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Chris Lorenz

## Beyond Good and Evil? The German Empire of 1871 and Modern German Historiography

**Whenever contemporary historians** go at each other's throats over differences of opinion on current history, their more serene colleagues often offer the following consoling reflection. To their minds, contemporary history is history in which many parties still have a stake because individuals and groups are generally attached to the image presented of them. And where different interests are involved, conflicts of interest are never far removed. Consequently, a calm and detached approach to the past requires severing the direct link with it, which in turn only happens with the passage of time. Temporal distance is in this view a necessary condition of scholarly distance;<sup>1</sup> hot history must first 'cool off' in the archives for a generation or two before it can be warmed up on paper in an adequate way by historians. For Clio's owl, too, only flies at dusk.

The historiography of the Second German Empire poses an intriguing problem for historians of this persuasion. For though the Empire ceased to exist in 1918 and therefore has had sufficient time to cool off, discussion of this period continues to inflame the minds of German historians. Just like the Third Reich, this period seems to belong to that part of German history that refuses to change into 'true' disinterested history. It is 'abnormal' history without a natural half-life: 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will' [the past that won't pass].<sup>2</sup> It is typical of this sort of history that research has not led to a significant decrease in the number of interpretations. The analysis of the historiography of this period given by Dieter Langewiesche in 1979 still holds true in 1995. He remarked that a layman seeking to be informed about this period by different historians would only be thrown into confusion, since the historiography of the Empire gave the impression that his-

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torians had discovered totally different German nation-states in the years 1871–1918 which had only the slightest features in common.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s historians such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Michaël Stürmer would repeat this analysis in different ways.<sup>4</sup>

The explanation of the strikingly controversial character of the historiography of the Empire must be sought in its traumatic sequel. The fall of the Second German Empire in 1918 and the rise of the Third Reich in 1933 were, in the final analysis, only separated by the fourteen years of the Weimer Republic, and if the presidential cabinets of 1930–3 are left out of consideration, this period did not even last a dozen years. The question whether the historical roots of the Third Reich should not be sought largely in the Second Empire was therefore more or less unavoidable. The Empire belongs since 1933 to the direct pre-history of the Third Reich and it is especially in this context that historians have judged it since 1945.

The Empire confronts the historian simultaneously with the question of the continuity of German history after 1871 and with that of German national identity. After all, this Empire embodies the first national state of the Germans and the Third Reich the murderous perversion of German nationalism.<sup>5</sup> The question of what relationship existed between the German nationalism of the Second Empire and the national socialism of the Third Reich has therefore figured on the historical agenda since 1945. The same holds true for the political cultures of the Second and Third Reich, between which the Weimar Republic seemed to be no more than a brief democratic intermezzo.

Seen against this background, it probably comes as no surprise that so much energy has been expended in Germany on research into and interpretation of the Empire. In the following discussion the interpretations that have dominated the debate since the late 1960s are charted. The views of historians Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Michaël Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Gerhard A. Ritter and Thomas Nipperdey are aired in turn, after which the influence of the critique on Wehler's present position is assessed and finally the balance of the discussion drawn up.

The complex situation that results from the diversity of historical interpretations, it should be noted, is more an advantage than a disadvantage from a scholarly point of view, since each interpre-

tation of the past only takes shape and acquires its identity in confrontation with other interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

The point of departure of the current discussion of the Empire is still the interpretation advanced at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s by the Bielefeld school.<sup>7</sup> Among this illustrious tribe of historians, who originally were mostly connected to the University of Bielefeld, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka are the informal chieftains.<sup>8</sup> Their view of the Empire, which was strongly inspired by the work of Eckhart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg, is enshrined in Wehler's 1975 book *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*. Since then, this view has been further elaborated and given nuance in many studies, but has not fundamentally changed.

The heart of the Bielefeld interpretation of the Empire is the thesis that the history of Germany between 1871 and 1945 — the famous German *Sonderweg* — was characterized by the absence of a political modernization in conjunction with an unparalleled economic modernization. By political modernization, the Bielefeld historians mean democratization and parliamentarization in the liberal sense, such as took place in England, the United States and France. They consider the discrepancy between a pre-modern authoritarian political system and a modern market economy to be the fundamental problem of contemporary German history.<sup>9</sup>

The political culture of the Empire was dominated by the authoritarian, aristocratic élite of Prussia, which attempted to hold back any form of democratization. Although on paper the Empire was a constitutional monarchy, in reality it was a 'pseudo-constitutional semi-absolutism'.<sup>10</sup> When all was said and done, the three pillars of the absolute state — the army, the civil service and diplomatic service — remained in the hands of the monarch and the aristocrats without any form of regular, constitutional parliamentary control. The German state was thus anything but a neutral entity guided by the general good (*Staatsräson*), but rather a naked class state that also in foreign affairs primarily tried to defend the interests of the ruling classes.<sup>11</sup>

Wehler characterized the political culture under Bismarck as a 'Bonapartist half-dictatorship'.<sup>12</sup> This type of political regime was distinguished by a combination of limited concessions on the one hand, such as the introduction of various social insurance schemes and a relatively progressive universal male suffrage, and naked

repression and stigmatization of political opponents on the other. After Bismarck's resignation in 1890, the 'Bonapartist half-dictatorship' changed into an 'authoritarian polycracy of competing centres of power' — in reality a 'polycracy without co-ordination' — which Wehler used to explain the political zig-zags of the Wilhelmian period.<sup>13</sup> New interest groups such as the agrarian *Bund der Landwirte* and mass organizations such as the *All-deutscher Verband* and the *Flottenverein* were able to acquire a position of power in that period alongside the Kaiser, the upper echelons of the civil service and the military.<sup>14</sup> After 1890 the large landowners and industrialists were able to incorporate their interest groups into the apparatus of the state and thus directly put their mark on state policy. The weak position of the political parties and the strong position of the interest groups were therefore complementary phenomena in the Empire.<sup>15</sup> These interest groups organized enterprises more and more into cartels that divided up the market through price agreements. In this way the interventionist state and 'organized capitalism' arose after 1890.<sup>16</sup>

The aristocratic élite was said to have successfully defended its positions of power in the state until 1918, though it had to share economic power in the Empire with the German bourgeoisie, which had industrialized the country at a rapid pace. For the aristocracy this co-operation was part of its policy of 'defensive modernization', which was intended to maintain the political status quo through economic innovation. In exchange for a free hand in the economy, the bourgeoisie had been prepared to abandon its political liberalism and resign itself to the role of 'junior partner' of the aristocracy. For this reason, the influence of liberalism on the politics of the Empire remained strikingly weak. Among the bourgeoisie the fear of the 'rabble', alias the 'red threat', played an important role, especially after the Great Depression of 1873.

