of non-political values. Moreover, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of the masses in politics, as well as the growth of the mass market and the first signs of a mass-produced commoditized culture, gave this pulling back from politics an increasingly conservative valency. This is

where the line became powerfully drawn: the new materialist civilization became identified with a pattern of social development already occurring in the West, whose *modernity* the German bourgeois observer thereby refused. According to many historians, an ideology of the superiority of German values to those of the West, with their 'arid rationalism', then developed, foregrounding 'a peculiarly intense relationship to nature, and a tendency to prefer the "organic" to the "mechanical" society', with the general 'hostility to "modernity" and a strong leaning towards "cultural despair"'. David Blackbourn has described this line of interpretation very well:

... this 'vulgarized idealism' ... formed a substitute for a healthy and proper engagement in social and political affairs. A retreat into the private world of sensibility and inwardness therefore helps to explain the fateful figure of the 'unpolitical German', symbolized by Thomas Mann's defence of these peculiarly German virtues during the First World War. Thus, in turn, a star-struck and supine response to authority has been diagnosed. This amounts to an indictment of the German bourgeoisie, especially its university-educated part, for its divergence from western standards of rationality and pragmatism. Irrationalism, inwardness, and cultural pessimism appear as burdens which prevented the German bourgeoisie from fighting for its own proper objectives.¹⁸

Here we reach the 'core' of the argument about 'anti-modernism' in German history. The notion of a cultural and political revolt against modernity, generated in the contradictions between Germany's rapid industrialization and its inherited structures of political backwardness, remains central to conventional understandings of Nazi ideology and the origins of Nazism *tout court*. Here is Jeffrey Herf's rendition:

The 'Prussian path' was a form of capitalist industrialization that fostered a peculiarly intense cultural and ideological protest, the politicization of which constituted a decisive chapter in the history of German nationalism. The language of romanticism, soul, *Volk*, *Gemeinschaft*, *Kultur*, life, blood, inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) stood for specifically German virtues confronted with the danger of *Zivilisation* – capitalism, liberalism, science, soulless rationality, international communism, and, of course, the Jews.¹⁹

Nazism is understood as an anti-modern revolt against reason, progress, and the political values of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, a pathological consequence of Germany's peculiar social and political development in the nineteenth century. In one typical statement, for instance, Nazism was the ideological expression of a 'crisis of modernization', taking the form of a 'utopian anti-modernism', whose essential feature was 'an extreme revolt against the modern world and an attempt to capture a distant mythic past.'²⁰

Equipped with this perspective, the motif of German history between the rise of the NSDAP and internally complex movements doing some violence to their *Kaiserreich*, and producing a culture co-opted into this explanation of the Nazis: for instance Christianity, nature mysticism uncovered in every corner by anthropologists, folklorists, educational visionaries, free-Swedenborgians, occultists, Germans are all recruited will German ideology', which is general.²² This desire to make logic of proto-Nazi development the *Volk*, which have norms thinking about racial or national 'folkish' ideology, linking Nazis in the late nineteenth century connotations of 'national' and Invoking the *Volk* in turn of of the 'people-nation', although Complex histories of contested Nazis appropriated it for their distinctive *völkisch* ideology by of this discursive field.

MODERNITY'S CONTRADICTIONS

How might we develop an approach depends on an approach to backwardness, the mark of interpretation of the social and become the collective bearer put by Fritz Stern, whose imagination of German history situate German history in character of Imperial Germany "illiberal", meaning 'not only restrictions, or class chicanery, free man ... not generous to others; narrow-minded' – a cultural style'. By contrast with

18. David Blackbourn, 'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: Reappraising German History in the Nineteenth-Century', in Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984, p161.

19. Jeffrey Herf, 'Reactionary Modernism: Some Ideological Origins of the Primacy of Politics in the Third Reich', *Theory and Society*, Volume 10, 1981, p807. See also Herf's book, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984.

20. Henry A. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization', in Turner (ed), *Reappraisals of Fascism. New Viewpoints*, New York 1975, pp117-39.

Equipped with this perspective, which sees 'anti-modernism' as the defining motif of German history between unification and Nazism, and the motive force behind the rise of the NSDAP, historians have homogenized widely disparate and internally complex movements of ideas into a single proto-Nazi lineage, doing some violence to their contextual resonance and meanings under the *Kaiserreich*, and producing a completely artificial coherence and linearity. Ideas are co-opted into this explanatory framework because they seem to presage those of the Nazis: for instance, 'nineteenth-century racial doctrine, Germanic Christianity, nature mysticism, sun worship, and theosophy'.²¹ Traces are then uncovered in every corner of pre-1914 literary culture, so that racists, anthropologists, folklorists, *Heimatkünstler*, land reformers, communarians, educational visionaries, free-thinkers, aesthetes, prophets of youth, mystics, Swedenborgians, occultists, new romantics, anti-semites, hikers, and Pan-Germans are all recruited willy-nilly to form a wholly artificial composite of 'the German ideology', which is then identified with the political culture in general.²² This desire to make Wilhelmine intellectual history obey an iron logic of proto-Nazi development is especially clear in discussions of the idea of the *Volk*, which have normally attributed a peculiar mystical tradition of thinking about racial or national matters to Germany, namely, *völkisch* or 'folkish' ideology, linking Nazism to early nineteenth-century romanticism. Yet in the late nineteenth century the term *Volk* carried the same double connotations of 'national' and 'popular' to be found in other countries too. Invoking the *Volk* in turn of the century Germany entailed political languages of the 'people-nation', although the precise discursive charge varied widely. Complex histories of contestation and transformation were required before the Nazis appropriated it for their own goals. If we speak too easily of some distinctive *völkisch* ideology before 1914, we neglect and obscure the openness of this discursive field.

MODERNITY'S CONTRADICTIONS

How might we develop an alternative perspective? So much of the existing approach depends on an *a priori* view of Germany's self-evident difference (its backwardness, the mark of 1933), which in its turn centres on a particular interpretation of the social and political agency of the bourgeoisie, its failure to become the collective bearer of progressive change. The view has been sharply put by Fritz Stern, whose influence lay so heavily across the conceptual imagination of German historians in the 1960s and 1970s and their ability to situate German history in its comparative frame.²³ In Stern's view, 'the character of Imperial Germany after 1878 can best be caught in the term "illiberal"', meaning 'not only the structure of the political regime, suffrage restrictions, or class chicanery, but a state of mind' – an outlook 'not befitting a free man ... not generous in respect to the opinions, rights or liberties of others; narrow-minded' – a mix of practices and attitudes that were 'part of a cultural style'. By contrast with Britain or France before 1914, 'the amazing

21. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London 1966.

