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Source: *German Studies Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb., 2007), pp. 1-32
Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the German Studies Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27668211
Accessed: 05-04-2018 23:49 UTC

Master Narratives beyond Postmodernity: Germany's "Separate Path" in Historiographical-Philosophical Light

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This essay assesses the configuration or emplotment of twentieth-century German history on display in important recent synoptic works. This affords an opportunity to reflect on the strength, in the aftermath of German reunification, of the long-influential concept of Germany's "special path" (*Sonderweg*). Because this concept has often figured as a "master narrative" of modern German history, the question arises whether, in the light of various post-structuralist critiques, such large-scale historical interpretations are epistemologically admissible. The essay argues that, in non-exclusivist form, master or grand narratives are justifiable and necessary, but also that those it analyzes here do not persuasively encompass contemporary German circumstances.

Ohne Zweifel hat in der Historie auch die Anschauung des einzelnen Momentes in seiner Wahrheit, der besonderen Entwicklung an und für sich einen unschätzbaren Wert; das Besondere trägt ein Allgemeines in sich. Allein niemals lässt sich doch die Forderung abweisen, vom freien Standpunkte aus das Ganze zu überschauen; auch strebt jederman auf eine oder die andere Weise dahin; aus der Mannigfaltigkeit der einzelnen Wahrnehmungen erhebt sich uns unwillkürlich eine Ansicht ihrer Einheit.

Leopold von Ranke, *Die großen Mächte* (1833).[1]

The postmodern wave has crashed and receded on historiography's beach. Many working historians, never keen to surf these waters, would embrace Ihab Hassan's 1989 pronouncement that "the word postmodernism has shifted from awkward neologism to derelict cliché without ever attaining to the dignity of concept." In our guild, apprentices and maestros alike reject postmodern methodological revolution against accustomed empiricism.[2] Yet poststructuralist postmodernism (in contradistinction, following Ernst Breisach, to structuralist postmodernism)—and the cultural and linguistic turns, micro-history, ethnographic history, and new narrativism accompanying it—have left their mark. They have suggested, as in Foucault's writings, a rich array of new research themes. They have also stiffened historians' "incredulity," in Lyotard's phrase, "toward the metanarrative."[3] Simultaneously, there occurred the weakening or collapse in the late twentieth-century social-political life of various real-historical structures of high modernity, such as the Keynesian corporatist liberal welfare state and the Soviet Union. This shook many empiricist, liberal-minded working historians' confidence in post-World War II modernization theory, an outgrowth of classical sociological theory, which had supplied them with

various scenarios and blueprints mapping the future and suggesting how the human past ought to be emplotted as its anticipation.[4]

Historians did not need the French poststructuralists to warn them against metanarratives' siren song. Karl Popper and other paladins of anti-Marxism had earlier sounded alarms that reached many western ears. Nineteenth-century German historicism had struggled to eject a recalcitrant Hegel from its house, while Gibbon and Voltaire had torched Christianity's teleological talismans. Yet the Enlightenment's triple offspring of liberal democracy, nationalism, and socialism could not storm the future without maps, which their theorists and historians readily supplied, both from the ideological press room and the university lecture hall. National histories, especially, dramatized their respective chosen peoples' struggles for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was unthinkable to nationalist historians that their nation possessed no story.

The twentieth century proved some such stories disastrous, and none more so than Germany's. In 1945's moral and material ruins, no alternative remained to German historians but to trace the "separate or special path" (*Sonderweg*) leading to Hitler, Auschwitz, and Stalingrad. As with tales of happier nations' trajectories, construction of this master narrative was, as common sense supposed, an indispensable, inescapable task. Yet, after German reunification in 1989–90 the *Sonderweg* seemed to end. The disgraced German Democratic Republic's successful incorporation into the Federal Republic seemed, in widespread if doubtful parlance, to "normalize" German history. The question arose: did the German master narrative require reformulation as a scenario of ultimate success: social death—one's own and others'—followed by democratic rebirth and redemption? Or did the *Sonderweg* end just when poststructural postmodernism drove meta- and master narratives from historiography's sacred grove?

"Incredulity toward the metanarrative," taking the term loosely to encompass all large-scale and long-term historical conceptualizations, carries heavy consequences for German historiography. But this holds for all national histories, indeed of histories of any sort, if it is true that any empirically grounded narrative implies both a larger historical scenario, within which alone it can be meaningfully thought, and a theory of causation—of how and why things happen in the world. Escape into a safe monographic or microhistorical space is impossible, so that the working historian's position on master narratives is no small matter. In these pages, I show, through critique of recent German historiography, that master narratives assert themselves even against authorial repudiation.[5] Non-German historians will, I believe, see their own subjects refracted in this light. As for synthetic narratives' philosophical admissibility, much depends on the strength of their opponents' arguments. I conclude, therefore, with an appraisal of the postmodernist case against them, especially in Hayden White's influential writings. Such themes inevitably engage historians' epistemological assumptions about the truth-status of their research and writ-

ings. Master narratives mean one thing epistemologically to constructivists, and another to realists. I argue that non-tyrannical master narratives, empirically constructed to answer questions of present-day relevance and open to falsification and revision (rather than claiming to illuminate an unchanging past reality for all time), are justifiable and indispensable. But, in German history, as in other western historiographies, the now dominant master narratives—perhaps surprisingly, considering the intelligentsia's still pervasive postmodern pessimism—presuppose not far-distant attainment of Enlightenment utopia. Its anticipated glory blinds thought to the challenge of realistically interpreting the twenty-first-century world that humanity is now, both consciously and unwittingly, constructing. Such interpretation is impossible without macro-level theorizations of human life in historical motion.

Allan Megill distinguishes master narrative as "the authoritative account of some particular segment of history." Grand narrative is "the authoritative account of history in general," while metanarrative, invoking sacred metaphysics or the world's immanent rationality, "serves to justify the grand narrative."[6] It is a large question whether the authoritativeness Megill stipulates flows from scholarly or social-cultural consensus, or from gun-barrels. In seeking to formulate in scholarly terms a modern German master narrative, Bielefeld University's school of "historical social science," led by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, came closest to hegemony. In the fourth volume of Wehler's *History of German Society*, encompassing the years 1914–49, this epitome of *Sonderweg* analysis achieved triumphant self-transcendence in post-1949 West Germany's attainment of liberal-capitalist stability. Simultaneously, Wehler's treatment of National Socialism visited the final stations of the "separate path" whose beginnings he traced 30 years ago in his muscular masterwork, *Imperial Germany, 1871–1918*.[7] This book had provoked explosive polemics and counter-narratives, notably David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley's neo-Marxist *Peculiarities of German History* and Thomas Nipperdey's neo-Rankean three-volume *German History*.[8] In the 1980s, younger West German historians counterposed an anthropologically inflected, microhistorical "history of everyday life" to the Bielefelders' macro-structuralism. The nearest thing they produced to a synoptic history were essays that Lutz Niethammer and colleagues published in 1990 as *Bourgeois Society in Germany*.[9]

Wehler's and Nipperdey's tomes defined the stakes in tracing the German *Sonderweg*'s descent into fascism. Interpretations of post-Nazi Germany also stood in *Sonderweg* shadow, especially after Ralf Dahrendorf's *Society and Democracy in Germany* (1965) analyzed the structural changes resulting from Nazi dictatorship—centrally, destruction or discrediting of "anti-modern elites"—which secured West Germany's stable democracy.[10] Wehler, following Dahrendorf and precursors, also ascribed huge weight to pre-1945 elites' illiberal influence.[11] But recently, in *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories*, Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have pronounced Wehler's and Nipperdey's interpretations

untenable and *passé*. In New Cultural History's and postmodernism's name, they propose a conceptualization free of tyrannical teleology.[12]

Jarausch and Geyer: Happy Ends to German Histories?

Jarausch and Geyer view the *positive* celebrations of German separateness penned in the 1870–1945 era—from triumphalist Bismarckism to anti-western "ideas of 1914" to Nazi myths of "folk community"—as "frantic effort[s] to efface difference, in which aspiring elites invoked the nation to impose their own... set of North German, Protestant, authoritarian, or male values upon a reluctant population."[13] Jarausch and Geyer pronounce the *Sonderweg*'s leftist counternarrative, encoded in Marxism-Leninism, dead through self-incrimination in Soviet communism's debacle.

West German "historical social science's" defects came to light following the "seepage of French theory across the Rhine," with its "solvent effect of deconstruction upon the structural realism of the Bielefeld school." Postmodernist "questioning of referentiality imperiled the edifice" of Wehlerite *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* ("societal history"), now exposed as an epistemologically unsustainable "discredited metanarrative" of a negative German *Sonderweg*. Echoing long-standing criticism, Jarausch and Geyer discover in the Bielefelders' work "a teleological fixation on 1933, which has, if anything, deepened with recent Holocaust concerns, produc[ing] a misleading picture of developmental linearity."[14] Summoning in postmodern spirit Max Weber's, Michel Foucault's, and Zygmunt Baumann's dark visions of modernity, they likewise reject the Bielefelders' modernization concept, focused on attainment of capitalist liberal democracy, as shallow and one-dimensional.[15]

Having banished rivals, Jarausch and Geyer begin with the "incoherence of the subject," invoking the "fragmentation of the German past, a shattering that has been previously ignored" (though the cliché of 1945's "zero hour" [*Stunde Null*] imperils this judgment). "In contrast to presuming a unified pattern, scholars ought to look more closely at the pieces of the German debris in order to figure out how they once fitted together and what broke them apart," namely, generation from German society's inner workings of "war and genocide," leaving in memory "little sense of the shape and structure of the twentieth century." If "there was something like a collective experience, it was the encounter with mass death, with irretrievable loss."[16] Professorially, the German people spent much time "rewriting [their] curricula vitae." From this agonized discontinuity it follows that "there is no single master narrative to be told." Historians are left only to recount Germany's manifold "fascinating stories."[17]

Having voyaged this far in Jarausch and Geyer's boat, disembarkation looms on postmodern, poststructuralist historiography's safe shore, where no domineering designs dwell. Yet it transpires that the navigators sailed with the totems of synthesis and holism. Dissolving their focus on "incoherence," they

advance instead an overarching, trauma-centered, equilibristic concept of "the development of this catastrophic century as a series of life-threatening ruptures that set in motion desperate efforts to survive and to return to"—benign?—"normalcy." Their synoptic vision descries twentieth-century Germany's "central problem:" "the extraordinary difficulty of an emergent nation in finding a way of living together, in generating a civic culture to unite a diverse society, and in developing viable forms of participatory and peaceful politics, and thus, to modulate and negotiate popular activism."[18]