The German state had fought against advancing social democracy with all the means at its disposal, such as the police, the civil service, education, religion and the army. Because of their ideologically internationalist orientation, the socialists were put beyond the pale of the German nation as *vaterlandslose Gesellen*. Bismarck attempted to neutralize the social and political tensions caused by this policy with two Bonapartist power tactics.<sup>17</sup> The first tactic consisted of redirecting domestic tension to the foreign arena, the so-called policy of 'social imperialism'.<sup>18</sup> In this context foreign conflicts were regularly stirred up in order to divert atten-

tion from domestic problems. His second tactic consisted of politically stigmatizing minorities in the Empire — the so-called *Reichsfeinde* — who were said to threaten the Empire from within. Through his policy of ‘negative integration’ the majority of Germans was set against a minority, thus distracting their attention from the real sources of conflict and artificially inducing a feeling of national unity.<sup>19</sup> In this connection Catholics, left-liberals, socialists and Poles were chosen by Bismarck as the favourite scapegoats of the official German nation. In this way, nationalism acquired an increasingly aggressive and anti-socialist character after 1870.<sup>20</sup> After 1890, a clear anti-semitic undertone was also detectable. Thus German political culture had already become dangerously inured to discriminated minorities during the Second Empire.<sup>21</sup>

The feeling, harboured by the traditional élites, that internal (especially socialist) and external (especially Russian) threats to their position would only become greater in the course of time created an increasing willingness to accept the risk of a war of ‘liberation’. Thus, according to Wehler, the first world war can best be interpreted as a ‘flight forward’ of the German élites. This fatal flight could not be stopped in July 1914 by parliament because the army and foreign policy both fell outside its competence. The anachronistic division of power of 1871 between the legislative and executive branches thus proved definitely fatal for Germany in 1914. In this sense, Bismarck’s political heirs did ultimately reap what the Iron Chancellor had sown at the founding of the Empire.

The weakness of political liberalism in the political culture of the Empire is in this interpretation the crucial problem to be explained.<sup>22</sup> For elsewhere in Western Europe the liberals were able to achieve an increasing parliamentarization of politics. This ‘failure’ of the German liberals is usually attributed by the Bielefeld school to three factors: first, the failure of the revolution of 1848; second, Bismarck’s successful policy of 1866 of dividing the liberals into two factions and third, the political capitulation of the liberals to the conservatives in 1878 out of fear of the ‘red threat’ and in exchange for liberalism in the economy.<sup>23</sup> In the Bielefeld interpretation the political culture of the Empire was therefore comparatively undemocratic, authoritarian and illiberal, and these characteristics were directly connected to the dominant political and social position of the Prussian aristocracy.<sup>24</sup> The Second Empire bequeathed this undemocratic heritage to the Third Reich; in this view, in other words, there is a definite con-

tinuity in political culture. Needless to say, in keeping with good German custom, this proposition did not remain unchallenged.<sup>25</sup>

Important resistance to the Bielefeld interpretation was offered by Hillgruber, Hildebrand and Stürmer, who in opposition to Wehler and his group emphasized precisely the *discontinuity* between the political culture of the Second and Third Reichs. In their eyes there is no question of a German *Sonderweg* in contemporary history, but only of a German *Eigenweg* with a *Sonderfall* — Hitler.<sup>26</sup> To their minds the non-parliamentary structure of the Empire is not connected with the weakness of the German liberals, but rather with the geographical position of Germany. The problem of the geographical position of the German Empire lay in the fact that by its very existence it disturbed the normal balance of power among the European great powers.<sup>27</sup>

From the time of the Thirty Years War, Central Europe had been a neutral territory between the great powers where none was allowed to intervene. After the defeat of Napoleon, the European state system was again stabilized by a 'neutralization of the centre', for which the Germans paid the price in terms of political fragmentation. Only when Prussia surpassed Austria as an industrial great power was a solution to the 'German problem' possible, the Germans finally obtaining their — belated — national state in 1871. From that point on, the problem of this belated nation was, however, that it was 'too big to cohabit with Europe and too weak to control it'. This formulation captures the tragedy or the fate of contemporary German history.<sup>28</sup> This half-hegemonic Germany stood all alone, permanently surrounded by the other European great powers. And since the latter exerted continual pressure on the German borders, 'their guns kept trained on the Empire', as Bismarck put it, there was in the final analysis the question of a permanent international menace. For this reason, the young German national state could not really afford a parliamentary political structure.<sup>29</sup> In this interpretation it was the 'precarious' (Stürmer), if not 'impossible' (Hillgruber) geopolitical position that forced Germany to solve its problem through the maxim of Frederick the Great: *Sieg oder Untergang* (conquer or perish). Thus, it was not the political culture of the Empire that was special, as the Bielefeld school asserted, but rather the fate reserved for Germany as the new *Macht in der Mitte* in the concert of the great

powers. The Empire could 'well exist, but not grow' and therefore could not be like the others, expansionist and imperialist.<sup>30</sup>

The political genius Bismarck had always had a keen eye for the European conditions of existence of the German Empire. For that reason, until 1890 Germany conducted itself as a 'satiated power'. This position cost the Germans dear, but was the price they paid, according to Stürmer, for peace in Europe. This price consisted of the acceptance of large-scale emigration, the *Kulturkampf*, the anti-socialist laws and the destruction of liberal ideals.<sup>31</sup> Thus Bismarck's striving to stabilize German social relations was not the Bonapartist power politics of a threatened traditional élite, as the Bielefeld school insisted, but rather a peace-loving policy that demonstrated wise statesmanship. The compass by which he steered was not domestic but rather foreign policy.<sup>32</sup>

This course, however, was no longer open to Bismarck's successors. In the era of imperialism the explosion of industrialization and population growth made it impossible for them to abstain any longer from control over raw materials and markets for goods. A world economy necessitated, after all, a world politics. In the phase of fast-paced industrialization after Bismarck the 'restless empire' could no longer be held in check by a conservative, political *Stillstandsutopie* (static utopia).<sup>33</sup> This by no means meant, however, that the German political élite accepted the risk of the first world war, which was rather the tragic result of many international circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

Hillgruber stresses that after 1890 military, in addition to political, factors made Germany's situation steadily more untenable, for technology in the 'technical-scientific mass society' revolutionized not only the economy but also the business of warfare, thus rendering Germany's geopolitical position to an increasing extent intolerable. Advances in military technology made it increasingly easier to bridge great distances by force of arms. For this reason the 'empire in the centre' lost more and more political and military weight in comparison to the imperial powers on the edges: Russia, France, and England. In the age of imperialism, therefore, just to remain a 'half-hegemonic' power in Europe required Germany to thrust itself into world politics. To do so it had to build a fleet, acquire colonies and accept the risk of confrontation with other powers.<sup>35</sup> In formulaic terms the 'German problem' read *Weltmacht oder Niedergang* (world power or decline).<sup>36</sup>



In contrast to Bismarck, it was precisely the forces striving for more influence for parliament, the liberals, that had remained blind to the limiting European conditions of German politics. Had they not as early as 1848 ardently espoused the Great-German (*Grossdeutsch*) solution to the national question? And had they not that long ago pushed for the foundation of German colonies and the construction of a fleet, in other words for a policy that was internationally speaking extremely risky?<sup>37</sup> If indeed the political culture of the Empire had experienced any special problem at all, it was, according to Hildebrand, far more an excess than a deficiency of parliamentary influence on the ship of state.<sup>38</sup> Thus he brusquely upended the Bielefeld school's views on the 'democratic deficit' of the Empire and the political myopia of the aristocracy.