22. See *ibid.*, pp12-148 (Part I of the book, 'The Ideological Foundations').

23. As well as *Failure of Illiberalism*, and *Politics of Cultural Despair*, see Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire*, Knopf, New York 1977.

quality of German illiberalism was its pervasiveness': 'German society, far from keeping down the illiberal impulse, fostered it and formed it into a habitual response'. Thus Germans failed in the basic civic virtues, preferring instead to 'cling to an illiberal structure, embrace an illiberal stance, live in an illiberal political milieu'. German illiberalism also embodied the old virtues of obedience and the uneasy adulation of authority: it embodied the new faith in nationalism and the supreme value of the nation state. It signified the acceptance of a kind of civic nonage.²⁴

24. Stern, Introduction to *Failure of Illiberalism*, pxi. The quoted phrases are culled from *ibid.*, pp xvii-xxi.

Recent scholarship allows us to go beyond this view in some important ways. In fact, a large and substantial literature has been accumulating on the social and cultural history of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie, which challenges the simplifications and schematisms of the *Sonderweg* thesis in this respect. But here I want to indicate only some broad outlines of this developing critique. First, it's by no means as clear that the German bourgeoisie was either as alienated from politics or as disempowered as the older approaches suggest. Second, the hardness of the boundary between those movements, interests, policies, and ideas conventionally regarded as 'modern' and those thought to be 'anti-modern', 'traditional', or 'backward' has become blurred. Together, these two points upset the field of distinctions between liberalism and authoritarianism, the traditional and the modern. They confuse the intelligibility of German history within the comparative frameworks of political development on which we've come to rely.

After a decade of intensive research and discussion, there is now a much greater willingness to acknowledge the degree to which bourgeois values permeated German society after unification and set the tone of public life. For instance, Wehler now finds two such areas of bourgeois success under the *Kaiserreich* involving values originating sociologically in a specifically bourgeois milieu in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but expanded during the nineteenth century to become universal social and cultural goods. He mentions first 'definite bourgeois organizational forms', including a particular model of the family, and the *Verein* or voluntary association as the all-purpose medium of sociability, cultural exchange, and political activity in a public sphere, which acquired generalized and normative validity. Then secondly, he sees 'bourgeois norms and values' becoming culturally dominant – most decisively in the 'system of law', but also in 'the revolutionary principle of efficiency, orientation towards work, secularization, rationalization of thought and action, autonomy of the individual, individualism *per se*, and also the association of individuals for the purpose of clarifying their problems in public discussion'.²⁵ We can go even further, arguably, and extend this reevaluation to the public culture and institutional arrangements of the new German Empire – to the legal and institutional infrastructure of the *Kaiserreich*, and to the growth and elaboration of public opinion via the modalities of an institutionally complex and legally guaranteed public sphere – while in the dynamically expanding late nineteenth-century capitalist economy (odd, really,

25. Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das Deutsche Kaiserreich?', p204f.

that this massively structured (discussion) bourgeois value:

Of course, it was the *po*, thought to have revealed thus in the economy and understood, bourgeois achievement, political system (the argument strong as before. Wehler a but on the whole they reiterate of the *Kaiserreich*'s core political, aristocratic privilege bureaucracy, but in general pre-industrial interests and ideal of the modernity that bourgeois politics' since the subordinate position (the aristocratic elites, above all from below. Of the necessity that is, for the breakthrough 'bourgeois self-assurance, a political know-how, resistance not much sign. To this extent structuralism of the account of the bourgeoisie, in this view was what counterposed German successful modernizations (immense. Nazism was

the bill for bourgeois culture before the risky trial of a culture, of successful bourgeois society in general.²⁷

One of the problems has liberalism and bourgeoisie, in other, and liberalism is the expression of a bourgeois culture the passage from bourgeois abnegation (by the 1880s) – the bourgeoisie' – it is not bourgeoisie as a social force, and transformations of understanding of liberalism strong forms of twentieth

that this massively structuring fact should remain so understated in the discussion) bourgeois values and achievements had their core domain.²⁶

Of course, it was the *political* domain in the stricter sense that was always thought to have revealed the weakness of the German bourgeoisie most clearly: thus in the economy and civil society, even in the public sphere broadly understood, bourgeois achievements could be shown; but in the state and the political system (the argument runs), the power of the traditional elites was as strong as before. Wehler and others have made some revisions on this front, but on the whole they reiterate the central argument about the backwardness of the *Kaiserreich's* core political structures (to do with the monarchy, the military, aristocratic privilege, Prussian predominance, more ambivalently the bureaucracy, but in general the institutionally secured societal primacy of the pre-industrial interests and elites), which have always been counterposed to the ideal of the modernity that *was not* attained. After the recession of 'vigorous bourgeois politics' since the 1870s, the bourgeoisie accommodated itself to a subordinate position (the argument runs), or at most to co-partnership with the traditional elites, above all due to the rising pressure of the labour movement from below. Of the necessary presence of a combative bourgeoisie (necessary, that is, for the breakthrough to modernity) – recognizable elsewhere in 'bourgeois self-assurance, confidence in victory, deliverance from self-doubt, political know-how, resistance to the new dangers from the right' – there was not much sign. To this extent, the master narrative of the *Sonderweg*, the deep structuralism of the account of the origins of Nazism, is still intact. The advance of the bourgeoisie, in this view, stopped at the gates of the political system. This was what counterposed German history in the nineteenth century to the successful modernizations of the West. And the long-term consequences were immense. Nazism was

the bill for bourgeois conservatism and nationalism, for bourgeois timidity before the risky trial of strength, for the deficit of liberal-bourgeois political culture, of successful bourgeois politics, of the bourgeois stamp on state and society in general.²⁷

One of the problems here is the persistent conceptual slippage between *liberalism* and *bourgeoisie*, in which discussion of one elides into discussion of the other, and liberalism is typically assumed to be the logical correlate or expression of a bourgeois collective interest. When Wehler sets out to explain the passage from bourgeois self-confidence (the 1860s and 1870s) to bourgeois abnegation (by the 1880s) – what he calls 'the origin of the fatal pathogenesis of the bourgeoisie' – it is not the economic, social, and cultural strength of *the bourgeoisie as a social force*, which unfolded much as before, but the difficulties and transformations of *political liberalism* that he addresses. Here, the understanding of liberalism tends to be abstracted inappropriately from the strong forms of twentieth-century liberal democracy (including the latter's

26. Recent research is now synthesized in Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (eds), *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Berg, Oxford and Providence 1998, and David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (eds), *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Early Twentieth Century*, Routledge, London 1991.

27. Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das Deutsche Kaiserreich?', p216f.

welfare statism), whose possibility is projected quite unhistorically on to the collective agency of the bourgeoisie in German unification a hundred years before. In the process, the more appropriate context for judging German liberalism, the political 'modernity' of its time – that is, the Europeanwide conjuncture of constitutional revision, nation-forming, and state-making in the 1860s, together with the culture of progress and the general remaking of the social environment for capitalism – gets confused. Moreover, the common equation of 'liberalism' and 'democracy' in these discussions compounds the conceptual elision of 'liberal' into 'bourgeois' still further, making the connotative continuum of 'bourgeoisie=liberalism=democracy' into an implied causal chain. But specifically *democratic* impulses came from elsewhere, from the labour movement and other popular traditions, and were seldom part of the bourgeois project until after the First World War. Indeed, the articulation of bourgeois aspirations in the late nineteenth century, including their liberal versions, usually took an exclusionary *anti-democratic* turn, but were no less *bourgeois* for that.

In other words, we might consider the possibility that bourgeois interests and aspirations were establishing dominance in the political as well as in the socio-economic and cultural realms before 1914, because at present the main argument to the contrary is an attributed failure of the Imperial State to acquire a *liberal* or even a *liberal-democratic* form. If we can free ourselves from the assumption that the achievement of bourgeois hegemony (in the sense of the political dominance of bourgeois values) can only be conceptualized or registered via the organization of the bourgeoisie's collective political agency within a specifically *liberal* movement or party, then the way could be clear for considering other, non-liberal forms of political articulation. Then the social coding of 'authoritarianism' before 1914 as 'aristocratic', 'pre-industrial', and 'traditional', as opposed to 'bourgeois' and 'modern', would start to look more questionable.²⁸ In other words, 'bourgeois' interests and values could be at work, and 'modern' political forms could be in play, even if 'liberal' ones were not.

MODERNITY'S DARK SIDE

Deconstructing the powerful identities of social and political history that organize our understandings of the German past, and dismantling the conceptual unities ascribed to 'liberalism' and the 'bourgeoisie', is a complex and contested project, because so many important beliefs of the post-1945 world are attached. One site of such critical engagement would be the character of the Imperial-German state between 1871 and 1914, and much progress has been made in re-theorizing this question. It is now much less clear why a state with authoritarian features should be deemed to have expressed the political dominance of a landowning aristocracy and other pre-industrial elites, rather than articulating the interests of the bourgeoisie and providing a framework for the latter's hegemony in its specifically late nineteenth-century German

form. Arguably, the state of 1871 was less adaptable, that is, than 1914 (to comparable challenges) to perform – securing the conditions for legitimation, organizing the consent of the people, and so on. If reactionary elements were so strong, the Constitution was more flexible, and more penetration – and indeed – than historians have been ready to admit.

Thus perhaps we should think of the 'traditional' and the 'modernizing' circumstances of the *Kaiserreich* as a tension between authoritarianism, right-wing conservatism on one side, and 'backwardness' or 'pre-modern' on the other side, is highly misleading. 'Modernizing' tendencies in the 'anti-modern' ones, that were imperialist and anti-democratic, are not. The argument is that some recent revisionist thesis of an abject and supine Germany, reshaping the Empire's culture even further. The complexity of the relationship to the expanding world is not to give up the conceptual traditions altogether. If we reject the premise of a logical or lawlike requirement for another, then we become free to think of the *Kaiserreich* more constructively.

In concluding, I want to suggest some areas where political modernizing liberalism and 1914 Germany were used to encountering it. Who deal with Germany are still

(1) The first area concerns the *nationale Verbände* or the League and the Pan-German League crystallized an extra-parliamentary governmentalism of the kind exploding into an open conflict during 1907-8. There were no political formations. But here is a point of view.³⁰

On the one hand, radical nat

28. For a detailed presentation of this argument, see Geoff Eley, 'The British Model and the German Road: Rethinking the Course of German History before 1914', in Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities of German History*, pp. 75-90; and Eley, 'Liberalism, Europe, and the Bourgeoisie 1860-1914', in Blackbourn and Evans (eds.), *German Bourgeoisie*, pp. 293-317.

form. Arguably, the state of the *Kaiserreich* was proving perfectly adaptable (no less adaptable, that is, than the states of Britain and France when faced with comparable challenges) to the tasks which a 'modern' state is called on to perform – securing the conditions of capitalist reproduction, doing the work of legitimation, organizing the unity of the dominant classes, mobilizing the consent of the people, and so on. If this is so, then the 'backward' or strictly reactionary elements were more isolated in the political system, the Constitution was more flexible, and the 'modernizing' forces had achieved more penetration – and indeed, the 'traditional' elements were less 'traditional' – than historians have been ready to allow.²⁹

Thus perhaps we should think again about what exactly the categories of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' mean, both in general and in the specific circumstances of the *Kaiserreich*. In particular, the common equation between authoritarianism, right-wing politics, and imperialist foreign policies on the one side, and 'backwardness', archaism, and 'pre-industrial traditions' on the other side, is highly misleading. It may be, in fact, precisely the most vigorous 'modernizing' tendencies in the *Kaiserreich*, rather than the recalcitrantly 'anti-modern' ones, that were the most pugnacious and consistent in pursuing imperialist and anti-democratic policies at home and abroad. What I want to argue is that some recent revisions – which abandon the extreme 'feudalization' thesis of an abject and supine bourgeoisie for a picture of bourgeois values reshaping the Empire's cultural and institutional world – should be pushed even further. The complexity now acknowledged in the Imperial polity and its relationship to the expanding dominance of bourgeois influences should lead us to give up the conceptual framework of the primacy of 'pre-industrial traditions' altogether. If we accept the irreducible contingency of political forms, and reject the premise that the dominance of a particular social class has a logical or lawlike requirement for one type of state and political culture over another, then we become free to think through the specificities of the *Kaiserreich* more constructively.

In concluding, I want to suggest six areas where these possibilities might be explored, areas where political life disobeyed the binary distinction between modernizing liberalism and backward authoritarianism in the form we've grown used to encountering it, and which many historians and social theorists who deal with Germany are still trying to maintain.