This formulation's "presence of the absence" recalls the desirability of modulating and negotiating often troublesome elite activism. The "central problem" discovers German history's larger sense in attainment of the politically moderate, democratic multi-culturalism paradigmatic for the United States. Like the hypothesis of an interplay between "normalcy" and "ruptures," this is an admissible idea. It confirms Croce's dictum that all history is contemporary history. It privileges certain themes, especially communal integration. It projects, in short, a master narrative, subsumable under Jarausch and Geyer's phrase: "the struggle over how to constitute a whole nation from its parts."[19]

Though they dismiss the nation-state as a "fiction of security and stability," the German nation itself figures as epistemological reality and source of holistic meaning. Highlighting Germany's "many forms of religious, sexual, regional, and ethnic diversity" is not a prescription for (now negatively coded) "incoherence," since the resultant histories "intersect, conflict, and at times even converge on a shared, but distinctively interpreted sense of Germanness" and thus help to "*unlock the course of twentieth-century history*."[20]

Defying reification's risks, they accept the culturally and linguistically defined German nation as analytical subject, though also contentious discursive realm. As principal methodological tool they wield Georg Simmel's concept of "*Vergesellschaftung*:" "making and unmaking societies" analogous to weaving and tearing apart of fabrics.[21] Analyzing the nation as a social-cultural body has a distinguished pedigree. Accepting the nation as holistic meaning-field perpetuates the intellectual tradition of communitarian German nationalism.[22] The challenge Germany faced, Jarausch and Geyer write, was not "westernization." What "really matters" is "the formation of a cultural code or... succession of codes that put and hold together a texture of belonging in a deeply fractured society."[23]

Since 1945 the Germans have healed their deep fractures and restored community. Jarausch and Geyer celebrate this as an "extraordinary success story" and a "happy ending," exemplified in German women's long-term liberation.[24] Reunified Germany is again a European great power, enjoying international "normalization."[25] As for political ideology, Marxism having expired, liberal-democratic doctrines of multiculturalist "emancipation" prevail.[26]

How did it come to the National Socialist tragedy from which Germany eventually recovered so well? Jarausch interprets Nazism as extreme nationalism

bent on homogenizing an ideologically racialized German "folk" and staking out in its name a world empire based in conquered eastern Europe and Russia. Geyer highlights quasi-religious, redemptive, millenarian-apocalyptic elements in Nazi mentality, heightened by resentful memories of national humiliation. The book's account of National Socialism's origins and ascent to power, though fragmented and minimalist, supports long-established arguments stressing German backwardness in face of modernity's challenges.[27] Addressing unnamed critics—doubtless including Daniel Goldhagen—Jarausch and Geyer propose that "instead of stressing the continuities of an unchanging German national character, it might be more productive to ask why certain cross-national developments led to particularly dangerous consequences in central Europe."[28] Insofar as the German "calamity was part of a more universal crisis"—with here unlimned lineaments—one must, as Meinecke wrote in 1946, "broaden the question concerning the German catastrophe to encompass the fate of the occident." Wehler and others have acidly remarked of this tendentially self-exculpatory suggestion that, because Germany alone embraced genocidal fascism, *Sonderweg* and not occidental crisis comes first.[29]

In the heated question of continuity between Bismarck's and Hitler's German empires, and on Nazi origins generally, Jarausch and Geyer offer the canonical western liberal viewpoint.[30] As for the twentieth-century dictatorships, instead of emphasizing National Socialism's (or the German Democratic Republic's) police-state or totalitarian aspects, Jarausch and Geyer, invoking "negotiation societies," conclude that "need for popular support limited coercion and made both Nazis and Communists look for more subtle methods of encouraging cooperation."[31] After 1945, age cohorts earlier recruited into the Hitler Youth were obliged to suppress often fervently held Nazi identities. Hence the startling nature, from Jarausch and Geyer's angle, of postwar West Germany's embrace of liberal democracy.

How did this ethical-epistemic shift occur? Fundamental was extreme nationalism's discrediting by Nazism's crimes and failures. But Jarausch and Geyer waver in explaining how "the Germans have come to repudiate the heritage of illiberalism." They summon religious imagery. "Effectively, many Germans were undergoing something akin to a conversion, a remaking of a sense of themselves, of body and soul."[32] They speak of "a remarkable process of cultural osmosis," by which "most Germans not only formally accepted democracy but also ultimately internalized its values, developing an emotional attachment."[33] Despite earlier "aggressiveness and authoritarianism," the Germans "suddenly have turned into pacifist democrats." A "learning process" also figures, particularly among elites.[34] But Jarausch and Geyer (like Goldhagen) leave unspecified the sources of such conversion, osmosis, and learning, although "consumer society was ushered in as a way of rebuilding society."[35]

Despite disclaimers of master-narrativizing, Jarausch and Geyer proffer

central elements of familiar liberal theory, in which "modernity" culminates in "market democracy." Their rhetoric conveys confident empiricism and occasional nomothetic and scientized flourishes.[36] Contemplating twentieth-century inhumanities, they find "the debate still inconclusive on whether these appalling developments should be construed as regrettable backsliding on the way upward or whether they were in some fundamental sense"—as Baumann and others hold—"a product of modernity itself." But finally they pronounce the century "an unstoppable descent into bloody cataclysm followed by a gradual but ultimately successful return of a greater degree of civility," i.e., liberalism. Whiggishly, they salute West Germans' "concerted effort to regain the momentum for human progress that had beckoned at the beginning of the century." If the future encourages "guarded optimism," and last century's second half ran a "positive course," it is because of Germans' "conscious intellectual attempt to come to terms with [pre-1945] horrors."[37]

Jarausch and Geyer offer a "new kind of cultural history of German politics" eclipsing the spheres of government or economy, where institutions, instrumental rationality, conjunctural movements, and short-term contingency reign.[38] Culture figures as group identities, rooted in various social milieus, and as mass-based commodified popular culture, while high art and literature stand aloof from national fate. Though inequalities loom of class, gender, ethnicity, and region, the conflicts they spark appear distant and muted, marginalized by issues of nation, group identity, and multiculturalism. Globalization's daunting, protean challenges to German self-understandings, interests, and prosperity are indiscernible. The implications of the European integration the Federal Republic has championed go unplumbed, apart from the salutary effects of European citizenship on German self-definition.

In a book condemning xenophobia and prejudice, it disconcerts to find glowing traces of nationalist and National Socialist rhetoric and worldview, inadvertent though they certainly are. The "better case" the Nazis might have made "for reclaiming ethnically German Danzig," rather than provoking war over the Polish Corridor, hangs ominously unstated. Of Hitler's wartime policy uprooting east European German minorities and settling them in formerly Polish areas contiguous to the Third Reich it is said, perpetuating nationalist myths, that the Nazis drew up "grandiose plans for 'reclaiming' German lands and repopulating them with ethnic Germans."[39] As if Nazi brutalities were mere byproducts, "to make room, millions of native Poles and Jews had [sic] to be forcefully removed to the Polish [G]overnment [G]eneral while their farms and possessions were reassigned [sic]."[40]

It misleads to claim that, before the Holocaust, the Jews suffered "many extirpations," despite earlier cruel persecution.[41] Nazi rhetoric crops up bereft of scare-quotes: the Nazis "made strenuous efforts to return desirable Aryans" to Germany; in Weimar years, folkish agitators promised a "racial cleansing... that

would remove Jewish influences that threatened to lead to cultural and social decadence;" the Holocaust effected a "violent elimination of racial undesirables" and "tried to cleanse the body of the nation and clear land for settlements."[42] Postwar German-Jewish relations generate jarring notes: the Federal Republic "accepted its collective responsibility and negotiated restitution payments to Israel and the Jewish community to regain international respectability;" immigration visas were granted in the 1990s to "Jewish petitioners from Russia, who were admitted to reverse the effects of the Holocaust by reestablishing a Jewish community in Germany." A positive twentieth-century generalization holds that "millions of Polish and Jewish foreigners have also acculturated themselves in Germany, blending into the dominant fabric with hardly a trace of difference." Victims of Nazi persecution "seem to have miraculously increased over time. Although only a few camp inmates or resistance members survived to tell their tales"—actually, among the multi-millions, many did so—"a media-created Holocaust recollection of Nazi atrocities against the Jews has come to dominate the official memory culture and the self-consciousness of the intellectuals." Similarly, a curious causality holds that, "because of the leadership of the Leo Baeck Institute, and a strange combination of filiopietist philanthropy and post-Holocaust guilt, the study of German-Jewish history seems to be flourishing on both sides of the Atlantic."[43]

Jarausch and Geyer applaud German naturalization law's recent liberalization, underscoring Turkish and other immigrants' positive socio-economic contributions. The German "Left is starting to understand the need for a concerted effort at integration to help newcomers leave their separate colonies by including them in the mainstream." "Insistence on cultural integration" mandated by 2003 legislation is a "hopeful sign." Yet demands for "leaving separate colonies" and "cultural integration," with their sad and brutal German history, all too easily subvert democratic multi-culturalism.[44]

Though Jarausch and Geyer recount an "extraordinary success story," shadows lurk.[45] It may be that "consumer society... established the market of meanings and feelings in which the moral universe of a shattered German society was remade," reconstituting Germany "as a plural and altogether cosmopolitan nation." Yet the social-psychological escapism and atrophying of self that accompany capitalist mass consumption were evident in the 1920s. "Weimar culture thrived," Geyer writes, "because its dreams had the ability to worm their way into public consciousness even when there was no commensurate reality," adding that "therein lies the true challenge of mass culture."[46] But can the consuming public master this challenge?

The left-leaning 1968 generation, in its own life experience, effected the transition from class-stratified "commodity culture" to (seemingly) class-dissolving "consumer culture." Through consumption new youth-cultural identities emerged, responding to "a very distinct despair over the vast dislo-

cation of values, customs, and norms" in a world in which "parents, tradition, ideology"—but what of the "ideas of '68"?—"and religion were no guidance at all and in which meaning and feeling, the ways of ordering one's life, had indeed become a matter of consuming desire."[47] Such identities, if they exist, are economic fortune's hostages. In the 1930s Depression liberal-democratic loyalties calamitously lapsed.