These historians do not, therefore, deny that German political culture was different, less liberal and parliamentary, than that of other Western European systems. They simply emphasize that the German *Eigenweg* is inextricably bound up with the German *Mittellage*. For this reason, the political culture associated with the German *Eigenweg* may not in their eyes be criticized by the standards of the Western parliamentary systems, as the Bielefeld school did. For to do that is to stamp the West as the norm and brand the 'empire of the centre' as a deviation, when in fact the German experience embodies simply a variant of the 'general European pattern'.<sup>39</sup> Such an approach neglects the fundamental historical datum that the late German state formation in the centre of Europe entailed its own completely specific problems.<sup>40</sup>

Aside from the obvious differences between the views of the German *Mittellage* historians and the Bielefeld school, there are also interesting similarities. As far as the nature of German political culture is concerned, Stürmer and Hillgruber also point out the decisive influence of Prussia and its aristocratic *Führungsgruppen* under the leadership of Bismarck. From the very start this conservative monarchy had dominated the Empire, thus ensuring that its constitutional structure was a compromise between monarchy and liberal democracy, in which the liberal forces had to swallow a great deal from Bismarck. The constitution lacked, for example, any bill of human and civil rights, and sovereignty was vested not in the people but in the governments in the Bundesrat.<sup>41</sup>

Another interesting area of agreement is the significance attached to the founding period of the Empire. Like the Bielefeld school, Stürmer holds the opinion that the authoritarian political

culture was definitively shaped in the tender youth of the Empire. This culture was manifest in the German constitution, which like any constitution was the expression of historical relations of power. In this case, the constitution bore the indelible imprint of the Prussian army, which had brought about German unification 'from above'. The foundational myth of the Empire was consequently not the liberal one in which the emancipated citizens had called the national state into existence through a collective act of will, but rather the myth of military triumph.<sup>42</sup> Due in part to this feat of arms, the military aristocracy of old Prussia continued to regard itself as the 'first estate' of the new Empire.

This 'first estate' had not foreseen, however, that the first German nation state would become the grave of that old Prussia; from a Prussian perspective, German history after 1871 was a 'long deathbed'.<sup>43</sup> As it happened, the Empire was not only a Great Prussia, but also a German nation state in which the liberals were able to make a modest mark. Its political culture therefore had not one, but two faces: monarchical *and* liberal-democratic. And this liberal-democratic face of the Empire was in turn split into plebiscitary and representative halves.<sup>44</sup> This singular compound of political cultures can best be characterized, according to Stürmer, as 'Caesarist', and not therefore Bonapartist, because the position and style of Bismarck's rule most resembled those of a Caesar. Although time worked to the advantage of parliament, power in the Empire remained, in Stürmer's view, concentrated in the chancellor, the Prussian bureaucracy and the army.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to this criticism of the Bielefeld interpretation from, for the most part, conservative quarters, starting in the early 1980s a neo-Marxist critique was formulated by two English historians, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn. They stoke their English stoves with the Bielefeld thesis that a pre-modern, authoritarian political culture forms the historical bridge between the Second Empire and the Third Reich.<sup>46</sup> To their minds, this thesis rests on two untenable assumptions.

The first untenable supposition is that political modernization did not occur in the Empire because Germany had not undergone its liberal political revolution in 1848, and the second that the liberal bourgeoisie in the Empire had capitulated politically to a feudal aristocracy.<sup>47</sup> According to these authors, both these

assumptions are based on mythical representations borrowed from English and French history. By this they mean the notion that the aristocracy is inherently feudal and the bourgeoisie by nature liberal and the idea associated with this view that a non-liberal bourgeoisie thus 'missed' its revolution and must be 'feudalized'. In this pattern of thinking social classes are identified by the class-consciousness attributed to them and not on the basis of the relations of production. These conceptions, according to the two Englishmen, have little to do with historical reality, because the bourgeoisie maintains just as little a necessary relationship with political liberalism as the aristocracy does with feudalism.

Here the myth is at play that a bourgeois revolution can only be made by a class-conscious (=liberal) bourgeoisie and that this has to be a dramatic event. According to these English historians, this myth derives from simplistic interpretations of English and French history long ago refuted by modern historical research.<sup>48</sup> In their eyes, it is, moreover, historically speaking nonsense to call German history special, based on an idealized view of Western European history, and to explain its special course — its *Sonderweg* — on the basis of what did *not* occur there, in other words, the non-occurrence of a bourgeois revolution and the absence of a parliamentary democracy.

Eley and Blackburn maintain that the fundamental mistake in the Bielefeld interpretation is the insufficient distinction made between the introduction of a parliamentary system in politics and the introduction of a capitalist mode of production in the economy.<sup>49</sup> Both matters are designated by the concept 'bourgeois revolution', when in fact they are anything but identical. The capitalist mode of production can, as it turns out, flourish under non-parliamentary-democratic political systems, as the experience under fascism, among others, amply proves. Eley reserves use of the term 'bourgeois revolution' for politics that make the capitalist mode of production possible and consequently arrives at the curious conclusion that the Empire *cannot* have not gone through its bourgeois revolution<sup>50</sup> since capitalism blossomed there as it did in few other places. The Bielefeld historians did not recognize this bourgeois revolution since it did not appear in its mythical form: in Germany, after all, in contrast to England and France, no kings were deposed and decapitated. On the basis of these considerations, Eley and Blackburn conclude that in the Empire it is more appropriate to speak of a 'bourgeois' aristocracy than of a

'feudalized' bourgeoisie.<sup>51</sup> Thus in the neo-Marxist interpretation as well, the Bielefeld thesis is turned on its head.<sup>52</sup>

In the view of the English historians, an important consequence of the Bielefeld school's misconstrual of the relationships of power in the Empire is a misrepresentation of its political culture. Because the politics of the Empire is interpreted as a successful struggle of the feudal élites against the democratic forces, these politics are reduced in essence to a successful manipulation of the masses by the authoritarian élite. This misreading comes out in an exemplary way in Wehler's emphasis on Bismarck's Bonapartist power tactics, such as 'social imperialism' and 'negative integration'. The masses are incorrectly reduced to a passive object of élite politics: the independent political activity of the 'base' is kept out of the picture in the Bielefeld interpretation. In this way it is overlooked that the political mobilization of the masses in Germany actually took place *earlier* than elsewhere in Europe and that in this respect the German political system was more advanced than backward. The nationalistic mass organizations of the period after 1890, such as the *Flottenverein*, the *Alldeutscher Verband* and the *Bund der Landwirte*, clearly illustrate this development.<sup>53</sup> These radical right-wing nationalistic organizations, which were, according to the Bielefeld interpretation, manipulated by the élites, are pictured by Eley and Blackbourn as primarily *völkische* organizations of the recently mobilized social groups, such as the middle classes and farmers. This *völkisch* — new right — nationalism collided squarely with the official — old right — nationalism of the governments of the German states. For this reason Eley concludes that it is not really plausible to suppose that these movements were manipulated by the élites.

Berghahn and the other Bielefeld historians are not very impressed by this evidence and argumentation. As it turned out, both the official and the *völkisch* nationalism resulted in the same call for more armaments, thus being in Berghahn's eyes no more than two variants of the same *Rüstungsnationalismus* (armaments nationalism).<sup>54</sup>

The questions placed on the agenda by the English historians concerning the political culture of the Empire prove to be more important than the answers they give. Their criticism of the Bielefeld interpretation that it had only replaced the positive Bismarck myth of the conservative historians with a negative version of the same myth touched on a sore spot of this interpretation.<sup>55</sup> For

in both cases Bismarck is presented as the solitary individual manipulating the strings of German politics; only the assessment of his puppet show differs.<sup>56</sup>

The same applies to their questions concerning the exact relations among bourgeoisie, liberalism, aristocracy and democracy. Though few historians have adopted their neo-Marxist view, Eley's and Blackbourn's intervention has transformed characterizations in use in this debate of the Empire, such as 'illiberal', 'unbourgeois', 'undemocratic' and 'aristocratic', into problems for which a solution is being sought in comparative European history.<sup>57</sup>