(1) The first area concerns *radical nationalism*, the distinct politics generated by the *nationale Verbände* or nationalist pressure groups (notably the Navy League and the Pan-German League between the 1890s and 1914), which crystallized an extra-parliamentary 'national opposition' against the moderate governmentality of the conservative party-political establishment before exploding into an open confrontation with the Imperial government itself during 1907-8. There were many complexities to radical nationalism as a political formation. But here I want to present its central paradox from our point of view.³⁰

On the one hand, radical nationalists were clearly on the right of the political

29. For the state, see George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993.

30. I have discussed radical nationalism at length in Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right. Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1991.

spectrum. Despite the populism of their political practice and ideology, they were profoundly anti-socialist and anti-democratic to the core, and on the face of it corresponded closely to the type of aggressive and anti-modernizing authoritarianism that supposedly preserved the *Kaiserreich* in the backwardness of its illiberalism before the First World War. But in other ways radical nationalists don't fit into this interpretative framework. Sociologically, they were not the casualties or opponents of modernization, but mainly the self-confident beneficiaries of Imperial Germany's new industrial civilization. Politically, they committed themselves to the powerful modernity of the new German national state, which they constructed through the discursive novelty of a 'German-national' (*deutschnational*) rhetoric. Most obviously, this new *deutschnational* ideology was focused on *Weltpolitik* and the naval arms drive, which were considered both the logical correlate of German industrial strength in the world market and the condition of the latter's continued growth. But it also embraced a range of other concerns, including an anti-clericalism originating in the *Kulturkampf* (the secularizing campaign against the Catholic Church in the 1870s), and a relentless hostility to all particularisms (especially that of Catholic Bavaria, but also ultimately the Prussian particularism of aristocratic privilege East of the Elbe), both of which expressed the positive desire for a unitary state. The political drive for a strengthening of the centralized state fabric produced a range of specific reforming commitments, including the demand for an Imperial system of national taxation to harness the nation's material resources more effectively, and the pressure to 'nationalize' the school curriculum, which was also linked to the general ideological call for 'civic education' or *staatsbürgerliche Erziehung*. At the height of their tensions with the government in 1907-8, radical nationalists assumed positions that were highly disruptive of the given patterns of right-wing politics, and even potentially anti-monarchist.

In all of these ways, radical nationalism amounted to a modernizing ideology of 'national efficiency' (to adapt a British political catchword of the same time), which was extremely subversive or destabilizing of a traditional conservative standpoint. For instance, while the militants of the *nationale Verbände* were vociferously anti-socialist and bitterly opposed to many of the consequences of the parliamentary system, they were undismayed by the entry of the masses into politics, and castigated their conservative opponents for ignoring the fact that 'the masses have come of age (through elementary schooling, mass conscription, universal suffrage, and the cheap oil lamp)', as one of them put it.³¹ 'Parts of our fatherland', another observed, 'are unfortunately still dominated by traditional bureaucratic residues of the narrow subject mentality' and were obstructing 'the elevation of all parts of the nation to consultation and participation in national matters'. The conventional politicians could 'not understand that the caste spirit in the upper strata has nourished the class spirit in the lower, and that an obstinate persistence in the old mistakes has aided and abetted the alienation of the masses from the state and the monarchy'.³² Many of the leading radical nationalists came from strongly liberal family and

personal backgrounds, and in the cultural moment of German language of 'freedom', 'in importance of a 'free political: the fossilized trace of an old Wilhelmine present (the p dimension an angry comm parents' generation to org radical nationalist critique: established discourse of right Government 'what the Germ jingoos, and undignified syc and responsible tribunes of and ambiguous hybrid, sui g formation might be fitted in German historiography is no

(2) Radical nationalists p idea', its ability to consumm internal divisions of class, : with a missionary zeal. The s a second important area educational reform at the t functionalist account of the l to legitimate the Empire's attacks, and to establish n particularist, confessional, : proceedings of the two Prus can certainly be read in this 'German' learning themse language of Germanizing th aimed at rendering Germa intensifying international ec points here relevant to the t the basic project of devising common currency of popul even socialists no less th radical-nationalist critics. On with the desire to promote t Germany's entry to the twen the latter purposes was nc anti-democratic, and otherw system of distinctions arou modernization is defined, : examples.

The first is Hermann Ra

31. Hermann Rassow to Alfred von Tirpitz, 12 April 1898. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, F. 2223, 93943.

32. Heinrich Oberwinder, *Nationale Politik und Parteipolitik: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Deutschen Flottenvereins*, Dresden 1907, pp17, 21, 43ff.

personal backgrounds, and were basically formed as children or young adults in the cultural moment of German unification in the 1860s and 1870s. But the language of 'freedom', 'independence', the 'will of the people', and the importance of a 'free political life' in radical nationalist rhetoric was more than the fossilized trace of an older discourse, and articulated real aspirations of the Wilhelmine present (the period from the 1890s to 1914), forming in one dimension an angry commentary on the inability of the liberalism of the parents' generation to organize sufficient popular support. At all events, radical nationalist critiques opened a crucial ideological fracture in the established discourse of right-wing political legitimacy. They aimed to show the Government 'what the German people needed – courtly sneaks, empty-headed jingoes, and undignified sycophants, or independent citizens, intrepid patriots, and responsible tribunes of the people?'³³ Radical nationalism was a complex and ambiguous hybrid, *sui generis* to the Wilhelmine era. How this new political formation might be fitted into the conventional tradition/modernity schema of German historiography is not clear.

(2) Radical nationalists proclaimed the healing properties of the 'national idea', its ability to consummate Germany's internal unity by transcending the internal divisions of class, religion, region, and party-political partisanship, with a missionary zeal. The search for an effective national pedagogy is accordingly a second important area of complexity. At one level, the discourse of educational reform at the turn of the century can be readily assimilated to a functionalist account of the Imperial government's need for integration – both to legitimate the Empire's institutions against Social Democratic and other attacks, and to establish new forms of national cohesion over the older particularist, confessional, and parochial solidarities. The very interesting proceedings of the two Prussian School Conferences called in 1890 and 1900 can certainly be read in this fashion, but the debates around classical versus 'German' learning themselves contained a 'modernizing thrust', for the language of Germanizing the curriculum was also practical and technocratic, aimed at rendering German society dynamic and efficient for an age of intensifying international economic competition.³⁴ In fact, we can make two points here relevant to the tradition/modernity conundrum. On the one hand, the basic project of devising and promulgating a national pedagogy was the common currency of popular politics before 1914, common to liberals and even socialists no less than to governmental conservatives and their radical-nationalist critics. On the other hand, all manner of ideas could co-exist with the desire to promote the learning, knowledge, and skills appropriate for Germany's entry to the twentieth century, and being an extreme modernist for the latter purposes, was no hindrance to espousing a variety of racist, anti-democratic, and otherwise right-wing goals. This again destabilizes the system of distinctions around which Imperial Germany's alleged deficit of modernization is defined, and we can illustrate this best by a couple of examples.

The first is Hermann Rassow, senior teacher at an Elberfeld *Gymnasium*

33. 'The Victory in Danzig', *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, 16 June 1908.