Master narratives are historians' emplotments of protean historical records, not reflections of unitary, coherent pasts. Happy-ending stories call forth, by the unhappy potentialities they repress, more complex, tension-ridden pictures. Jarausch and Geyer's "extraordinary success story" sounds triumphalist notes evoking both Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and Panglossian postmodern celebrations of cultural diversity and high capitalism's ego-enhancing qualities. One can enter these tents, but critical minds will wonder whether to pay the price. They will look instead for interweaving of the nationalist and Nazi past with the democratic present, summoning the drama of millions of minds and hearts in which—silently, agonizingly, resentfully, or self-deceivingly—discredited extremist impulses wrestled with a liberal legacy traceable to Lessing and Kant as well as Rousseau, Jefferson, and Mill. They will seek to analyze challenges, and even threats, to German prosperity, power, community, and identity that are at the heart of serious debate today.[48] Celebrating postwar miracles produces skewed pictures whose implausible sunniness does not end the shadow life of Nazi-era caricatures of Germany as a land, not of "*Dichter und Denker*" ("Poets and Thinkers") but of "*Richter und Henker*" ("Judges and Hangmen").

Wehler's History: "Discredited Metanarrative"?

Wehler remains the *Sonderweg* army's militant soldier. In his *Societal History*'s 4,300 so far published pages, he often debates critics and challengers. The "central question" remains "National Socialism's preconditions" and "the German modernization path's special circumstances."[49] The year 1933 "remains a caesura of world and [German] national history."[50] Alluding to Nipperdey, Wehler criticizes "fashionably clothed neo-Rankeanism" or "neo-historicism that insists on understanding past epochs only as products of their own preconditions, while denying or repressing the present's epistemological interests." But "since these very interests are always indissolubly joined inescapably to a self-reflexive historical mode of understanding," such methodological anachronism "lead[s] only to a dead end." What present-day ends could a merely historicist account of nineteenth-century Germany serve?[51]

Wehler does not hide his combative liberal-democratic political preferences and moral judgments. Bismarck's regime bequeathed an "evil legacy" in rightist nationalism. In Bismarck's shadow, an authoritarian political culture developed that, especially in the middle classes, inhibited resolute opposition to aristocratic-monarchical power. "No European or north American state [before

1918] possessed an elected legislature that evaded the struggle for hegemony within the system of political institutions with such toothless fear of conflict as the German Reichstag." Upper middle-class accommodation to the Imperial system, which Wehler persists in controversially labeling "feudalization," amounted to "the grande bourgeoisie's intellectual and moral treason."[52] Of the illiberal, self-serving, noble-dominated Imperial ruling elites Wehler drastically concludes: "The *Kaiserreich* led to a German *Sonderweg* because its social and political power structure made it possible, as Max Weber said, 'to leave the mass of the citizenry unfree in an authoritarian bureaucratic state with but a facade of parliamentarism, and to administer them like a cattle-herd'" instead of "'integrating them into the state as co-rulers.'"[53]

Wehler denies advocacy of "linear development toward National Socialism" and disclaims purveying "a dogmatic logic of decline" or "teleological conception."[54] He follows his original neo-Weberian, post-Habermasian method, analyzing the four interactive axes of economy, society, politics, and culture (understood mainly as ideological contestation and institutional inculcation of hegemonic social-political values). Frank about the values and epistemological interests informing his problem choices, he writes that "confirmation or correction of the interpretation offered here... on the basis of other criteria of judgment remains open until better arguments' persuasive force prevails."[55]

Wehler addresses criticism from the New Cultural History camp which aims to replace his "theory-guided social and societal history, with its central concept of society," with the "all-encompassing, if often amorphous, category of 'culture.'" He concedes his approach was vulnerable "because it often did not do justice to the twofold constitution of reality postulated by Weber's and Bourdieu's social theory: constitution [firstly] through the guiding structures created within society's four basic dimensions by the powerful evolutionary processes favored by that theory, and constitution [secondly] through consciousness and perception of 'reality' by individuals faced with interpreting it, whose 'processing' of reality can only be unlocked hermeneutically."[56]

Wehler cleaves to modernization theory. His central nineteenth-century history concept—the 1849–1871 "double revolution" of urban-industrial "*Take-off*" and nation-state creation—describes the "twin nature of an extraordinarily successful, temporally enormously compressed metamorphosis of Germany's societies and states."[57] Pre-Bismarckian Germany knew no *Sonderweg* curse. The post-1848 political future remained open to a "turn toward the better." Yet in the "double revolution's" aftermath, the "power of tradition" stood opposed to "the capacity for modernization" as the dark side of German history's "Janus-face."[58]

Scientific Marxism's base-superstructure model and sociological structural-functionalism loom in Wehler's "classical modernization dilemma" facing Imperial Germany: "a meteoric socio-economic evolution stood confronted

by the self-preservative power of the forces of social and political tradition."[59] This created an "explosive state of high-powered tension" which could only have been overcome through "the congruence of economic and political modernity in a bourgeois parliamentary system." Yet, unlike modernization theory's Panglosses, Wehler grants that "capitalism and industrialization in no way led with inner necessity to a victory of liberalism and democracy."[60] Politics, as Napoleon said, were fate. And while Bismarck's allying of Prussian *raison d'état* with a multi-class cartel favoring, for economic and nationalist reasons, the Prussian path to German unification possessed powerful logic, it was also contingent, among other things, on Bismarck's talents and luck.

In Wehler's 12-step review of the various actors and agencies tramping out the pre-1914 *Sonderweg*, Bismarck marches first.[61] Weber's charisma theory explains the Iron Chancellor's near 30-year grip on power. "The charismatic individual is always born of crisis"—in Bismarck's case, the crisis triggering the "double revolution"—"and he always gains his exclusive authority through its mastery." German liberalism "alone in Europe was subjected to the 'double pressure' of charismatic authority from above and the [post-1867] democratic Reichstag franchise from below."[62]

Yet Wehler paints pre-1914 Germany not only in somber *Sonderweg* colors but also in successful modernity's bright tones. Democratic sentiment was widespread, the future open.[63] Nonetheless, his emphasis, which stung early critics, persists on the *Kaiserreich*'s "authoritarian distortion." Socialization in home, school, and army inculcated deference to authorities and stifled revolutionary susceptibilities. This led the political opposition to "shy away" from defying a weakened pre-1914 Imperial government. Such socialization also prevented the Social Democrats in 1918–1919 from stripping defeated Imperial elites of power, dooming—as Wehler sees subsequent events proving—the Weimar Republic.[64]

National Socialism embodied the "fatal long-term effects" of post-1880 right-wing nationalist radicalization. This "can best be explained, presumably, as the 'answer' to the challenge of manifold rapid modernization processes and the painful experiences they entailed, to which [rightist nationalism] responded with a compensatory offer of national successes, national greatness, national uniqueness, a German world mission and German '*Weltpolitik*.'" The ultra-swift transition to capitalist market society entailed "hard constraints of individual and collective adjustment," causing "traumatic injuries" assuaged by an aggressive nationalism spreading more easily for lack of firmly embedded liberal political culture.[65] The unique combination of nineteenth-century "double revolution" and the de-liberalizing, de-civilizing effects of 1914–18 "total war" engendered "radical fascism," metastasizing from post-1918 self-reinforcing structural crises which enabled antidemocratic elites to raise Hitler to power.[66]

Nazi triumph lends itself to many readings. Was it a counterrevolution joining

conservative elites and backward-looking, resentment-laden common people against modern-minded, democratically inclined liberals, Social Democrats and a Communist party whose menace Nazism vastly inflated? Was it a wave of nationalist populism imagining Hitler's dictatorship as democratic victory over the *Kaiserreich*'s unloved elites? Wehler insists that elites and commoners, expressing "mighty tendencies within the political culture," welcomed Hitler as a "'second Bismarck.'"[67] Germany was again gripped in "existential crisis," whose social-psychological "pathology" Wehler decodes with charisma theory. This highlights "the necessity of a lasting 'social tie' between the bearer of charisma and the society fostering, supporting, and upholding him." Wehler joins the current revival of religious metaphors for Nazism: Hitler became a "deified messiah" because German political culture had created a "social expectation, a hope-infused longing for redemption, an eager sounding-board for radical demands of all kinds—altogether, a political understanding that hungered for a national savior, a 'second Bismarck.'"[68] It was not Nazism's "efficient terror," but the *Kaiserreich*'s authoritarian legacy that sustained loyalty to the disastrous end.[69]

Wehler's *fortissimo* playing on continuity also extends forward in time. Nazism was a "catalyst of long advancing developmental processes" beyond 1945, deeply stamping the Federal Republic. The Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* or "people's community" adumbrated postwar capitalism's competitive, market-stratified social order open to upward mobility. West Germany's "socially responsible market economy," embedded in traditions of state-mediated corporatism, had roots too in Nazi pseudodemocratization and attendant ideological discrediting of traditional elites, though it was necessary after 1945 to legitimize pursuit and clash of private interest without obfuscatory folkish-communitarian rhetoric.[70]

Of 1945 defeat's liberalizing consequences Wehler writes, alluding to Goethe's Mephistopheles, that the paradox of Hitler is that "he helped destroy what he wanted to secure for a thousand years, and brought to pass what he most ardently fought." Like Jarausch and Geyer, Wehler unveils a happy ending: in Hitler's aftermath, nationalist racism and biologized politics, German great-power strivings, and the European "white men's" empires vanished. Despite the Holocaust, Israel was born. The USA and the USSR, which Hitler execrated, ruled the Cold War world. "All illusions of a [positive] German *Sonderweg*" dissipated. In the Federal Republic's society and polity—"both doubtless the western tradition's creations"—the Germans, "for the first time," found success.[71]

Viewing Wehler's history from on high, the peaks are his depictions of the nineteenth-century industrial-national "double revolution" and twentieth-century fascism as interrelated misadaptations to "modernization" flowing from over-mighty "forces of tradition" unscrupulously exploiting crisis-induced social susceptibility to charismatic authority for their own antidemocratic ends. This is, as other liberal-centrist interpretations such as Jarausch and Geyer's, Volker Berghahn's, and Nipperdey's show, a widespread understanding, stronger for the

weaknesses of Marxist accounts and theory-averse historicist narrativism.[72] How else to measure the German catastrophe—political and cultural in expression, whatever the causal force of socio-economic crisis—except by the ideal-type of Enlightenment liberalism? Viable Weimar democracy would have blocked a movement's dictatorship that even in the manipulated 1933 election could not win a majority.