Recently, Wolfgang Mommsen incorporated into his own interpretation of the Empire the Anglo-Saxon criticism of the manipulative image of politics. He subscribes to the point made by the English historians that Bismarck's policies have been interpreted too personally both by his conservative admirers and his liberal critics. To his mind as well, the politics of the Empire should be explained more through the changing social relations than is the case with Wehler. This can be done by viewing the political structure of the German Empire as a 'system of neglected decisions' linked to the unstable balance of power around 1870 between the primarily conservative aristocracy and the primarily liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>58</sup> As a consequence of this balance of power, in the constitution of 1871 no real choice was made between the monarchical and the democratic principle — in more concrete terms between the Prussian militaristic *Obrigkeitsstaat* and the parliamentary state dominated by the bourgeois parties. In effect, the legislative bodies dominated by the bourgeois parties, and the executive organs controlled by the aristocracy continued to exist unconnected, alongside one another. Due to this constitutional gap between the legislative and executive arms of the state, both branches had to be co-ordinated at the top in order to make government possible at all. Although with the help of the Prussian bureaucracy Bismarck initially succeeded quite well in this task, with the passage of time it became increasingly difficult for him. After his fall in 1890, the 'latent crisis' in this political system, veiled since 1871, became more and more manifest through the absence of a strong co-ordinating force at the centre.<sup>59</sup>

Up to this point there are no major differences between the interpretations of Mommsen and Wehler, since the latter had also

pointed out that Bismarck's 'Bonapartism' rested on the equilibrium of class forces between aristocracy and bourgeoisie. In Marx's original analysis, the large margin for manoeuvre of the central power (Bonaparte, Bismarck) stemmed from this equilibrium.<sup>60</sup> Important differences between Mommsen and Wehler only arise with the evaluation of the political dynamics of the Empire and the assessment of the success of Bismarck's policies. In Mommsen's view, these dynamics, which were connected to advancing industrialization, increasingly undermined the social base of both liberalism and conservatism. Up to the 1880s the liberals had owed their electoral strength to the fact that the electorate had as yet hardly been mobilized politically. When that started to happen in the 1870s and especially after 1890, the liberals were finished, in spite of the three-class voting laws of Prussia and several other states. For this reason, Bismarck's attempts to achieve a stable majority of conservatives and (national) liberals in the Reichstag for his policies became more and more arduous and ultimately failed.<sup>61</sup>

The only exception to this development involved his shielding of the army and the civil service from any form of parliamentary control. Thus according to Mommsen, Bismarck's Bonapartist power tactics were only successful in a negative way. He succeeded in holding back the liberal and socialist forces, but not in eliminating the democratic threat to the élites within the political system.<sup>62</sup> He was not able to prevent the slow but sure erosion of the position of power of the élites within the political structure he had erected in 1871 to safeguard Prussian conservatism. Democracy crept into the Empire through the back door, as it were. Measured against its own conservative objectives, Bismarck's politics were for Mommsen therefore far less successful than suggested by both the positive *and* the negative Bismarck myths.

Gerhard A. Ritter places an even stronger emphasis on the social roots and the unintended effects of the political structure. Like the English neo-Marxists and Mommsen, he warns against personalizing politics. Even the nearly almighty 'Iron Chancellor' had to deal with given circumstances: he could not, as he put it himself, 'make the waves, just take them into account'.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that the Empire possessed a federal state structure was one of those given circumstances. In this regard the political struc-

ture of Germany was fundamentally different from unitary states such as France and England. This federal state structure had two important consequences for the organization of political parties in the Empire. The first was that the national political parties could only establish themselves relatively late because they were spread over many states. The second was that they were everywhere confronted with the long-established civil and military bureaucracies of the rulers. While in England, from the seventeenth century on, parliamentary formations occupied central positions of power in the state and subjected its apparatuses to parliamentary control through ministerial responsibility long before modern state bureaucracies arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the Empire the army and the civil service had arisen without any parliamentary involvement. Up to and including the Weimar Republic, German parliaments proved incapable of bringing these pre-parliamentary institutions under their control.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, although the Empire certainly cannot be regarded simply as Prussia writ large, there did in point of fact exist a special relationship between the political structure of the Empire and Prussia. The Imperial Chancellor was simultaneously both prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Prussia. After 1878 he was in these capacities dependent on the conservative majority in the Prussian House of Representatives.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the Empire depended to a large extent on the Prussian bureaucracy in carrying out national policy. When in addition we realize that approximately half the Prussian representatives also sat in the Reichstag and that the king of Prussia was automatically the German Kaiser, it will then be clear that the identification of the German Empire with Prussia is not entirely unfounded.<sup>66</sup>

These three circumstances — the federal state structure, the fact that the formation of the state apparatus had preceded the formation of the nation, and that the conservative bulwark of Prussia dominated the Empire politically and institutionally — put the German liberals in particular into a comparatively difficult situation. Their predicament was brought out in an exemplary fashion at national unification in 1871, which not they, but the Prussian state had effectuated. The liberals, divided as they were since 1866 by the Prussian constitutional conflict, early on lost the confidence of the socialist workers' movement because of their evident weakness with regard to the imperial leadership. The workers' movement split from the liberals and founded its own

party between 1863 and 1875.<sup>67</sup> In this way, the German liberals were faced with competition not only from the conservatives, but also from the socialists, at a much earlier date than was the case elsewhere. This particular circumstance did not increase the chance of reforming the state in a liberal direction.

According to Ritter, the often remarked weakness of the German liberals in the Empire and their obligingness with regard to Bismarck cannot therefore be explained by their surrender to the aristocracy or by a specific fear of the proletariat on the part of the German bourgeoisie. The explanation should be sought rather in the unintended temporal coincidence of three problems that in countries such as England and France could be solved in sequence, for in Germany the problems of national unification and the constitution were posed simultaneously with the 'social question' in the period 1848–71. This highly explosive mixture of complex problems was beyond the power of the German liberals to solve. For that reason they had to leave it to the 'white revolutionary' Bismarck to unite the German states into one nation state.<sup>68</sup>

But it is not only the limited possibilities of liberal politics, but also those of the authoritarian conservative camp that Ritter places in a broader social framework. Like the English neo-Marxists and Wolfgang Mommsen, he plays down the importance of Bismarck's political manipulations through the use of Bonapartist power tactics. He believes that the structure and dynamics of the political system must be explained through social factors, by which he means the processes of industrialization and political mobilization.

As to the limited manipulability of politics, Ritter points out in the first place that the division of the German political stream into four currents was more or less an established fact by about 1875. As a matter of fact, the political landscape in which stood from left to right social-democratic, liberal, Catholic and conservative blocs, emerged ideologically as early as the 1830s and subsisted more or less unchanged until the Weimar period. With one exception, all the political blocs had their roots in social milieus. The conservatives drew their support from the Prussian aristocracy and the rural population dependent on it; the Catholic Centre party from all social groups in the predominantly Catholic territories of western and southern Germany; and the social-democrats from the urban proletariat, which thanks to industrialization was



growing steadily. Only the liberals lacked a definite social base, which, as Mommsen also observes, made them increasingly vulnerable electorally. When, after 1870, the political parties changed more and more from organizations with a common worldview into representatives of group or class interests and the constitutional issue disappeared from the political agenda, the liberals sought in vain for their grassroots.<sup>69</sup> The classic pretension of the liberals that they did not represent narrow interests now turned out to be true in a way they never intended. This, for the liberals fatal, process of political change was given an extra impulse by Bismarck's struggle against the Catholics and socialists.<sup>70</sup>