34. See the analysis in Heinz-Joachim Heydorn and Gernot Koneffke, *Studien zur Sozialgeschichte und Philosophie der Bildung. II: Aspekte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*. List Verlag, Munich 1973. pp179-238.

before moving to the headmastership of a school near Magdeburg in 1901, and later to a prestigious post in Potsdam, the most tireless and creative of nationalist agitators, whose activity was framed by a mobile political eclecticism, unattached to particular parties, equally comfortable with populisms of 'right' and 'left'. Focusing on the navy, as an issue ideally suited for raising 'the German national consciousness', for easing the workers' 'return to patriotism', and for 'winning back the embittered masses' to the monarchy, he found all manner of platforms – the local Pan-German League (he was a member of the national Council), Young Men's Associations, groups of former pupils, the Elberfeld Christian-Social Association, the Elberfeld Evangelical Workers' Association, the Royalist Association of Railway Craftsmen, the Provincial Conference of Conservatives in the Rhineland, the Elberfeld 'Tuesday-Society', and all sorts of workers' clubs and 'patriotic associations'. A supremely well-connected *Bildungsbürger*, he was the prototype of the disinterested nationalist intellectual, driven by an ideal of social conciliation under the banner of national community, formed by the experience of unification, for whom loyalty to the new nation-state *per se* was the thing. Accepting that social democrats should be reasoned with rather than suppressed, and with a lively interest in the 'social problem', he believed in the expanding capitalist economy as the answer to working-class discontent, as opposed to remedial interventions by the state. In this double respect – the primacy of nationalist loyalty to the state, and acceptance of capitalist Germany's changing social reality – Rassow was truly a child of the Empire, in this sense a *Wilhelminian*, attracted neither by the anti-capitalist counter-utopias of conservatives nor by the prospect of a more democratic state. He loved the new technologies of industrial power, both in the battleships that focused his nationalist desire and in the varied media of his popular agitation. He collaborated with the Navy Office, characteristically supported the Reich fiscal reform which ran aground on Conservative opposition in 1909, and was mainly drawn electorally to the more imperialist tendencies of left liberalism. In the 1890s he was simultaneously an admirer of Adolf Stöcker (the antisemitic populist former chaplain to the Kaiser, who led the Christian-Social Party), Friedrich Naumann (former associate of Stöcker and heroic figure of patriotic left liberalism, who launched the short-lived National-Social Association in 1896), and Friedrich Lange.³⁵

Lange is the second example. Anti-semitic and believer in a Germanic 'aristocracy of race', author of a well-known racist tract and founder of the German-Union (1894), the small Pan-German-like sect that combined mystic crankiness with clear-headed pursuit of anti-Socialist coalition building, Lange was superficially a prime candidate for the kind of proto-Nazi pedigree criticized above.³⁶ Yet he turns out to have been a far more complex figure. He specifically repudiated that 'ecstasy of habitual German patriotism' and 'beloved self-deception', which looked backwards to the tradition of 'Arndt, Jahn, and Körner', insisting that the nationalist tasks of the Wilhelmine era were fundamentally different.³⁷ He denied that the German-Union was 'a refuge for *Deutschthümelei*' and countered that 'it knows how to think *modern*'.³⁸

A favourite issue was school curriculum in the 1880s to launch the Society: to 'Germanize' the classical curriculum and the unitary concerns with national efficiency. Search for a new secular religious idealism of our popular stock. non-SPD Left: in 1893 his a performed by the New Free 'national socialism', as 'economy between work and leisure', find him speaking of 'natural time', we should perhaps irrationalist pre-history of I midway on a continuum from hybrid of 'progressive' and period between the 1880s and

(3) A third area concerns the valency of the *industrial paternalism* in Saarland, and Silesia, and including shipbuilding and whether such paternalism authoritarianism (the so-called taking-over of older pre-liberal for a modern society; or was rationality, in presupposing organized capitalist production elsewhere. The point I was interpreting the repressive model than seeing them as a labour conciliation which in fact, it makes more sense to and company welfare schemes that such practices were adopted pre-1914 Germany, regardless – that is, by a self-conscious dynamic electro-technical sector such as Krupp. How this is an interesting question.⁴³

(4) Fourthly, *social imperialism* grand-interpretative framework the relationship of the Kaiser's discussion of German modernity later nineteenth-century imperialism for domestic politics. As he said

35. The quotations and details are assembled from various collections of Rassow's correspondence. For a full account see Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, especially pp57f., 172-4, 94f., 225f.

36. See Friedrich Lange, *Reines Deutschtum. Grundzüge einer nationalen Weltanschauung* 3rd. ed., Berlin, 1904, which is also the best source for Lange's ideas and career.

37. *Ibid.*, pp338f., XV.

38. *Ibid.*, p375.

A favourite issue was school reform, and Lange initiated the movement in the 1880s to launch the Society for School Reform (1889): this was partly a desire to 'Germanize' the classical education, but the central demands for a modern curriculum and the unitary grammar school also reflected more technocratic concerns with national efficiency.³⁹ Moreover, his critique of Christianity and search for a new secular religion of nationality, with its stress on the 'native idealism of our popular stock', had affinities with the cultural criticism of the non-SPD Left: in 1893 his anti-capitalist and anti-clerical play *Der Nächste* was performed by the New Free People's Theatre in Berlin.⁴⁰ Lange's advocacy of a 'national socialism', as 'economic nationalism combined with a better balance between work and leisure', certainly had a prophetic ring. But when we also find him speaking of 'natural science and socialism' as 'the main levers of recent time', we should perhaps pause before assimilating him too easily to an irrationalist pre-history of Nazi ideology.⁴¹ His ideas are not to be located midway on a continuum from Romanticism to Nazism. They were a complex hybrid of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' motifs, which was *sui generis* to the period between the 1880s and 1914.⁴²

(3) A third area concerns industrial relations and the political and ideological valency of the *industrial paternalism* dominating heavy industry in the Ruhr, Saarland, and Silesia, and other sectors of large-scale industry before 1914, including shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Briefly, the issue here is whether such paternalism may best be seen as a 'pre-industrial' type of authoritarianism (the so-called *Herr-im-Haus* outlook), which involved the taking-over of older pre-liberal and aristocratic cultural patterns inappropriate for a modern society; or whether it articulated specific forms of capitalist rationality, in presupposing certain conditions of large-scale and well-organized capitalist production. I've discussed this question at some length elsewhere. The point I wish to make here is that there are other ways of interpreting the repressive industrial relations described by the paternalist model than seeing them as a backward impediment to the evolution of forms of labour conciliation which historians such as Wehler identify with modernity. In fact, it makes more sense to see company unions, company housing, black-lists, and company welfare schemes as both illiberal *and* modern. It was no accident that such practices were adopted by all the most advanced industrial sectors in pre-1914 Germany, regardless of the employers' particular political affiliations – that is, by a self-consciously liberal employer such as Siemens in the more dynamic electro-technical sector, as well as by a reactionary heavy industrialist such as Krupp. How this issue fits into recent discussions of *Bürgerlichkeit* is an interesting question.⁴³

(4) Fourthly, *social imperialism*, which is elevated by Wehler into a grand-interpretative framework for considering questions of continuity and the relationship of the *Kaiserreich* to the Third Reich, also complicates the discussion of German modernities. In Wehler's influential view, Germany's later nineteenth-century imperialism had conservative functions and effects for domestic politics. As he sees it, the breadth of the ideological consensus for

39. *Ibid.*, pp287-346.