It is not Wehler's *Sonderweg* rhetoric that provokes, since interpretation must trace some path to National Socialism. It is the argument that Imperial German authoritarianism predetermined reactions to Weimar's "existential crisis" such that Hitlerism resulted. But, while Wehler sees Bismarck in Hitler, does he see Hitler in Bismarck? His logic does not require it. Wehler accepts, between Bismarck's 1862 accession and Weimar's end-crisis, the future's openness. But, in the aftermath of the *Sonderweg*'s successive events, Wehler discovers earlier developments' unforeseen and unintended consequences. Finding Hitler's charisma shining in Bismarck's light, it is impossible not to think of Bismarck as Hitler's unwitting enabler.

Wehler's judgmentalism makes it hard to accept that, when pre-1918 actors made choices that, retrospectively, smoothed the path to Hitler, they might have been defensibly pursuing well-considered interests and even the public good.[73] Wehler's master narrative may also seem, in its focus on structures, conjunctures, and instrumental-rational interests, insufficiently culturalist. Yet social-psychological explanations loom large, in which Wehler, drawing on Weberian charisma theory and Durkheimian social-stress analysis, unpacks discourses expressing and legitimizing social-political crisis-reactions. Wehler's equation of tradition with authoritarianism and modernity with emancipation obscures modernity's repressive dimensions, as in the instrumentalization in the Holocaust of such modern ideologies as Social Darwinism, "racial science," and "eugenics."

Wehler's view is understandable that the safest haven on modernization's seas is capitalist democracy (though its destructive power is also great and perhaps growing). More debatable is whether Wehler convincingly accounts for resistance to the liberal utopia: why people have wanted to be Bismarcks, or Hitlers, or Stalins, and why others have supported charismatic leaders with such ambitions. After all, fascism's "escape from freedom" presupposed democracy. Still, the charge of master-narrativism alone cannot silence Wehler's views, for—on condition of empirical warrantability, falsifiability, and debate with worthy challengers—construction of grand syntheses is a virtue.

Thomas Nipperdey's Ambivalent Defense of German Culture

Nipperdey brandished his polemical sword in the Bielefelders' faces. He especially wanted to remove German cultural history from the "suspicion under which clever people born in the aftermath so easily and quickly place it." He

protested self-styled enlighteners' use, in critiquing pre-Weimar intellectuals, of "accusations of fascism or pre-fascism as a murder weapon" and denounced obsession with scattered antiliberal or anti-Jewish statements in reputable pre-Hitler writers' works as "sniffing out of heretics."[74]

Wilhelmine society was no precursor of Nazism—for example, by way of the 'authoritarian family,'" for "there was no single Nazi character, nor any such continuity." Nor was pre-1914 cultural life "illiberal."[75] Of the Nazi generation he writes, delicately: "the grandchildren's troubles and confusions cannot be charged to the grandparents."[76] As this kinship idiom signals, Nipperdey speaks as a German among Germans, sensitive to external criticism. About foreign resentments of *Kaiserreich* successes he says: "Latecomers, overly eager and terribly efficient—this did not make the world love the Germans." Triumphs of pre-1914 science and art "incontestably made the world reputation of the Germans, the image of the 'good German.'" All the greater "our anger at the miserable caviling and carping about such universal geniuses as Nietzsche and Wagner."[77]

The historian's "virtue" is to render "justice" to the "great-grandparents before the First World War," and not to "condemn them all-knowingly." It is necessary "to return to the past what it once possessed, and what every era and our present age also possess—namely, an open future." Nipperdey embraces epistemological realism anchored in romantic historicism. He gazes on "life's wholeness," the "fullness of its spheres, and its unfolding." Journeying through nineteenth-century Germany, "in the end we have no formula or thesis to which it all"—"the whole of reality"—"can be reduced." Instead, "truth is totality," about which at best its different dimensions' interrelations can be known.[78] Nipperdey sarcastically paraphrases Ranke, saying that "it is not the historian's task to show how, essentially, things were not, but should have been." The *Kaiserreich* stands in "a mediated relation to Hitler, to Weimar, to postwar Germany, and also to the universal culture of the late twentieth century, but it stands in direct and unmediated relation to itself." As Ranke said, "in the antiquated religious formula (no longer directly accessible to us): every epoch is immediate to God."[79]

Yet Hitler is an "ineluctable fact" and Imperial Germany's legacy to Nazism establishes a perspective that is "legitimate," "fruitful," and "necessary." "Whoever wanted to evade it would fall into a blind apology for the past." German history and culture before 1914 were not "merely 1933's prehistory" but yet they were, "of course," also 1933's prehistory.[80] This Nipperdey contemplates in cultural terms, as "shadowlines" extending forward to 1933. He defends his culturalist approach, writing that after 1945 "the market economy's successes and the disappointments of politics (!) enthroned individual prosperity and self-realization." But nineteenth-century life, with religion retreating, entailed embrace of ideological-philosophical worldviews. "The religious-cultural situation determined metapolitics." Social stratification resulted less from economic

inequalities than distinctions of cultural discourses and codes, anchoring social in cultural change.[81]

Nipperdey sees the cultural realm as the plane on which Germany's world reputation, and the "good German" in general, most urgently require defense. He investigates the prevalence among *Kaiserreich* intellectuals of the mentality of the "unpolitical German" and the "inwardness protected by the power-state" (in Thomas Mann's words) in and for which the "unpolitical German" lived. A monarchist subject-mentality indeed often overshadowed liberal-democratic citizenship. "In Germany fear of advancing mass society became an absolute obsession."[82] Simmel's and Weber's civilizational crisis was real.[83] Many intellectuals embarked on a "German cultural-intellectual *Sonderweg*" leading first to the "ideas of 1914"—"ambivalent certainly: not pre-National Socialist, but weak in resistance to power-abuse, radical nationalism, illiberalism." A safe province beyond politics "could not in the long run exist. Here a potential"—for seduction and collaboration—"gathered that could not resist the pull of totalizing and inhumane politics." These were fateful "shadowlines in culture's luminous pre-1914 world."[84]

The *Sonderweg* tool fitted Nipperdey's hand, though he mocked preoccupation with it as Germanocentric "navel-gazing."[85] Inescapable, granting that Imperial developments help explain National Socialism, was the question how. Nipperdey's explanation, like Wehler's and Jarausch and Geyer's, speaks the language of modernization crisis. He writes of "modernization's compressed tempo" and "piling up of problems—formation of state and nation, liberalization and even constitutional democratization, coping with class society's social problems—which in older (perhaps 'happier') societies arose for solution one by one."[86]

Germany suffered Ernst Bloch's "dissimultaneity of the simultaneous" in the "discrepancy between economic and social change... and change in mentalities and attitudes." Germany endured the "losses and sufferings of modernity."[87] While bourgeois culture rose to hegemony, "bureaucratic Prussia stiffened into a caste-state, and became intolerable." In politics, alongside the authority-based state, bourgeois society found its voice. By 1914 political blockage prevailed, "which yet is not paralysis: the power-state faces democracy."[88] Nipperdey's modernization rhetoric obscures more concrete causal explanation, but makes the point, congenial also to Bielefelders, that tradition itself was modernized. Nipperdey's "discrepancy thesis" points to "two fractured formations: fractured modernity, and fractured pre-modernity." This "double ambivalence" stamped the relationship between society and government.[89]

Nipperdey offers no overarching characterization of National Socialism, but leaves it in interpretive shadow, morally condemned for darkness and inhumanity, an unrealizable utopia of non-antagonistic society. Yet:

> people do not separate into the good and the bad. The *Kaiserreich* was not in itself good or bad, nor was it clearly distinguishable between the good and the bad. The fundamental colors of history are not black and white, its basic pattern is not the contrast of the chessboard. The fundamental color of history is gray, in endless shades.[90]

Applied to Hitler's dictatorship, these lines appear naively forgiving and, fixed on essential character rather than acts of omission or commission, morally ill-conceived. Perhaps they mean to express Christian sentiment.

In epistemological holism's name, and to render justice to the great-grandparents, Nipperdey abjured reducing nineteenth-century German history to a conceptualization overreaching its pre-1918 subject matter so as to constitute Hitlerism's prehistory. Yet he broke this vow, advancing a macro-narrative arguing, in terms similar to Wehler's and Jarausch and Geyer's, that a disastrous *Sonderweg* ran from Imperial Germany to 1933–45. It is, rhetorically, a tragic story of German modernization's contradictions and tensions, "losses and suffering."

The *Sonderweg* was a path that began to be traced, before Nazism, to explain World War I and Weimar democracy's embattlement, as in Max Weber's and Arthur Rosenberg's writings. After 1945, such influential pre-Bielefelders as Karl Dietrich Bracher, Hans Rosenberg, and Ralf Dahrendorf reformulated the argument in mid-century social-science idiom, before Wehler's *Kaiserreich* eclipsed them as central paradigm.[91] Though East German and other Soviet-influenced Marxists scorned western *Sonderweg* analysis, their now rust-gathering arguments ran parallel: Hitlerism derived from capitalism's contradictions, whose post-1870 depth was evident in the rise of German socialism and communism and the tendency among capital's various fractions and allied intellectuals to close ranks against them, whatever the cost.

Sonderweg theory need not wear modernization's and modernity's rhetorical dress. But it remains an inescapable narrative until 1945, and—considering Nazism's nightmarish legacy—one that survives as German experience's negative pole. Hindsight reveals that those who supported Hitler made a worse than fatal mistake.[92] Few of the millions donning fascist or Bolshevik uniforms harbored bloodthirsty visions of Holocaust and Gulag. Few Nazis realized they were marching into ethical, political, and existential hell's deepest crevices. The concentration-camp and genocidal universe they ended up creating had never before existed, and was not imaginatively or discursively present, in any clear or large way, in the public sphere. The *Sonderweg* analysis which, following the Nazi disaster, must be constructed does not require projection backward from 1933 onto the whole society or even all Hitlerites, despite their repellent bigotry and aggressiveness, of the profound guilt later incurred.