For Ritter, liberalism as a political force was ultimately undermined less by Bismarck's strategy of divide and rule than by industrialization and its consequences. As it happened, the economic crisis of 1873 sealed the liberals' fate by eroding the credibility of their free-market ideology and making clear that liberalism in the economy led not to a 'classless society of citizens', but rather to a 'bourgeois class society'.<sup>71</sup> This same economic crisis also brought about the definitive split in liberal ranks. The crisis induced Bismarck to erect tariff barriers, a policy that divided the liberals for good into a left-wing free-trade faction and an anti-free-trade bloc of national liberals. Up to a point, differences of opinion had not precluded co-operation between the liberal factions.<sup>72</sup>

In the long run, Bismarck and the traditional élites proved to have just as little control over the momentum of the party system as they did over the social basis of the political parties. This momentum resulted from the process of political mobilization after 1870. Thus the electoral turnout in cities such as Berlin and Hamburg rose from respectively 26.1 per cent and 28.8 per cent of the vote in 1871 to 79.9 per cent and 71.2 per cent in 1878.<sup>73</sup> The national turnout continued to rise afterwards to 84.9 per cent in 1912.<sup>74</sup> Thanks to this process of mobilization, the social relations that had been fundamentally transformed by industrialization were with some delay ultimately reflected in politics, in spite of all the undemocratic obstacles and mechanisms that had been built into the electoral system.

With hindsight, it is ironic to observe that Bismarck himself had unintentionally launched this process of mobilization with his policy of 'negative integration', accomplishing over time exactly the opposite of what he set out to do. As it occurred, his policy

of repression against the Catholics and socialists touched off the political mobilization of the masses much earlier in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. In this regard, the German political system displayed not *pre-modern*, but rather pronounced modern features.<sup>75</sup> This political mobilization strengthened Bismarck's political opponents electorally while eventually sapping his basis of support — the conservatives and national liberals. In this way the traditional élites ultimately did threaten to become the political victims of 'the masses' through universal suffrage, just as some conservatives had foreseen as early as 1871. Thus, according to Ritter, Bismarck's strategy of 'fighting parliament with parliament' led in the end to a complete failure, even though the political parties themselves were incapable of forcing through a democratic alternative to Bismarck's system.

The same holds true for the period after 1890, when Bismarck had been relegated to the sidelines by Kaiser Wilhelm II. To be sure, Ritter recognizes in that moment a caesura, since parliament did gain in influence in relation to the chancellor, but he rejects the thesis that a 'quiet parliamentarization' occurred in German politics after 1890. That thesis had been juxtaposed by Rauh to Wehler's postulation of the 'obstructed parliamentarization' of the Empire.<sup>76</sup> Ritter points out that until July 1917 the formation of parliamentary majorities was only achieved through the intervention of the imperial leadership (*Reichsleitung*) and not on the initiative of parliament itself. Moreover, until October 1918, in other words just one month before the complete collapse of the Empire, the parties had only participated in government in a marginal way. In Ritter's view, parliament's failure to assume political responsibility precludes speaking of the parliamentarization of politics in any meaningful sense.

Even less is it possible to interpret the increasing parliamentary influence after 1890 as a democratization of German politics. Such a view completely overlooks the fact that the army and the bureaucracy remained exempt from any form of democratic control and neglects the powerful anti-democratic tendencies that politics displayed. Thus, the further democratic extension of the vote in Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden (between 1904 and 1907) can be counterposed by its restriction in Braunschweig, Hamburg, Lübeck and Saxony (between 1896 and 1905), which was intended to reduce even more the influence of the social democrats. Due to such developments, social democracy played no real role in Prussia

or Saxony.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, we should not close our eyes to the fact that after 1890 the political parties came increasingly under the influence of economic pressure groups and their mass organizations. These organizations were not democratic but populist in character and worked essentially in support of their own interests under the cover of a militant nationalism and anti-semitism.<sup>78</sup>

To Ritter's mind, not only Rauh's 'quiet parliamentarization', but also Wehler's 'obstructed parliamentarization' and Mommsen's 'latent crisis' are too one-sided as a characterization of the Empire's political system. In his view it remains the question whether the Empire's problems were not bound up more with the intensification of social economic conflicts during the transition to the interventionist state than with the 'deficit' in parliamentarization and democratization. On this point his interpretation is related to that of Blackbourn and Eley. In the interwar period, even parliamentary democracies like England and France were not equal to problems such as unemployment and were unable to steer their economies effectively. According to Ritter such — comparative — data should serve as a warning against attributing the evasion of fundamental decisions in Germany à la Mommsen exclusively or primarily to the absence of parliamentary democracy. Nonetheless, it can be said with assurance that the political system of the Empire possessed only limited 'conflict-solving potential' and offered poor preparation for a parliamentary democracy.<sup>79</sup>

Nipperdey's interpretation of the Empire can be seen essentially as a counter-history to the Bielefeld view.<sup>80</sup> His primary goal is to free the Empire from the deadly embrace of Hitler in which it has been held since 1945. In his view, the Empire must be understood in itself and not simply reduced to the pre-history of the Third Reich (or the Weimar Republic or Federal Republic).<sup>81</sup> For this reason he rejects on principle interpretations that try to explain the anti-democratic political culture of the Third Reich by direct reference to the Second Empire.<sup>82</sup> For him history is always an open process, literally a sea of possibilities, in which individuals can exercise a decisive influence.<sup>83</sup> It is, therefore, in principle impossible to explain an episode, for example the Third Reich, as the necessary result of the preceding history, say, that of the Second Empire.

Naturally this openness does not mean that anything is always possible and that the historical process knows no constraining constants that push history in a specific direction. In Nipperdey's eyes, the geopolitical situation of Prussia–Germany is such a constant, a view that brings him close to the *Mittellage* historians. The addition of the Rhineland provinces to Prussia in 1815 resulted in its division into an eastern and a western part; overcoming this division then became the driving force of Prussian politics. Since the security of Prussia in the west coincided with that of Germany, the Prussian pursuit of a hegemonic position in Germany became 'almost a necessity'.<sup>84</sup> The 'Prussian mission in Germany' was a result not of Prussian hunger for power, but of the Congress of Vienna, which had assigned Prussia the task of guarding the eastern borders of post-Napoleonic France.<sup>85</sup> But Prussia was the only one among the great powers involved in the restorative restructuring of the European state system after 1815 to lose out. To be sure, it had strengthened its position in Germany, but it had not attained 'its real objectives' and, given its geopolitical problem, was 'far from fulfilled'.<sup>86</sup> In comparison to the other victors over Napoleon — Russia, Austria and England — Prussia remained 'almost a second-class great power'.<sup>87</sup> Its desire to do something about it was every bit as legitimate as it was understandable.<sup>88</sup>

Nipperdey's method with regard to the image of the Empire offered by the Bielefeld historians can be characterized as pulverization through nuance. He attempts to undermine their most central theses by differentiating them. Where the 'critical' Wehler seemed to postulate homogeneity and unambiguity in 1973, the neo-historicist Nipperdey perceives heterogeneity and ambivalence in 1990. In his eyes, the picture of the Empire presented by the Bielefeld historians is inadmissibly coarse and simplistic.<sup>89</sup>