40. Lange, *Reines Deutschtum*, pp110ff.

41. *Ibid.*, pp147, 72, X, VIII.

42. I owe much of my current thinking here to Jennifer Jenkin's forthcoming University of Michigan dissertation on 'Provincial Modernity: Culture and Local Identity in Hamburg, 1885-1918'.

43. See Eley, 'British Model and German Road', pp98-126; David F. Crew, *Town in the Ruhr. A Social History of Bochum 1860-1914* Columbia University Press, New York 1979, esp. pp1ff., 119ff., 145-257, 221-4; Dick Geary, 'The Industrial Bourgeoisie and Labour Relations in German 1871-1933', in Blackburn and Evans (eds.), *German Bourgeoisie*, pp140-61.

44. Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, p.115.

45. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Bismarck's Imperialism 1862-1890', *Past and Present*, Number 48, 1970, pp.119-55; and 'Industrial Growth and Early German Imperialism'.

overseas expansion during the so-called Great Depression of 1873-96 combined with Bismarck's manipulative skills to produce social imperialism as a diversionary strategy of rule, mobilizing popular nationalism behind the demand for colonies, the big navy, and other aggressive foreign policy goals as a way of solidifying support for the status quo and blocking the pressure for reform. This politics – 'the diversion outwards of the internal tensions and class contradictions arising from the process of industrialization'⁴⁴ – laid down a lasting pattern of government policy that persisted until the First World War. For Wehler, social imperialism set German history on a particular course in this way, one of conservative retrenchment and defence of the status quo: he draws an explicit contrast between the authoritarian governing system that social imperialism successfully guaranteed and the alternative developmental trajectory of 'welfare-state mass democracy' that remained blocked in Germany till after 1945.⁴⁵

However, this approach constructs social imperialism and social reform into a false dichotomy. Taking the nineteenth century as a whole, it is surely hard to deny the positive relationship between liberal or social democratic reform politics and imperialism. Whether we look to the mid-century forms of free-trading imperialism, to the new imperialism before 1914, or to Fabian views of empire between and after the two world wars (just to take the British case), reformist projects have been predicated on the continuities of empire. Indeed, the most compelling voices for liberal renewal in Germany before 1914 elaborated their reformist projects (in relation to social legislation and political reform) precisely via an engagement with the possibilities of imperialist expansion. In that case, the dichotomous opposition of 'social imperialism and social reform' breaks down. Neither liberalism nor Wehler's abstract utopia of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, nor constructions of modernity itself, can be protected against imperialism's contamination, because the colonial aspiration was inscribed in the Enlightenment tradition from the start.

For precisely this reason, it is important to begin exploring the ways in which forms of social relations, patterns of culture, and increasingly racialized discourses of national superiority developed in the colonies became powerfully reinscribed into metropolitan society. 'Colonial knowledge' in this sense should be a rich field of enquiry, for it has become clear from recent work on British and French colonialism how far metropolitan understandings of nationality have been constructed since the eighteenth century via elaborate encounters with colonial 'Others'. Forms of colonial representation through literature, museums and exhibitions, entertainment, and popular culture have been especially fruitful in this regard. The gendering of national identity, whether in militarist activities and warfare, or in the more general ordering of nationalist representations around conceptions of sexual difference, also had key colonialist roots. Intensive discussions of colonial intermarriage generated a complex discourse around gender inequalities, sexual privilege, class priorities, and racial superiority, which then became powerfully rearticulated into nationalist discourse at home. This was the *real* ground of social

imperialism, arguably – that governing elites focused on the process of ideological structuring of the field of relations between empire and imperialism certainly can't be identifying social imperialism with modern strategies of rule.⁴⁶

(5) We also need to instate the kind of formality that acknowledges the complex and variable co-ordination of women and men, and necessarily as a whole. As a 'useful category' to enrich our understanding of the relationship of citizenship and the public sphere, of established questions of German gender perspective, and one of

For example, whereas the charity, and social insurance arguments (Christian responses to national efficiency), these were particularly regarding the social both national and local state of welfare, all of which reflect orderly domestic living arrangements changing bases of women's industrial, blue versus white industrial and parliamentary regarding German national (charged with new meanings, professional expertise in so women's movement. When welfare and maternal welfare, public general regulation of morality field for gender sensitive analysis discourse of the 'New Woman' series of radicalizations around women's history to our grasp need for similar analysis of areas unambiguously involve capacities in the liberal sense, for that.

(6) The *ambivalence of reform* 'modernizing' initiatives of liberal-democratic normativity

imperialism, arguably – that is, not so much the conscious manipulations by governing elites focused on by Wehler and others, but the more insidious process of ideological structuration. At all events, this implies a much richer field of relations between empire and domestic politics. The consequences of imperialism certainly can't be bracketed from the 'modernization' project by identifying social imperialism so uni-dimensionally with conservative anti-modern strategies of rule.⁴⁶

(5) We also need to instate the importance of *gender* to our analysis, not just as the kind of formality that acknowledges the previous neglect of women, but as the complex and variable construction of sexual difference that affects both women and men, and necessarily influences our understanding of the world as a whole. As a 'useful category of historical analysis', gender can challenge and enrich our understanding of a range of general questions, from the gendering of citizenship and the public sphere, to the gendered discourse of class, and the relationship of masculinity and femininity to nationalist ideology. But the established questions of German history *per se* can also be illuminated by a gender perspective, and one of these would be the 'social question'.