Niethammer and Colleagues: German History as Enlightenment-Project

Wehler, and Jarausch and Geyer, hold that, beyond the *Sonderweg*, German history has led to postnationalist, multiculturalist, stable, prosperous capitalist democracy. Reunited Germany (granting present flaws) has attained "normalization." The future must perfect this socio-political constitution, for contemporary thought theorizes no order that might justifiably supersede it. With such judgments Nipperdey's modernity concept, though ill-defined, harmonizes. Doubtless they are dominant in today's professional historiography and historical pedagogy.[93]

What mattered was attaining an institutionally structured outcome, through removal of premodern impediments and navigation of the pathology-strewn passage from "traditional" to "modern" society. Philosophical liberalism conferred this expedition's captaincy on the propertied and educated bourgeoisie. Yet liberal historiography demonstrated, through *Sonderweg* analysis, how bourgeois leadership failed. It required a post-1945 Allied-induced democratization of elites to eventually instill the liberal institutions the western conquerors imposed with indigenous vitality, fitting them—helped by soaring prosperity—to educate common folk to democratic life. West Germany became a post-bourgeois, high-consumption mass society, steered by meritocratic elites. Thus the "bourgeois society" concept might seem relevant only to *Sonderweg* theory. Perhaps for that reason Niethammer and colleagues' 1990 book—coinciding with reunification—sparked no widespread debate. Yet it concerns this essay in its emphasis, not so much on the bourgeoisie's historic role, but rather on how far Enlightenment liberalism has been realized in German society as a whole. Does this suggest an interpretation of German modernity transcending the *Sonderweg* perspective?[94]

Niethammer and colleagues distill from Kant's political-philosophical-historical essays the Enlightenment's essential "bourgeois program:" "a tendency toward freedom, equality, and peace, which should be hastened through societal self-reflection" or rational self-critique. The authors, embracing Frankfurt School tradition, defend this program, advocating a "process of self-awareness in a democratic community that has gone astray amid capitalist growth's self-generated dynamics."[95] "Bourgeois society"—or liberal civil society—justifies itself as an analytical category because it emerged at modernity's dawn as the Enlightenment's self-proclaimed blueprint, and because most post-1789 social-political regimes understood themselves as embodying it. Niethammer sees it (teleologically) as "the unending structural process of historical advance" toward freedom, equality, and Kant's "eternal peace." The Soviet empire's 1980s collapse showed that "coupling of freedom and reason, exemplified in Kant's 'Idea for a Universal History,' belongs to the bourgeoisie's ongoing legacy beyond the era of its economic domination"[96] Niethammer concludes with the assertion (betraying little confidence in ordinary people's enlightened impulses) that

"social theory must deal with a problem unforeseen in [earlier] theoretical approaches [whether Kant's, Hegel's, or Marx's]: namely, social, cultural, and political integration [into liberal civil society] of what in the twentieth century were called 'the masses.'"[97]

Irmgard Wilharm asks, if after 1945 "a bourgeois society could be established notwithstanding the impotence of the bourgeoisie, does that mean that bourgeois society can exist without a stable bourgeoisie? What then is bourgeois about bourgeois society?" The answer lies in the spread of "bourgeois behavior and values"—"embourgeoisement." Crucial is the bourgeois virtue of labor. Yet post-1960s structural unemployment and high-consumption leisure-orientation sap its strength. As the digitalized and globalized economy escapes political elites' steerage, the end looms of "bourgeois society in the sense of rational autonomous planning and decision-making under critical oversight of public opinion." Those who, like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer earlier, critique structural inequalities, contradictions, and absurdities "are themselves an essential part of bourgeois society, which without critics would be deformed, like fascist society, which destroyed its real and potential critics." Embattled enlighteners depend on liberal freedoms.[98]

Niethammer and colleagues' pre-1933 *Sonderweg* fuses Marxist and Wehlerite perspectives.[99] If this encompasses familiar landscape, its theoretical aim, more proclaimed than attained, to view modernity as a stage on which the Enlightenment project struggled for multi-class-based legitimacy illuminates the post-bourgeois present. One wonders why the "bourgeois program" figures so exclusively as the middle classes' affair, when in the Anglophone world plebeian democracy embraced its ideals of enfranchisement and civil rights, if not laissez-faire economy. German Social Democracy might justly claim more credit. Perhaps memory of Hitler's mass support perpetuates Frankfurt School mistrust of democratic populism. Yet Niethammer and colleagues make the crucial point that attainment of formally institutionalized "market democracy" is not Enlightenment's just and pacific fulfillment, but a step in an endless quest its adherents follow, on which nations may again go astray.

Master Narratives and Contemporary Philosophy of History

Opinion is nowadays strong that modern philosophy, Critical Theory, or postmodernism prove master narratives inadmissible. Charges of determinism dog them, as they do social theory, disturbing realist-minded, freedom-loving empirical historians. While often believing a coherent historical process exists independent of subjective perception, such scholars deny that any dynamic drives events toward predetermined outcomes. Humans are free to choose, so that the historical process is an aggregation of liberty's acts, not necessity's. Yet, for modern analytical philosophy and science, a determinist account is but an elucidation of relevant evidence whose logic compellingly answers the

question at hand. Successful arguments offer necessary and sufficient grounds for given outcomes. Taking questions as posed and evidence as known, there is no better way to answer them. In this sense, determinism is virtuous and essential to understanding, without detracting from historical actors' freedom.[100] Recent criticism also pillories master narratives as exclusivist conceptualizations, especially at national, civilizational, or world level. They appear deeply ideological, claiming infallibility and aiming tyrannically to impose a single vision and memory while suppressing alternatives.

How are broad-gauged historical narratives faring among philosophers? Logical positivism, robust at mid-twentieth century, gained a summit in Arthur Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), but this approach then withered. Danto credits Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) with dealing the death-blow.[101] At its demise, the analytical philosophy of history sought to extend to complex narratives Karl Hempel's account of true historical statements as instances of broadly or universally valid "covering laws." Could whole historical narratives, as opposed to statements or sentences, be in this sense true?[102]

Hayden White's landscape-altering *Metahistory* (1973) hurtled historiography around the linguistic turn, subordinating epistemology to rhetorical and formalist analysis of narratives as literary, psycho-mythological, ideological creations.[103] Empirical historiography's truth-status sank into murky waters. In North American philosophy, Richard Rorty fired a neo-pragmatist revolt against the analytical citadel, some of whose towers are now in flames. Rorty reempowered history to explain human thought and existence, while abandoning pre-Kuhnian efforts to force historiography into a scientized, realist bed. He urged escape from "the collapsed circus tent of epistemology—those acres of canvas under which many of our colleagues still thrash aimlessly about." The desire to ground knowledge in noumenal reality is anachronistic authoritarianism—search for superhuman sanction. Since Frege and Wittgenstein, analytical philosophy has been "theory of meaning" not science of reality. Truth became "warranted assertability within a language," knowable only through the "ongoing practice of reason-giving and deliberation." Inescapably, "only a belief can justify a belief."[104]

Rorty sounds Rankean, though also robustly nominalist, saying that "no area of culture and no period of history gets Reality more right than any other. The difference between [cultural/civilizational] areas and epochs is their relative efficiency at accomplishing various purposes. There is no such thing as Reality to be gotten right—only snow, fog, Olympian deities, relative aesthetic worth, the elementary particles, human rights, the divine right of kings, the Trinity, and the like."[105] Such statements are historians' working papers. As for why lights go on when switches are flipped, it is not, Rorty holds, because scientific realism accesses ultimate nature, but thanks to electromagnetic theory. Why we accept

this theory emerges from its history in thought and practice. The philosophy of science is the history of science, just as historical explanations alone account for the liberal-democratic culture Rorty embraces, whatever philosophical justifications it possesses.[106] These are neither Rorty's nor philosophy's last words, but they signal rising importance for broad-gauged historical explanations in the philosophical enterprise.

Some will object that Hayden White and followers have unveiled—or ennobled—such narratives as fictions and myths. He remains defensively dug into *Metahistory*'s quadrilateral of possible rhetorical emplotments, among which irony, stressing unintended consequences, is professional historians' favorite. Of our guild he says "they always resist. They resist anyone who tries to tell them something about what they are doing."[107] Of analytical philosophers White wrote that they "typically treated narrative less as a verbal structure" than as "explanation by storytelling." For them, the story figured "as a structure of argumentative concepts, the relations among whose parts were logical (specifically syllogistic) rather than linguistic." Thus historical discourse's content "could be extracted from its linguistic form, served up in a condensed paraphrase purged of all figurative and tropological elements, and subjected to tests of logical consistency as an argument." But this "was to ignore the one 'content' without which a historical discourse could never come into existence at all: language."[108] White's study of narrative tropes concluded that historians' stories are told, not found. True stories are self-contradictions. All stories are fictions, true only metaphorically. "Is this," he asks, with *Schadenfreude*, "true enough?" It follows that historical argument "is ultimately a second-order fiction, a fiction of a fiction or fiction making, which bears the same relationship to the plot"—the rhetorical mode in which historians impart meaning to evidence—"that the plot bears to the chronicle"—the data as relevant facts.[109]

This seems an uncompromising, militant rejection of any empiricist practice that might claim to satisfy Rorty's coherentist test of warrantable assertability, let alone epistemological realism's correspondence theory of truth. In White's effort to encompass the Holocaust in his thinking, he wrote that "competing narratives can be assessed, criticized, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever [!] arguments they may contain." But "narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts [!] is transformed into a story. Among these elements are those generic story patterns we recognize as providing the plots."[110] In *Metahistory* White assumed historians arrived at their emplotments "precriticially." Yet why should historians not consciously ponder the rhetorical and literary-dramatic options open to them, selecting on grounds of logic, value-rationality, and aesthetics?[111]

White inclines to demystify historical argumentation as fictionalizing

play with more or less arbitrarily assembled facts. "You can't replicate—by definition—historical events. They are no longer perceivable. So they cannot be studied empirically. They can be studied by other, nonempirical kinds of methods."[112] So much for *evidence*. That direct perception alone constitutes empirical observation presupposes the epistemological realism that White scorns. Yet White's position on empiricism, as on historians' arguments, is less hostile than muddled. In 1988 he asserted that historical narratives' dominant plot forms show how given cultures "imagine the different kinds of meaning (tragic, comic, epic, farcical, etc.)" which life "*might have*." These can be "tested against the information and knowledge that specific forms of human life *have had*." Understanding follows of how cultures conceive life historically. "The degrees of truthfulness and realism of these forms of fiction to the facts of historical reality and our knowledge of it can be measured," though what "reality's" yardstick is, how it escapes rhetorical-tropological distortion, goes unsaid.[113]

Odder still is a footnote White appended to his Holocaust essay:

> Historical discourses consist, obviously [!], of explanations cast in the form of arguments more or less formalizable. I do not address the issue of the relation between explanations cast in the mode of formal arguments and what I would call the explanation-effects produced by the narrativization of events. It is the felicitous combination of arguments with narrative representations which accounts for the appeal of a specifically historical representation of reality. *But the precise nature of the relation between arguments and narrativizations in histories is unclear* [emphasis added].[114]

Working historians will marvel at how an eminent thinker can have avoided, decades-long, solving this most fundamental question, if only provisionally. Left unanswered, it menaces White's own arguments. If obvious things must be said: a narrativization conveying an argument that cannot withstand the test of warrantable assertability—logic and empirical non-falsifiability—cannot represent historical experience in any sense of truthfulness, whatever its poetic charms.[115]