Like Gerhard Ritter, Nipperdey questions the notion of 'the' German state and 'the' conservative political strategy. It is not really possible to speak of 'the' German state since there were a number of them in the Empire with differences as great as day and night: Prussia differed fundamentally from Bavaria and Bavaria in turn from Saxony, Baden or Württemberg.<sup>90</sup> For this reason, 'the' German state could also not be run by the authoritarian aristocratic élite under the leadership of the Prussian Junker Bismarck, as the Bielefeld school had asserted, following Eckhart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg. The German states were run in any case not

only by authoritarian and conservative aristocrats, but also by reform-minded civil servants of bourgeois background — and even by liberal aristocrats. From the start of the nineteenth century the civil service had become an autonomous power in the German state and was able to push through its anti-feudal reform programme, against the will of aristocrats, on a regular basis.<sup>91</sup> After 1815, Prussia was no longer an absolute — dynastic — state, but rather a bureaucratic-monarchical *Obrigkeitsstaat* in which civil servants shared control. Even Bismarck's Bonapartist social insurance policy, with which the Bielefeld historians felt he had for some time after 1880 successfully tamed the red masses thirsting for democracy, thus stabilizing the authoritarian system, was in practice given a different content by the paternalistic civil service than Bismarck had intended.<sup>92</sup>

Nipperdey also dismisses as a fairy tale the Bielefeld school's idea that the stability of the political system during the Empire rested upon Bismarck's Bonapartist politics. It was rather the almost permanent increase in income and wealth of most social groups that gave the system both its stability and legitimacy.<sup>93</sup> For Nipperdey there is no question in the Empire of a comparatively undemocratic, authoritarian and illiberal political culture specially connected to the dominance of the Prussian feudal aristocracy.<sup>94</sup>

How then can the political culture of the Empire and its relation to democracy be characterized? As usual, Nipperdey gives a nuanced answer to this question, especially by situating Germany in a comparative European context. In his view, the Empire was a class society, like all the European societies of the period, in which the state was in the hands of the owning classes. In these class societies, however, the socio-economic conflicts between classes were overlapped everywhere by socio-cultural ones, by which he means the conflicts between town and countryside, Catholic and Protestant, between regions in the north and the south, the east and the west, and finally between status groups (such as manual and intellectual labourers, nobles and non-nobles). The Empire was only distinguishable from the other European states by the way in which the socio-economic and socio-cultural conflicts overlapped each other and especially by the role played by the state in these. In agreement with Ritter, Nipperdey holds the opinion that, due to the pre-modern traditions of the estates, the state in Germany exercised a relatively big influence on class formation. In effect, the German state was characterized, and in

this Nipperdey goes along with the Bielefeld school, by a political privileging of the aristocracy in general and the military in particular. The nobility formed a privileged caste because it monopolized the top positions in politics, the army and the civil service.<sup>95</sup> For this reason, the nobility occupied the top rung on the ladder of status. Parts of the bourgeoisie consequently found themselves impelled to 'feudalize' or 'aristocratize' their status behaviour since the aristocracy, the military and the state bureaucracy represented in German society the most prestigious status models.

For Nipperdey, however, such conduct by no means signified that the bourgeoisie as a whole was feudalized and had capitulated politically and socially to the pre-modern nobility, as the Bielefeld historians would have it. For political co-operation between nobility and bourgeoisie was a general European phenomenon during this period.<sup>96</sup> The 'feudalizing' of the bourgeoisie only meant that the influence of the traditional aristocratic, military, and bureaucratic estate was greater in the Empire than elsewhere in northern and western Europe.

The fact that in this restricted sense Germany was less bourgeois than France or England, according to Nipperdey, in no way means that the bourgeoisie was socially subordinate to the aristocracy. In fact, the contrary was sooner true for him and he speaks without hesitation of the 'hegemony of the bourgeoisie' in the Empire.<sup>97</sup> In this he agrees with the neo-Marxist critics of the Bielefeld school, although his interpretation rests on other arguments. He posits that the less liberal conduct of the bourgeoisie in Germany than in France or England had nothing to do with its 'historic failure', but stemmed completely from its special, defensive position in opposition to the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>98</sup> On this point he is in agreement with Ritter. In 1848 the bourgeois revolution had failed chiefly because the — tragic — presence of two hegemonic states in the German Confederation had blocked the unification and liberalization of Germany.<sup>99</sup> From 1871 on, Bismarck's universal male suffrage had, comparatively speaking, prematurely robbed the German liberals of their allies among the workers and artisans, thus making a coalition with the traditional aristocratic élite even more natural.<sup>100</sup> The sceptical historian Nipperdey is neither surprised nor troubled by the thought that with this coalition strategy the German bourgeoisie sought more to advance its own interests than to further the cause of democracy.

Fortunately Nipperdey does not sidestep the crucial question,

seen in the light of '1933', of the democratic content of imperial political culture, which has been the starting-point of the discussion since the late 1960s. He too recognizes that from this perspective the Empire casts a number of 'shadows' on its aftermath. In the first place, the political culture of the Empire was characterized by several values that also played an important role in the Third Reich, of which extreme nationalism is the clearest example. But Nipperdey immediately de-emphasizes this continuity between the Second and Third Reich by stressing that nationalism between 1870 and 1918 was not a specifically German, but a general European phenomenon.<sup>101</sup> The same can be said of two other characteristics associated after 1945 with German political culture — the criticism of modernity with its materialism and rationalism and the criticism of the atomistic fragmentation of society as a result of industrialization and bureaucratization. This 'discontent with modernity' was expressed all over Europe and was at the most somewhat stronger in the Empire than elsewhere.<sup>102</sup>

In the same vein, Nipperdey concludes that neither anti-semitism nor imperialism can be considered typically German.<sup>103</sup> The phenomenon that deserves this label the most in his eyes is militarism — that is to say, the positive appraisal made in German culture of the military and its values — the glorification of war, discipline and blind obedience.<sup>104</sup>

Although the influence of these values on German political culture has been unmistakably great, seen from the perspective of '1933' the 'unpolitical' has been a more important characteristic of German culture.<sup>105</sup> In effect, the emphasis laid on this aspect of German culture, which finds expression in the *Bildungs*-ideology of the German intelligentsia, had unforeseen political consequences. It was characteristic of this ideology as a matter of principle to exalt culture (*Geist*) above politics (*Macht*), which in political practice led to contempt for any party politics and an uncritical veneration and justification of the 'unpolitical' national state. This veneration was shared by the great men who ran the state and by the state bureaucracy. In political practice the German *Bildungs*-ideology led to a problematical relationship of the cultural élite to democracy and the 'masses' that unintentionally created an opening for irrational, demagogic forces in politics and for non-liberal programmes for solving political problems.<sup>106</sup> Besides the militaristic and the 'unpolitical' bent of German politi-

cal culture, Nipperdey's third historical shadow cast by the Second on the Third Reich was formed by political radicalism. By this term he means the *völkisch* cultural criticism and the *völkisch* ideologies it generated. In this cultural critique, technical-industrial civilization was presented as a problem for German national culture because it led to mass society, social fragmentation, leveling and internationalization, which were contrasted ideologically with the harmony and homogeneity of the German people (*Volk*).<sup>107</sup> This preoccupation with German national identity led to the practice of presenting 'un-German' minorities as a problem in need of a 'solution'. Under the influence of social Darwinism and eugenics around the turn of the century, this cultural critique acquired the biological racist and anti-semitic twist that would produce such catastrophic consequences in the Third Reich.<sup>108</sup>

But despite his attention to the undemocratic shadows in the culture of the Empire, Nipperdey continues to warn expressly against labelling this period 'pre-fascist' or 'pre-national-socialist'. The historian of the Empire can do no more than ascertain that this culture offered little resistance to the abuse of power, extreme nationalism and illiberalism. Yet this in no way means that the Third Reich 'derives' historically from the Second Empire.<sup>109</sup>

Although Wehler's new synthesis of this period has been announced but not yet published, some important shifts in his view can be noted by way of conclusion. In this way we can provisionally chart the influence of his critics on his thinking.<sup>110</sup>

Like Nipperdey and Kocka,<sup>111</sup> Wehler now clearly acknowledges the social heterogeneity of the bourgeoisie. For it is true that in addition to the traditional urban bourgeoisie, there existed a *Bildungs*-bourgeoisie that can be divided into a section employed by the state in the civil service and another that exercised the liberal professions. Since, furthermore, the entrepreneurs and the lower middle classes are usually numbered among the bourgeoisie, the concept 'bourgeois' is correspondingly complex.<sup>112</sup> Without further qualification, therefore, the classification is not very helpful, and for this reason Wehler now clearly distinguishes all these types of bourgeois. The same holds true for his treatment of other social classes, such as the aristocracy and the working class.