For example, whereas the late nineteenth-century apparatus of poor relief, charity, and social insurance may have been formally based on a mixture of arguments (Christian responsibility, capitalist rationality, political calculation, national efficiency), these were also predicated upon gendered assumptions, particularly regarding the social importance of the family. This was true of both national and local state provision, charitable work, and company-provided welfare, all of which reflected definite assumptions about what constituted orderly domestic living arrangements. Moreover, from the 1890s on, with the changing bases of women's work (waged versus unwaged, domestic versus industrial, blue versus white-collar), the growth of urban living, the rising industrial and parliamentary strength of labour, and the manifold concerns regarding German national efficiency, the discourse of social reform became charged with new meanings, not least through the involvement of new forms of professional expertise in social policy and the pressure of the emergent women's movement. When we include certain additional issues, including child and maternal welfare, public health, policies for the control of youth, and the general regulation of morality and sexuality, we have an especially promising field for gender sensitive analysis. Of course, the First World War, the Weimar discourse of the 'New Woman', and the Nazi counter-revolution produced a series of radicalizations around these issues, and the valuable contributions of women's history to our grasp of these later moments should re-emphasize the need for similar analysis of the *Kaiserreich*.⁴⁷ My point is that none of these areas unambiguously involved an enlargement of women's rights or political capacities in the liberal sense, but that the meaning was none the less 'modern' for that.

(6) The *ambivalence of reform*, and the difficulties of assimilating the actual 'modernizing' initiatives of the turn of the century to the progressive or liberal-democratic normativity against which historians have insisted on

46. See Geoff Eley, 'Social Imperialism in Germany: Reformist Synthesis or Reactionary Sleight of Hand?', in Eley, *From Unification to Nazism. Reinterpreting the German Past* Allen & Unwin, London 1986, pp154-67.

47. See especially Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1996.

measuring the German past, brings me to the last of my proposals, which concerns the dynamics of disciplinary power in Foucault's sense – that is, the framing and application to the 'social body' of new knowledges of science and ambitions of control. Here we connect back to the question of Imperial continuities with Nazism, though not in the conventional sense of deficits of modernity producing pathologies that were the condition of Nazi success. On the contrary, I would argue, it was precisely the most striking manifestations of modern scientific and technocratic ambition in the sphere of social policy that laid the way for Nazi excess. For example, there is a growing literature on the eugenicist consensus that formed the disquieting background to Nazi racism between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s, and in whose light Nazi anti-semitism has increasingly appeared as the most virulent form of a much more extensive biological politics that systematically naturalized and essentialized social, cultural, and political phenomena under the sign of race. In Robert Proctor's view, 'the ideological structure we associate with National Socialism was deeply embedded in the philosophy and institutional structure of German biomedical science'. Consequently, if we take a broad view of the biomedical sciences as an ideological field, in which the Nazis' racial programmes (from genocide to the anticipatory treatment of Sinti and Roma, and the 1939 euthanasia program, back through population policies aimed at women and the 1933 sterilization law) were authorized by much longer traditions of racial hygiene from before 1914, then the Judeocide appears as the most vicious part 'of a larger attempt ... to medicalize or biologize various forms of social, sexual, political, or racial deviance'.⁴⁸ Moreover, we know from the work of Paul Weindling and others on the origins, rise, and mature elaboration of the eugenicist complex between the 1870s and 1945, that this was a restlessly aggrandizing ideological field. It convened biomedical knowledge, public health, and racial thought on the ground of social policy, and it was there that not only the politics of family and motherhood, but also the 'most progressive achievements' of the Weimar welfare state were completely embedded.⁴⁹

Perhaps the key point to emerge from this recent literature concerns the 'normality' of racial science in the Kuhnian sense. So far from corrupting 'true' science by the intrusion of irrational and anti-intellectual pressures from the outside, Nazism worked within an established eugenicist paradigm by appealing to the existing 'imagery, results, and authority of science'.⁵⁰ Rather than politicizing science in some illegitimate sense, Nazism worked upon traditions of discourse that had been articulating science to politics since the *Kaiserreich*. On the one hand, not just entire nationalities (Jews, Sinti and Roma, Poles, other Slav groups), but also entire social categories (gays, the handicapped, and mentally ill, various groups of the socially incompetent and incurably ill, and then Polish intellectuals, Soviet prisoners-of-war, 'political commissars', and so forth) became slated for racist and eugenicist attack. On the other hand, this was possible because of the prior diffusion of eugenicist and related ideologies of social engineering, which to a great extent had

permeated the thinking of the Nazis arrived.

In both respects the group limited sense of 'linguistic' p and system of practice aimed people and restructuring policy could be. This is w knowledges and the import Burleigh and Woodruff Smith and ethnology also helped specifically Nazi project could understanding of the race/g policies; Claudia Koonz saw naturalized poles of biological a 'social order founded on volume, *When Biology Became* 'biological politics' as a w imbrication of these two sets perhaps clear enough – the biologically constructed could one understood the place of family, and reproduction to have been prefigured very reproduction (population, lization) that go back to t recognize once again that reform as a set of abstract l modernizing reform as we a *simply do not fit*. Instead, th what passed as the ruling kn the irrational than an extreme we're to understand the original deficient modernization the modernity's dark side – to 'th science', in Detlev Peukert's c

CONCLUSION

Where does this leave us? A views of the Enlightenment' (for instance) is a very good the Frankfurt School's pes: fundamental dialectic of the Marcuse, Nazism was in t domination. As the first sei

48. Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p6f.

49. Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism 1870-1945* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989.

50. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, p283.

permeated the thinking of social-policy and healthcare professions long before the Nazis arrived.

In both respects the ground for Nazi racism was discursively laid – not in the limited sense of 'linguistic' preparation, but by an entire institutional apparatus and system of practice aimed at defining deviant or 'worthless' categories of people and restructuring popular assumptions about what an acceptable social policy could be. This is where my two earlier points concerning colonial knowledges and the importance of gender also converge. Work by Michael Burleigh and Woodruff Smith has shown how the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology also helped compose the ideological context from which the specifically Nazi project could come.⁵¹ Likewise, Gisela Bock pioneered our understanding of the race/gender connection in her study of Nazi sterilization policies; Claudia Koonz saw the Third Reich doubly ordered around the naturalized poles of biological distinction, male/female and aryan/non-aryar, in a 'social order founded on race and gender'; and the programmatic essay volume, *When Biology Became Destiny*, successfully made the case for seeing 'biological politics' as a unifying principle of Nazi practice. The logical imbrication of these two sets (the racialized and gendered fields of discourse) is perhaps clear enough – centring one's understanding of society around a biologically constructed concept of race had immediate consequences for how one understood the place of women, given the key importance of sexuality, family, and reproduction to both – and the Nazis' racial policies do seem to have been prefigured very strongly in a complex of policies affecting reproduction (population, welfare, family, motherhood, euthanasia, sterilization) that go back to the late *Kaiserreich*.⁵² Consequently, we need to recognize once again that the conventional understanding of modernizing reform as a set of abstract liberal-democratic desiderata and the discourse of modernizing reform as we actually encounter it in the early twentieth century *simply do not fit*. Instead, the Nazis' racialized policies were continuous with what passed as the ruling knowledge of the time, and were less an eruption of the irrational than an extreme form of technocratic reason in that sense. If we're to understand the origins of Nazism, therefore, it is not to the *Kaiserreich*'s deficient modernization that we must look, but to early twentieth-century modernity's dark side – to 'the genesis of the "Final Solution" from the spirit of science', in Detlev Peukert's compelling phrase.⁵³