White thinks twentieth-century history's enormities—oddly labeled "'unnatural' events"—render the narrative realism historians favor anachronistic, impotent, and self-blinding.[116] Representational strategy based on literary modernism—White favors Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf—should be devised. "Structural social science proved able to tell us everything about human psychology, society, and culture except why they were so violent, painful, and self-destructive [and why it offered] no enlightenment on how we might ameliorate [them]."[117] The twentieth century's "new form of historical reality... included among its supposedly unimaginable, unthinkable, and unspeakable aspects: the phenomenon of Hitlerism, the Final Solution, total war, nuclear contamination, mass starvation, and ecological suicide; a profound sense of the

incapacity of our sciences to explain, let alone control or contain these; and a growing awareness of the incapacity of our traditional modes of representation even to describe them adequately." Those modes have "proven to be inadequate," though White does not show how.[118]

White's *cri de coeur* evokes sympathy, though Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism should also figure among twentieth-century torments. Understandable too is White's advocacy, following Kant, of writing history appropriate to a future one would wish for humanity and the exhortation, following Schiller, to impose aesthetic order on seemingly formless, chaotic history.[119] Positivist scholasticism's unlovely style disfigures academic historiography. Historians ought indeed to find arresting new representational methods.[120] Yet that White ignores the analytically and imaginatively masterful books written within realist conventions about National Socialism and the Holocaust raises suspicion that he is unaware of them. There are likewise legions of eloquent, gripping memoirs by participants and survivors. This often disturbing yet deeply humane literature disqualifies White's charge of "narrative fetishism," whereby truthful stories about traumas offer but "intellectual mastery" failing to "clear the way for that process of mourning which alone can relieve the burden of history and make a more if not totally realistic [!] perception of current problems possible."[121]

White writes that literary modernism refused the history-fiction distinction, not to merge them but "to image a historical reality purged of the myths of such 'grand narratives' as fate, providence, *Geist*, progress, the dialectic, and even the myth of the final realization of realism itself."[122] These words witness White's struggle with Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment teleology—though, considering *Metahistory*'s call for historiography's re-poeticization and re-enchantment, it is rather attraction and repulsion than struggle. He seems blind to the alternative that empirically anchored historiography offers to metahistorical visions: large-scale narratives addressing modernity's great themes and massive tragedies, while abjuring metaphysical reinsurance and teleological premonition. Such narratives must pose clear and, in principle, answerable questions, and withstand challenge on evidentiary grounds. Whether called theories of history or master narratives, they are philosophically valid and, unlike traditional metahistories and self-serving modernist or postmodernist fictions, existentially and morally useful.

Among such present-day notables in historiographical studies as Frank Ankersmit, Jörn Rüsen, Allan Megill, and Hans Kellner, there is admiration for White's achievement but little inclination to perpetuate the master's tropological science. Crediting modern historians with lasting accomplishments in understanding the human world, they decline to sacrifice these to an analysis two-dimensionally fixed on aesthetics and politics.[123] What exactly historical narratives accomplish, and how, are questions that will ever intrigue the philosophically minded. Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida

and their followers may dismiss historical narrative, in White's words, as "the still undissolved residue of mythic consciousness in modern thought."[124] But White's colleagues in Domańska's and Ankersmit and Kellner's collections, and Reinhart Koselleck too, leave uncontested large-scale synthetic histories' epistemological admissibility and moral-aesthetic value.[125]

White recommends Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* as an interpretive model. Auerbach's analysis, as that of early Christian exegesis of Hebrew scripture as New Testament prefiguration, recalls that events are meaningful both within their own temporal horizons and in future developments' light.[126] Recognition of varying, equally valid interpretive angles smoothes the Wehler-Nipperdey debate's hard edges. The *Kaiserreich* assumes new significance when features that found further development under National Socialism come into view, and when it is seen how the Nazis fitted Imperial Germany into their own genealogy. This is true of the interrelations of the Third Reich, the Cold War states, and reunited Germany today. It is not a question of deterministic causation, but of retrospective understanding and amplification of meaning.

It lies in working historians' interest to banish apodictic metahistories and ideologies, and block tyrannical narratives. But we must, unpoetically speaking, allow warrantably assertible large-scale narratives to contend. Interpretive multiplicity is vigor. Hayden White student Hans Kellner supposes that "the notion of a congeries of incompatible historical worlds is potentially as troubling as the idea of the universe as a chaotic fun-house where different physical rules prevail in different places."[127] But as R. G. Collingwood observed of historians' constructions, "purely imaginary worlds cannot clash and need not agree; each is a world to itself."[128] There is not one but many of Hegel's owls of Minerva, and the terrain they soar over changes from epoch to epoch. Yet it would be foolish owls that, for fear of imposing logic on the landscape, refused to fly.

[1] Leopold von Ranke, *Die großen Mächte*, ed. Friedrich Meinecke (Leipzig, 1916), 13. Hildegard Hunt Von Laue's translation of this passage: "the contemplation of the individual moment in all its truth and of the special development for its own sake doubtless has inestimable value in history. The particular bears the general within itself. But no one can escape the urge to survey the whole from a detached viewpoint. Everyone strives after this in one way or another. Out of the variety of individual perceptions a vision of their unity involuntarily arises." *Theodore H. Von Laue, Leopold Ranke. The Formative Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 181.

This essay derives from a talk at a University of California-wide conference of modern German historians, at Berkeley, 16–18 April 2004. My thanks to the organizers for the opportunity and the audience for inspiration.

[2] Quote cited in Ernst Breisach, *On the Future of History. The Postmodernist Challenge and its Aftermath* (Chicago, 2004), 209. Uncommonly unpopular with most graduate students is Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham's *Using Foucault's Methods* (London, 1999),

an interesting, if arguable, book.

[3] Quoted in Breisach, 123.

[4] On the characteristics of twentieth-century modernity: Peter Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (London, 1994). Cf. Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago, 1998); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK, 1988).

[5] I concentrate on overarching arguments, leaving particular issues aside.

[6] Allan Megill, "'Grand Narrative' and the Discipline of History," in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1995), 152–53, 151–73, passim.

[7] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vierter Band: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949* (Munich, 2003). Volumes 1–2, covering, respectively, the periods 1700–1815 and 1815–1845/49, appeared in 1987, and volume 3, on 1849–1914, in 1995. Wehler's *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen, 1973) appeared in 1985 in English translation as *The German Empire 1871–1918*. The historiographical literature is too vast to cite here. For recent critique and bibliography, See Thomas Welskopp, "Die Sozialgeschichte der Väter. Grenzen und Perspektiven der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998): 173–98, and John Breuilly, "Auf dem Weg zur deutschen Gesellschaft. Der dritte Band von Wehlers 'Gesellschaftsgeschichte,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 23 (1997): 136–68.

[8] David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984). Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1983); idem, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Erster Band. Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (1990); idem, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Zweiter Band. Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (1992). Cf. Blackbourn's later views, emphasizing the considerable structural and behavioral modernity achieved in pre-1914 Germany: *The Long Nineteenth Century. A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York, 1997). Blackbourn's book harmonizes with James Sheehan's *German History 1760–1867* (Oxford, 1989), which rejects *Sonderweg* schemas.

[9] Lutz Niethammer et al., *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland. Historische Einblicke, Fragen, Perspektiven* (Frankfurt/M, 1990). Authors included Irmgard Wilharm, Ute Frevert, Hans Medick, Alf Lüdtke, Detlev J.K. Peukert, and Ulrich Herbert. See also, *inter alia*, Alf Lüdtke, ed. *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995 [German original, 1989]); and the interview-based project, directed by Lutz Niethammer: *Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960*, 2 volumes (Berlin, 1983). Geoff Eley shared the *Alltagsgeschichte* school's inspiration. His *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York, 2002) highlights workers' and leftist intellectuals' role in democratizing liberalism. Women's history proved inflectable along all the lines highlighted in this essay.

[10] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1967; [German original, 1965]).

[11] William W. Hagen, "The Descent of the *Sonderweg*. Hans Rosenberg's History of Old-Regime Prussia." *Central European History* 24 (1991), 24–50; idem, *Ordinary Prussians: Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500–1840* (Cambridge, UK, 2003), 1–25, 646–54. Cf. Hartwin Spenkuch, "Vergleichsweise besonders? Politisches System und Strukturen Preußens als Kern des 'deutschen Sonderwegs,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003): 262–93.

[12] Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past. Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2003). This work joins historiographical critique (with valuable bibliography) to cutting-edge analysis, based on deep substantive knowledge. Cf. Michael Geyer and Konrad H. Jarausch "The Future of the German Past: Transatlantic Reflections for the 1990s," *Central European History* 22 (1989), 228–59, and the exchange in *German Studies Review* 27:2 (1995): Kenneth Barkin, "Bismarck in a Postmodern Age," 241–52, and Geyer and Jarausch, "Great Men and Postmodern Ruptures: Overcoming the 'Belatedness' of German Historiography," 252–74.

[13] Jarausch and Geyer, *Shattered Past*, 59. Further citations of these authors refer to this work alone.

[14] Ibid., 100–1, 103.

[15] Cf. Fritz Ringer, *Max Weber. An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, 2004); Allen Megill, *Prophets of Extremity. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley, 1987); James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York, 1993); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 1989).

[16] Jarausch and Geyer, 11, 15, 106, 353.

[17] "Time and again belying people's expectations, the actual course of events proved the idea of a continuous history in twentieth-century Germany to be a fantasy. Hence, we ought to ask what happens when time does not proceed chronologically but in spurts of experience and memory.... [D]isrupted time and fractured space are the predominant, twentieth-century German experience and, hence, the condition to be understood." Ibid., 356–57. Other citations from x, 11, 15, 106, 353, 355.

[18] Ibid., 340.

[19] Ibid., xi.

[20] Ibid., 25, 107, 352. Emphasis added.

[21] Cultural history is the study of how "individual and social bodies constitute themselves, how they interact with each other, and how they rip themselves apart." Ibid., 15. Cf. Paul Nolte, "Georg Simmels Historische Anthropologie der Moderne. Rekonstruktion eines Forschungsprogramms," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998): 225–48.

[22] Friederich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (Munich, 1908); Bernhard Giesen, *Die Intellektuellen und die Nation. Eine deutsche Achsenzeit* (Frankfurt/M., 1993). Cf. Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity since the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK, 1999).

[23] Jarausch and Geyer, 28.