Wehler has similarly refined his treatment of the main political



currents. He now distinguishes three different types of liberalism: bureaucratic liberalism, constitutional liberalism and political radicalism. In this presentation he now stresses that not all liberals were supporters of a parliamentary form of government and that many nourished political and social ideals coloured more by a patriarchal and artisanal past than by a democratic and industrial future. For these liberals, it was not England, but rather Switzerland, the paradise of the middle classes, that served as their beacon. In their turn the radicals were subdivided into a 'populist' and an 'intellectual' current, the socialist and communist radicals belonging to the latter.<sup>113</sup>

For their part, the conservatives, seen previously as a solid bloc, are now split into different sizes and shapes. Alongside a reactionary 'patrimonial conservatism' that sought to restore the old social order and resisted the modern state on principle, Wehler poses a bureaucratic, a reforming and a pragmatic conservatism. He situates Bismarck's politics in this latter current, in which the original conservative creed has been overrun by the will to (the maintenance of) power.<sup>114</sup>

In imitation of Eley, Blackbourn and Nipperdey, Wehler's recent work draws a distinction between 'bourgeois' in a social and in a political sense. The first refers to the characteristics of civil society, or the 'bourgeois society', as formulated in the eighteenth century.<sup>115</sup> The second sense refers to the idea of citizenship — that of the *citoyen* — with its legally defined political rights (of representation) and duties. In contrast to Nipperdey and the duo Eley and Blackbourn, however, Wehler still does not think that as far as the Empire is concerned it is possible to speak of a bourgeois hegemony in either a social or a political sense, even though he now also sees the constitution as a triumph of the bourgeois liberals.<sup>116</sup> Pursuing this re-evaluation of the German liberals, Wehler no longer regards the revolution of 1848 as a complete failure and displays far more understanding than previously for the position taken by the liberals in that revolution.<sup>117</sup> Instead of taking them to task for an 'historic failure', he now holds that after the first two months of the revolution — March and April 1848 — the conservatives', position of power precluded any real chance of success.<sup>118</sup>

Although the nobility certainly became partially 'bourgeois', as Eley, Blackbourn and Nipperdey have remarked, the partial 'aristocratization' of the German bourgeoisie remains, in Wehler's

eyes, a more important phenomenon. For whenever the interests of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy clashed, as they did on the issues of tariff barriers, taxation and financing the military, it was the bourgeoisie that invariably lost out.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, in spite of the fact that Wehler still holds steadfastly to the view that the Empire was dominated by a conservative aristocracy, the picture he presents of political culture has become much more differentiated and ambivalent. Following his critics, Wehler now also recognizes the 'startling modernity' that characterized the Empire in some areas, which to a large extent can be credited to the bourgeoisie. At the same time, however, he continues to point to the 'social pathology' of this same bourgeoisie, which would reach its nadir in national-socialism. Ambivalence toward both the aristocracy and the working class remains for Wehler the political trademark of the bourgeoisie.<sup>120</sup>

Contrary to Nipperdey, in his assessment of the German state Wehler emphasizes the common features of the individual states of the federation, without, it should be said, denying their great differences. As of old, he locates the centre of gravity of German history in this period in the Prussia dominated by conservatives.<sup>121</sup> In contrast to Nipperdey, Austria for him plays a subordinate role in German history in the nineteenth century.<sup>122</sup>

With Nipperdey, he now acknowledges that most civil servants in the state bureaucracy were of bourgeois origin and were criticized by many aristocrats for their liberal views. But, in opposition to Nipperdey, he stresses that this fact still did not turn the bureaucracy into a 'bourgeois' institution. He continues to regard its coalition with the ruler and the Junkers as the cornerstone of the conservative 'power cartel'.<sup>123</sup> Nor in the same vein can the *Reichstag* automatically be qualified as bourgeois. As late as the turn of the century, sincere liberals cursed this parliament, not without reason, as a 'Bonapartist deception'.<sup>124</sup>

In agreement with Mommsen and Ritter Wehler now recognizes that after 1890 the *Reichstag* did gain in influence; yet, just like them he continues to deny that this represented a parliamentarization or democratization of politics. For him the growing weight of parliament has rather an unpolitical cause in system theory. As societies became more complex, it became more and more necessary to co-ordinate separate domains and interests.<sup>125</sup> But in what seems to be a change in his earlier view, this does not mean that there was no functioning institutional sphere for public debate in

the Empire. On the contrary, there was the question of a 'polyphony of the most diverse opinions', which raises the impression that the obstructed political modernization of the Empire could perhaps have been set in motion through reforms.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, the fact remains that the military state within the state proved impervious to bourgeois forces until 1918.

Given the pluriform character of politics, the mature Wehler thinks it is 'more than naive' to attribute such phenomena as imperialism, the construction of the fleet or pan-Germanism primarily or exclusively to the traditional forces, as he was wont to do in his younger years. Due to its 'incontestable modernity' in many areas the Empire can only be understood in the light of the 'dialectic of progress and degeneration of bourgeois modernization'.<sup>127</sup> For Wehler remains unshakeably convinced that in the Empire something went fundamentally wrong with the bourgeoisie and liberalism. Significantly, he speaks of the bourgeois 'pathogenesis', though he now assesses the causes of this 'degeneration' differently from before.

Wehler now traces the decline of German liberalism as a political force to a small degree to Bismarck's Bonapartist politics and, like Ritter and Mommsen, to a much larger degree to the overlapping of the national, constitutional and social problems and the socio-economic crisis of the 1870s.<sup>128</sup> For it was this crisis that had deprived liberalism of its credibility as a political ideology. The triangular relationship that had existed between 1830 and 1870 between *Bildungs*-ideology, liberalism and nationalism was broken after the foundation of the German national state: the goal of the national movement appeared to be attained. The ideological void this separation left in the bourgeoisie was immediately filled by an aggressive nationalism, whose roots Wehler now traces to the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was then, during the French occupation, that liberal nationalism, which until the end of the eighteenth century had had a definite cosmopolitan slant, acquired an anti-French, xenophobic and expansionist undertone that became more and more audible with time.<sup>129</sup> This had already led in the parliamentary assemblies in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt in 1848 to a preference for a 'Great Germany', broadly conceived to include many other European nationalities subordinated to the German nation. Thus, as early as 1848 the majority of German parliamentarians had opted for German power over the principle of nationality.<sup>130</sup>

In contrast to his earlier position, Wehler no longer associates the strength and influence of this illiberal, imperialist and conservative nationalism among the bourgeoisie exclusively with the dominance of the aristocracy, but also with the social composition of the bourgeoisie itself — the more heterogeneous it became, the more it needed a unifying ideology.<sup>131</sup> Illiberal nationalism filled this prescription exactly and it is here that for Wehler the ‘fatal pathogenesis’ of the German bourgeoisie begins.<sup>132</sup> The massive support given to the arms race, colonialism and *Weltpolitik* were its first political symptoms.<sup>133</sup> In Wehler’s view, the lines run straight from this ‘pathological’ complex to the subsequent bourgeois support for the war policy and the equally nationalistic as anti-semitic *Vaterlandspartei* in the first world war and later to national socialism and its *Führerdiktatur*.<sup>134</sup> The Weimar Republic brought the fundamental weakness of bourgeois political culture and the bourgeois position in society to light once more. Finally in 1933 came the political ‘reckoning’ for the fundamental ‘deficit in bourgeois political culture’, which in Wehler’s view still forms the fatal link between the Second and the Third Reich.<sup>135</sup> It is therefore still impossible for him to consider ‘1871’ without ‘1933’.<sup>136</sup>

**Surveying the course** of the discussion on the Second Empire, definite points of agreement and a certain development can be perceived among the striking diversity of views. If appearances do not deceive, some viewpoints even seem to converge.