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Where does this leave us? At one level, the argumentation evokes some classic views of the Enlightenment's dark side. Peukert's self-conscious Weberianism (for instance) is a very good example of this effect, but the stronger version is the Frankfurt School's pessimistic inscription of fascist domination in the fundamental dialectic of the Enlightenment. For Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, Nazism was in this literal sense the apotheosis of rationalized domination. As the first sentence of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* said: 'The

51. Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988; Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, New York 1986, and *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany*, Oxford University Press, New York 1991.

52. Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1986; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*, St. Martin's, New York 1987; R. Bridenbath, A. Grossmann and M. Kaplan (eds), *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1984.

53. Detlev J. K. Peukert, 'The Genesis of the "Final Solution" from the Spirit of Science', in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (eds), *Re-evaluating the Third Reich*, Holmes & Meier, New York 1993, pp234-52.

54. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Herder and Herder. New York 1972, p3. The phrase 'Fascism is the truth of modern society' is taken from Max Horkheimer, 'Die Juden und Europa', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VII, 1/2 (1938), p116.

55. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p234f.

fully enlightened world radiates disaster triumphant'. Fascism appears here as the self-destruction of the liberal Enlightenment, 'the truth of modern society'.⁵⁴ As Herf says, in a critique of this view: 'Adorno and Horkheimer went on to argue that implicit in the beginnings of the Enlightenment, in Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, was the synthesis of reason, domination, and myth that was revealed in all its truth in de Sade's orgies and Nietzsche's aphorisms, and then put into practice in Auschwitz. Auschwitz was the Enlightenment's truth: reason as total domination'.⁵⁵ For the Frankfurt philosophers, German history revealed the full enormity of a fate that beckoned to the modern world in general, enlightenment taken to its awful state-bureaucratic extreme.

We need not embrace the fullness of this philosophical critique to notice the resemblance to the structure of argument presented above. On the one hand, the view from Frankfurt (or rather from exile in New York) is incorrigibly overtotalized and grandiose, substituting philosophical abstraction of the logic of history for conjunctural specificity and carefully historicized comparative analysis, and all but removing fascism from the prospect of resistance or realistic political contestation. Such an approach effaces the overpowering importance of the First World War in brutalizing contemporary sensibilities, agitating and transforming the state-society relationship, escalating the capacity for societal mobilization, radicalizing the dialectic of technology and violence, and pioneering the mass production of death. It also ignores the fundamental importance of the Russian Revolution, the broader revolutionary turbulence in Europe during 1917-1923, and the resulting polarization of political options, in authorizing the extremism which Nazism needed to thrive. The importance of successive conjunctures before 1914, whether the Wilhelmine period opened by the 1890s, or the earlier moment of German unification, is also diminished by such a perspective. This essay has argued consistently against these effects.

On the other hand German modernity before the First World War displayed many of the logics Horkheimer and Adorno diagnosed. Though in some respects a more authoritarian state than the parliamentary polities of France, Britain, and north-west Europe, with an official culture that seemed aggressively militaristic, and a foreign policy that was restlessly expansionist, Germany's most visible characteristics in the European landscape of the time were its turbulent industrialism and modernizing energy. As European contemporaries saw, the *Kaiserreich* was the most compelling example of a modern state yet in existence, a model of 'national efficiency', sustained by the most dynamic capitalism in Europe. The Empire's achievements in science, technology, engineering, design, planning, architecture, and other applied fields, together with the strength of its cultural institutions and the growth of the public sphere, allow us to speak realistically of bourgeois dominance in society, anchored in the growing structural primacy of industrial production in the capitalist mode. Moreover, if the bourgeoisie was not the class directly and exclusively in charge of the state (but which nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, in this sense of collective political agency, ever was?), it increasingly dominated the

social, institutional, and i to be conducted – that is, capacity of German soci symptoms before 1914, s inseparable from its mod latter, but as an extrusion

So in the end Germa complicated effects Nazis in the primacy of pre nineteenth century and b modernity, from a pecu past, but that of a modern distinctiveness of Germa abandon the framework stop reasserting the esse the authenticity of the C (conflict-ridden *because s* Empire before 1914 wa Empire, the underdevelc the late twentieth-centur Imperial Germany's pass strength, saw this compl internal conflicts of Ge precisely an expression c pushing against its limits understood far more via t upheaval than through 'Normalizing' German h particularities, while free: be more disquieting. But understanding.

social, institutional, and ideological arenas where politics and government had to be conducted – that is, by exercising hegemony in the Gramscian sense. The capacity of German society to generate so many authoritarian and 'illiberal' symptoms before 1914, so many potentials for a radical right-wing politics, is inseparable from its modernities in this sense – and not as a reaction *against* the latter, but as an extrusion from their leading edge.

So in the end German history *does* contain a pre-1914 dynamic whose complicated effects Nazism presupposed. But this was not one deeply inscribed in the primacy of pre-industrial traditions descending from the early nineteenth century and before, and from a set of oppositions and resistances to modernity, from a peculiarly German anti-modernism, which idealized the past, but that of a modernizing society profoundly fixed on its future. The real distinctiveness of Germany's national history will only be captured if we abandon the framework of German exceptionalism altogether – that is, if we stop reasserting the essential otherness of German history and acknowledge the authenticity of the German experience as a *successful* but conflict-ridden (conflict-ridden *because* so successful) capitalist modernization. The German Empire before 1914 was *not* a backward state comparable to the Tsarist Empire, the underdeveloped European periphery, or many of the polities of the late twentieth-century Third World. Contemporary observers, envious of Imperial Germany's passage to a position of restlessly expanding industrial strength, saw this completely. In these terms, I've tried to argue, both the internal conflicts of German society and its foreign expansionism were precisely an expression of its modernity, the effects of a modernizing society pushing against its limits. The subsequent possibility of Nazism is then to be understood far more via the postwar crises of military defeat and revolutionary upheaval than through some deeper rooted pathology of backwardness. 'Normalizing' German history in this way – holding on to its self-evident particularities, while freeing them from the teleology of exceptionalism – may be more disquieting. But it will get us much further in historical and political understanding.