[24] Ibid., 13, 28; cf. x, 314. Surveying women's identities that have successively contended for hegemony, Jarausch and Geyer discern an encouraging "trajectory of increasing women's control over their bodies, chances for work, and public participation across the different regimes," adding up to cumulative improvement in life quality. Ibid., 267–68.

[25] Though Germano-skeptics might disagree, Jarausch and Geyer find the Federal Republic assuming a "regional leadership role" that is becoming "more acceptable to others and constructive in its results." Ibid., 193, 196.

[26] Ibid., 81–84. Left-wing critics of reunited Germany's social and ecological-environmental deficits play a useful role, "so long as they do not legitimize new forms of repression by becoming themselves hegemonic." Ibid., 84.

[27] Germany was "a site of an unusual accumulation of some general problems of modernity," which "impinged upon an unsettled, still somewhat traditional society and,

therefore, produced more backlash than elsewhere." Ibid., 368–69.
[28] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).
[29] Jarausch and Geyer, 369.
[30] They highlight the rise of pre-fascist folkish ideologies among conservative intellectuals, and echo the Bielefelders in recalling Hitlerism's adumbration in the 1890–1914 Wilhelmine era's nationalist mass mobilizations. They do not press guilt-charges against the Kaiser's Germany for World War I, whose inflammation of right-wing extremism all acknowledge. Ibid., 153, 231.
[31] Ibid., 159. Hitlerism bought popular backing with high living standards precisely when savage war and genocide raged. Ibid. 119ff.
[32] Ibid., 9; cf. ix. They invoke moral sensibility: "induced only in part by total defeat, Germans have turned against their past in a most remarkable process of conversion that has opened a space in German history for its victims. This is cosmopolitanism in the wake of genocidal war...." Ibid., 114.
[33] Ibid., 171; cf. 21.
[34] Ibid., 20, 171, 361, 365.
[35] Ibid., 313.
[36] As in holding that "originally positive developments" in pre-Nazi Germany "curiously mutated into negative directions," converging in a "negative spiral that produced an unimaginable calamity," or in clinically defining human identity as "a great diversity of constantly changing meaning structures embodied in and mediated by discourse practices and codified in a variety of texts." Ibid., 224, 361.
[37] Ibid., 172, 349, 358, 365; cf. 362.
[38] Ibid., x.
[39] Ibid., 127; emphasis added. German settlement in high medieval eastern Europe also figures as "'re-colonization,'" another nationalist myth that, again despite scare-quotes, is likely to be taken at face-value. Ibid., 201.
[40] Ibid., 207. About Imperial Germany's large Polish minority, they write that German nationalists mounted an "assimilation and settlement campaign"—actually, state-administered Germanization and colonization—"against Polish speakers in West Prussia, or Posnan [sic], whose increase threatened the German character of these provinces," though ethnically these were, respectively, evenly mixed and predominantly Polish lands that Prussia acquired only in the Polish partitions. Ibid., 203.
[41] Ibid., 131.
[42] Ibid., 163, 206 (cf. 252), 234.
[43] Ibid., 83, 216, 219, 329, 333.
[44] Ibid., 220.
[45] Jarausch conditions reunited Germany's stability and international acceptance on development of a "pluralized western conception of Germanness," conceding, if only about West German rightists and East Germans still remote from liberal democracy, that this remains partly unachieved. He sees a "tendency [among present-day Germans] toward retrospective self-victimization," which might be "offensive to survivors because it blocks compassion." Ibid., 244, 338.
[46] Ibid., 291, 314.Geyer sees "the emergence of a consumer-oriented society... becoming the narrative of the age." "Concatenation of choice and credit in the mass act of consumption remade German history," rendering post-1945 conversion twofold, both

to liberalism and consumerism. This left West Germans "more dependent on consumerism in providing meaning and orientation than [al]most any other nation"—hardly a complimentary judgment. Ibid. 269–70, 313.

[47] Ibid., 313.

[48] See, for example, Rebecca Harding and William E. Paterson, eds., *The Future of the German Economy. An End to the Miracle?* (Manchester, UK, 2000). Cf. David Held et al., *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford, 1999).

[49] *Sonderbedingungen*. He still defends the *Sonderweg* concept, though tolerating such alternatives as Germany's "individual problematic" (*Eigenproblematik*) or "historical handicaps" (*Vorbelastungen*). Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, III, 469–70. Further citations below of Wehler's work refer to the above-cited *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* alone.

[50] Ibid., III, 470.

[51] Ibid., III, 467–68.

[52] Ibid., III, 1269–70, 1287, 1291. Cf. III, 482, 484–85, 1294. However much recent research on the middle classes has enhanced their social-political and cultural importance, the reproach remains: "why did the bourgeoisie in the *Kaiserreich* evade the question of political power for forty years or come out the loser when power-struggles arose?" It was moral-psychological failure that "bourgeois authority as decision-making power" remained before 1918 unconquered. Ibid., III, 477, 1289.

[53] Ibid., III, 1295.

[54] Ibid., III, 465; IV, 205.

[55] Dismissing historicism that "submits to the power of outcomes emerging triumphant from the historical process, registering their success as irresistible," he deploys Weber's "theory of 'objective possibilities,'" explaining why, at crucial points, alternative paths of thought and action actually present in contemporary consciousness were spurned. Ibid., I, 6–34; III, 1252; IV, 585–86.

[56] Ibid., IV, xix. Wehler emphasizes subjective mentalities rather as they emerge from modernity's kaleidoscopic structural configurations, and respond in social crises to charismatic individuals, than as they shape or create the "evolutionary processes" driven by industrial capitalism and its social-political accompaniments. Whatever New Cultural History's microhistorical strengths may be, it displays "peculiar inaptitude for synthesis, which says something about the weak integrative power of the culture concepts vying in competition." Its "blustering claims of [epistemological] primacy" Wehler dismisses as "antiquated modes of thought, which ought to be left to the theologians with their pretension to competence in matters of final instances." Ibid., IV, xx.

[57] Wehler continues: "thereafter everything was different: the economic system of unchained industrial capitalism, the advancing social hierarchy of market-determined classes, the mighty potential of a new Great Power, the system of political authority of a charismatic leader." Ibid., III, 450.

[58] The Prussian nobility now appear "ominous." The burgeoning ranks of white-collar workers in 1914 stood undecided between "ties of tradition" and "orientation toward modernity," the right-wing nationalism toward which they gravitated figuring as antimodern. Ibid., III, 457, 468, 1250, 1254, 1273, 1276–77, 1284; cf. III, 481.

[59] Ibid., III, 1251. Wehler echoes Marx's rhetoric, proclaiming industrial capitalism's "deepest law of development" the business cycle—"the irregular rhythm of conjuncture and crisis, which ever since [its first appearance] has confronted society and politics with new influences and conditions." Ibid., III, 452.

[60] Ibid., III, 466, 485.
[61] Ibid., III, 1284ff.
[62] Ibid., III, 483–84. "After the grand epoch of Napoleon I, it was the young German Empire alone that, during the long nineteenth century, experienced the shaping force of charismatic rule—and across such an extraordinarily long time-span that it deeply stamped political mentality and culture. Susceptibility to an outstanding leadership personality, longing for a new charismatic ruler, survived into the mid-twentieth century." Ibid., III, 1285.
[63] Ibid., IV, 210. Imperial Germany in 1914 possessed "a high measure of security under the law, rights of political participation as in few other western states, social welfare provisions otherwise known only in Austria and Switzerland, freedom to express stringent criticism, successes for the political opposition, freedom of opinion with rare intrusions of censorship, educational opportunities, social mobility, rising prosperity." Ibid. IV, 203.
[64] Ibid., IV, 203, 215 (cf. III, 1274–75, 1281). The political opposition might have acted "by means, for example, of a persistent blockade in the Reichstag and its legislative commissions, forcing it finally to adjust itself to the parliamentary constellation of power." Ibid., IV, 201.
[65] Ibid., III, 1291. The burden of precipitous modernization resists the "depathologization" Wehler charges Blackbourn and Eley and other Anglo-American scholars with promoting through emphasis on Imperial Germany's successful embourgeoisement and Hitler's dictatorship's merely short-term origins in post-1918 capitalist crisis. Ibid., III, 468–70.
[66] Ibid., IV, 225, 589–91.
[67] Ibid., IV, 986. In the Weimar elites' eyes, a Hitlerian "'union of the strong hand,' under a prominent leadership figure and based on plebiscitary populism, stood in the tradition of post-1870 '*Sammlungspolitik*' [coalition of upper-class interests], when Bismarck functioned as figurehead, securing in the long run the hierarchy of privilege." In 1933 such an outcome "was only possible through neo-authoritarian politics resting on the NS-movement's mass base under its charismatic 'second Bismarck,'" which "promised, as the myth of 'national awakening' suggested, a propagandistically effective radical new beginning under the constellation of a pitiless anti-Marxism." Ibid., IV, 592.
[68] Ibid., IV, 992. Cf. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 1997),
[69] Seemingly addressing the now-vanished interpretation, once influentially voiced by Gerhard Ritter (*Das deutsche Problem* [Munich, 1948]), that treated Hitler as Germany's alien nemesis, Wehler insists that "Hitler remains a product of German history, in which the preconditions for dictatorial charismatic rule had arisen... There is no decisive argument that could banish from the world this nexus between Hitler and German society." Ibid., IV, 993–94.
[70] These developments sustained under postwar conditions the "utopia of an 'egalitarian *Volksgemeinschaft* based on individual accomplishment' which was, evidently, enormously attractive to the younger generations." Ibid., IV, 986, 988–91.
[71] Ibid., IV, 994.
[72] Volker Berghahn, *Modern Germany: Society, Economics, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK, 1988); idem, *Imperial Germany 1871–1914: Economy, Society, Culture and Politics* (New York, 1994). Heinrich August Winkler's *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, 2 vols. (Munich, 2001) accepts the *Sonderweg*, but argumentation through narration leaves this work undertheorized. See I, 1–3; II, 655, and 640–57, passim.

[73] As, for example, when bourgeois liberals accepted partnership with Bismarck rather than fighting uncompromisingly for parliamentary supremacy.
[74] Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866–1918*, I, 812, 828, 831, 878; II, 878. Further citations below are from this above-cited two-volume work alone.
[75] Ibid., I, 824; II, 905. German culture and politics were "not even distantly a prologue to 1933." Further on 1914 Germany: "by no means was a rigid friend-foe thinking dominant, and neither was an authoritarian or subject mentality, nor lack of self-criticism." Ibid., I, 823. Against the Wehlerites, Nipperdey condemned those who saw in the German Empire an "'aberration'" or "'wrong path,'" who saw in the Imperial regime primarily "a system of conservative self-preservation," and held that social imperialism led the 1914 government to recklessly risk or provoke war. Wilhelmine imperialism reflected mass enthusiasm, as in other European nations. The German government could not willfully manipulate it. Ibid., II, 878, 884–85, 890.
[76] Ibid., I, 822.
[77] Ibid., I, 812; II, 886.
[78] Ibid., II, 880–81 (cf. I, 812); 887.
[79] Ibid., I, 813.
[80] Ibid., II, 880, 888.
[81] Ibid., II, 898.
[82] Nipperdey follows Fritz Stern in speaking of the "vulgar Idealism," "vulgar romanticism," and "vulgar progressivism" that stamped the various intellectual-cultural milieus, granting that the first two, voicing cultural crisis, bred anti-democratic *ressentiments*. Ibid., I, 818–19; II, 881. Cf. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961).
[83] Nipperdey described it feelingly, in present tense: "middle-class people living in and for culture lose their older, self-contained and, so to speak, self-evident consciousness of culture's continuing existence and value and their role in it, and they lose their sense of self-assurance." *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866–1918*, I, 825.
[84] Ibid., I, 820, 832, 834.
[85] Ibid., II, 878.
[86] New conflict with "the proletariat" interrupted the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie's confrontation with the nobility. Liberalism "lurched to the right before it had its day." Ibid., II, 892. Perhaps not wishing to credit the Bielefelders' originality, Nipperdey recalls Thorstein Veblen's *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (1915), emphasizing rapid socio-economic modernization's dysfunctional effects under an aristocratic-monarchical government facing populist-democratic challenges. Ibid., II, 879.
[87] It was a "halting, braked, contradictory modernization," a "discord and splitting of modernity," a "tamed and divided, fenced-in modernity." Ibid., II, 881–82, 892.
[88] Ibid., I, 893.
[89] "Those injured by modernization and fearful of it supported the old 'system,'" wielding for self-preservation "wholly modern power-instruments." Ibid., I, 903.
[90] Ibid., I, 905. Cf. I, 816, 829.
[91] Arthur Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany. The Birth of the German Republic* (Boston, 1964 [German original, 1928]); Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Stuttgart, 1955). On Hans Rosenberg, see Hagen, "The Descent of the *Sonderweg*" (note 11, above) and the literature cited therein.

[92] Yet Eric Hobsbawm and Mark Mazower have recently underscored that, in the interwar world, devotion to liberal democracy was minority faith, especially after 1929. It might ultimately have retreated to Anglophone shores, or been extirpated. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York, 1994), 109–41; Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York, 1998), 3–41.

[93] In *Posthistoire. Has History Come to an End?* (London, 1992 [German original 1989]), Lutz Niethammer defends a democratic left perspective against an array of continental European writers, including commentators on the post-Marxist, postmodernist present who, following the death of their multifarious philosophical-ideological gods, pessimistically descry no meaningful historical future. Cf. Breisach's discussion of the (except for Fukuyama) also pessimistic "structuralist postmodernists." *Future of History*, 27–56.

[94] In 1992 Niethammer mapped his own version of the *Sonderweg*, emphasizing interplay from Bismarck to Helmut Kohl between conservative political elites' pursuit of national interests in the foreign-policy sphere and their efforts, through adoption of comparatively generous, state-funded social welfare programs, to gain broad populist support. Niethammer thought the old question—whether nationally specific characteristics of the German bourgeoisie unfitted it for assuming power—still worth pondering. His answer was that it was too fragmented to attain political hegemony. Here his views, though different, are not incompatible with Wehler's. Lutz Niethammer, "Geht der deutsche Sonderweg weiter?" in idem, *Deutschland danach. Postfaschistische Gesellschaft und nationales Gedächtnis*, eds. Ulrich Herbert and Dirk van Laak (Bonn, 1999), 201–24.

[95] They embraced also the "everyday life" and communal (vs. academic) "history workshop" movements of the 1980s.

[96] And despite the failure of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, seemingly destined as the new "ruling class," to achieve or sustain hegemony. Niethammer et al., *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland*, 12, 14–15, 29–30. Soviet power betrayed the Enlightenment: in Talleyrand's words, "this was more than a crime; it was a blunder." Ibid., 37.

[97] Ibid., 38.

[98] Ibid., 612–13, 618, 621. Cf. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Deutsches Bürgertum nach 1945: Exitus oder Phönix aus der Asche?" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 617–34. Wehler traces post-1945 socio-economic reconstitution of the West German bourgeoisie, especially its privileged and socially exclusionary upper strata, without arguing for its political-ideological hegemony in the sense of nineteenth-century Enlightenment-derived liberalism, but emphasizing the social-structural inequality that post-1945 bourgeois wealth and privilege entail and sustain.

[99] Pre-1914 bourgeois accomplishments, including voice in power, were real, but mass democracy was more threat than enticement. In Ulrich Herbert's account of Weimar's fall, the bourgeoisie figures solely as interest-driven capitalist and conservative power-elites whose single-minded determination to break the Social Democratic movement and seize state control predominates. Like Nipperdey, these authors beg the great question by failing to address Nazism's social-political character and historical origins. Though they reject Marxist orthodoxies, they suggest that Hitlerism was, alongside Enlightenment's betrayal, principally a bourgeois counter-coup in the class struggle. Ibid., 413–37.

[100] Ernest Nagel, "Determinism in History," in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 1974), 187–215. The logical alternative, sometimes embraced by anti-determinist historians, is to ascribe events to accident and randomness, though if this

were one's prior expectation, historical research's costs could hardly be justified.
[101] Embittered by Kuhn's impact, a colleague of Danto's recalled a sixteenth-century scholasticist's complaint: "wretched Luther has emptied the lecture halls." Arthur Danto, "The Decline and Fall of the Analytical Philosophy of History," in Ankersmit and Kellner, eds., 84 and 70–88, passim.
[102] On this problem (epistemological holism) in analytical philosophy generally, see Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," in Charles Guignon and David I. Hiley, eds., *Richard Rorty* (Cambridge, 2003), 160 and 158–80, passim.
[103] Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).
[104] Quotations, both from Rorty's works and critiques of them, in Guignon and Hiley, eds., 12–13, 52, 64–65, and 158. Cf. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), 3–13, 176, and passim.
[105] Guignon and Hiley, eds., 16.
[106] Ibid., 81–104, 124–38.
[107] 1993 Interview with Hayden White, in Ewa Domańska, ed., *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville, 1998), 29.
[108] Hayden White, "Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in idem, *Figural Realism. Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore, 1999), 5.
[109] Ibid., 9.
[110] Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation," in *Figural Realism*, 28 and 27–42, passim. This essay first appeared in Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).
[111] Though White's stress on historiography's poetic and philosophico-mythic dimensions was a grandly emancipatory step away from naive and self-righteous positivism, he evidently never considered that the tropological modes historians favor might be deliberately chosen or entailed by other priorities—dependent, not independent variables.
[112] Domańska, ed., 16.
[113] White, "Literary Theory and Historical Writing," 18–19.
[114] White, *Figural Realism*, 182.
[115] Despite the truth-concept's epistemological difficulties, one can follow Polish historian-philosopher Jerzy Topolski, communist era veteran: "the category of truth is also a moral one. It means, for the historian, the exhortation to be honest and to serve human beings, who cannot rest satisfied with lies or substitutes for truth. I treat the category of truth as one of the points of support that human beings need in life." 1993 Topolski interview in Domańska, ed., 136–67. On poststructural postmodernist positions on truth, see Breisach, 89ff.
[116] White, "The Modernist Event" (1996), in *Figural Realism*, 81.
[117] White, "Formalist and Contextualist Strategies in History Explanation" (1989), in *Figural Realism*, 48.
[118] Ibid., 41–42; cf. 81–82.
[119] 1993 interview with Hans Kellner, in Domańska, ed., 61, 64–65.
[120] As—overlooking better known cases—did Klaus Theweleit in *Männerfantasien* (Frankfurt am Main: Roter Stern, 1977–78), Lutz Niethammer and his colleagues in the *Alltagsgeschichte* camp, Alexander Negt and Oskar Kluge in *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt/M, 1993); and ethnohistorian Richard Price in *Alabi's World* (Baltimore,

1990).

[121] White, *Figural Realism*, 82. In my view, the "burden of history" cannot be "relieved," but only (if not denied) borne with more or less comprehension of how it came into being. White advances a baffling misreading of Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1998), sapping confidence in his judgment of professional historians' work. He objects that Browning "fears the effects of any aestheticization" of his theme, "especially by making it into the subject matter of a narrative, a story that, by its possible 'humanization' of its perpetrators, might enfable the event—render it fit therefore for investment by fantasies of intactness, wholeness, and health which the very occurrence of the event denies" (*Figural Realism*, 81). Yet Browning's book certainly possesses an artful—that is, aesthetic—dimension, presenting a story that humanizes the perpetrators, but with just the opposite effect White supposes. For Browning's demonstration of what ordinary men were capable of, under the conditions prevailing in their police battalion, precisely defeats fantasies of intactness and health that one might be tempted to associate with ordinary men, in contradistinction to tyrants and sadists, especially considering that most of Browning's actors were not ideological Nazis.

[122] White, *Figural Realism*, 100.

[123] See these four authors' contributions to Domańska's book, and Kellner's, Megill's, and Ankersmit's chapters in Ankersmit and Kellners, eds., *New Philosophy of History*. See also Georg G. Iggers' skeptical appraisal in "Historiographie zwischen Forschung und Dichtung. Gedanken über Hayden Whites Behandlung der Historiographie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 327–40, and White's response, ibid., 341–49, in which he rejects charges of "linguistic determinism" (349). For other evidence of coolness toward postmodern theory in mainstream west German historiographical circles, see Georg G. Iggers, "Geschichtstheorie zwischen postmoderner Philosophie und geschichtswissenschaftlicher Praxis," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 335–46, and Chris Lorenz, "Postmoderne Herausforderungen an die Gesellschaftsgeschichte?" Ibid., 24 (1998): 617–32.

[124] White, *Figural Realism*, 21.

[125] Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt/M, 1979). English translation: *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA, 1985).

[126] Hayden White, "Auerbach's Literary History. Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism," in *Figural Realism*, 87–100. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 2003 [German original, 1946]), 554–58.

[127] Ankersmit and Kellner, eds., 18.

[128] Quoted by Megill in Domańska, ed., 5.