To begin with, it can be noticed that the representations of the political culture of the Empire become steadily more differentiated in the course of the discussion. Black and white contrasts (traditional, aristocratic and pre-modern versus capitalist, bourgeois and modern) have been replaced by images in which the simultaneous presence of opposing elements and tendencies from different times is recognized (*die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*). Thus, most historians acknowledge the simultaneous presence in the Empire of traditional and modern elements and of democratic and anti-democratic tendencies. At the same time, it is more and more recognized that the political culture of the Empire was dynamic and changed fundamentally between 1871 and 1918 — the political parties of 1871 were totally different organizations from those of 1918. This process of change

is most dramatically illustrated by the Social Democratic Party, which evolved from 'enemy of the national state' (*Reichsfeind*) in 1871 to 'pillar of the national state' in 1918. A similar fundamental change took place with regard to the content and function of nationalism.

In the second place, it can be remarked that the interpretations of political culture become more and more 'collectivized' in the course of the discussion. They become less and less dependent on the person of Bismarck and his power politics, referring increasingly to (non-manipulable) collective forces and processes. Whereas Wehler, Eley and Blackburn, Mommsen and Ritter attribute primary importance to the late industrialization and state formation in shaping the political culture, Hillgruber, Hildebrand and Stürmer give precedence to the geographical *Mittellage*, without for the rest denying the significance of the former processes. While Nipperdey does not explicitly weigh the two complexes of factors, he also seems to consider the *Mittellage* as the more decisive. Furthermore, he sets himself apart from the others by assigning culture an important independent role as explanatory variable. Despite their respective differences, however, a certain degree of consensus does seem to emerge with regard to the question of which collective factors possess explanatory value; only the specific weight accorded to each remains at issue.

Together with the 'collectivization' of the interpretations, more and more weight is given to factors of a non-intentional nature. Politics seems to be interpreted increasingly in terms of unintended conditions of action and the unintended effects of collective actions. This shift has been accompanied by a decline in explicit value judgments, in particular those concerning Bismarck and the liberals, though these have by no means disappeared, as witness the *Mittellage*-historians' opinion of Bismarck and Wehler's bourgeois 'pathogenesis'. Thus, the weakness of the liberals in German politics is explained less and less in terms of conscious political strategies (such as Bismarck's 'Bonapartism' and the 'capitulation' of the bourgeoisie) and more and more as a result of unintended circumstances. A consensus even seems to have been reached concerning the fundamental importance of Germany's late state formation and industrialization and the concurrence of the national, constitutional and social questions, though here again the specific weight of each remains in dispute.

In the third place, an ever increasing emphasis seems to be

placed on arguments and interpretations of a comparative nature. Which aspects of political culture can be regarded as typically German, illiberal, unbourgeois and undemocratic and how they should be interpreted is increasingly seen as a problem that can only be resolved through international comparisons. For this reason, in recent syntheses Nipperdey and Wehler have explicitly sought to place German history in a comparative European context.

Yet despite these similarities in perceptions of the Empire, striking differences still remain in the way political culture is characterized and interpreted. First, we have seen how, based on different assessments of the power of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, conflicting characterizations of the Empire as a *Kompromißstruktur* continue to exist. Where Eley, Blackbourn and Nipperdey discern a 'hegemony of the bourgeoisie' in the Empire, Wehler, Stürmer, Hildebrand and Hillgruber still perceive the uncurtailed dominance of the aristocracy. While Wehler still puts forward the political 'failure' and the 'democratic deficit' of the German bourgeoisie as explanation of the German *Sonderweg*, the other historians, with the exception of Mommsen, repudiate any such account and interpretation of German history after 1870.

Pursuing the matter of different classifications of political culture, it should be observed in closing that fundamentally different interpretations of the relation of the Second and Third Reichs remain, corresponding to diverse views of German national identity, as witnessed once again in the *Historikerstreit*. While Wehler and Mommsen see a direct continuity between the undemocratic political cultures of the two, Eley, Blackbourn, Stürmer, Hillgruber, Hildebrand and Nipperdey find little or no direct relation. Though mountains of archives have been ploughed through since the appearance of Wehler's *Kaiserreich*, there seems to be little movement in the historiographic front lines in this sector. These lines of demarcation probably demonstrate more clearly than anything else just how closely interpretations of Germany's past and present are connected and how much construction lurks in every reconstruction of history. For this reason, the Second German Empire will, in all probability, continue to appear in various guises in the future.

## Notes

1. See H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen 1972), 275–84 on how distance in time leads to the ‘dying-out of vested interests’ that inhibit a satisfactory understanding.

2. Ernst Nolte launched the so-called *Historikerstreit* with an article under this title. See his ‘Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will’, in *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich 1987), 39–48.

3. D. Langewiesche, ‘Das Deutsche Kaiserreich — Bemerkungen zur Diskussion über Parlamentarisierung und Demokratisierung Deutschlands’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 19 (1979), 632.

4. See H.-U. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das Deutsche Kaiserreich?’ in J. Kocka (ed.), *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 1987), 243; W. J. Mommsen, *Der autoritäre Nationalstaat. Verfassung, Gesellschaft und Kultur im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt am Main 1990), 11–22; M. Stürmer, *Das ruhelose Reich. Deutschland 1866–1918* (Berlin 1983), 118.

5. For the history of German nationalism, see O. Dann, *Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770–1990* (Munich 1993). For the interpretations of the Third Reich, see I. Kershaw, *The Nazi-Dictatorship. Problems of Perspectives and Interpretation* (London 1989).

6. See my ‘Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality. A Plea for “Internal Realism”’, *History and Theory*, 33 (1994), 3, 312–14, and my *De constructie van het verleden* (The construction of the past) (Meppel/Amsterdam 1994, 4th rev. edn), 301.

7. The Bielefeld interpretation embodied a critique of the fact that Bismarck’s politics had been viewed very favourably by most German historians and presented as ‘satisfactory’; in this way the German *Sonderweg* became stylized as an *Einbahnstrasse* (one-way street) without its historical ‘costs’ being set out. See Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* (1975), 62 and 227–40. Seen against this background, it is all the more remarkable that precisely the Bielefeld view has been criticized as an *Einbahnstrasse*; see, for example, H.-G. Zmarzlik, ‘Das Kaiserreich als Einbahnstrasse?’ in K. Holl and G. List (eds), *Liberalismus und imperialistischer Staat* (Göttingen 1975), 62–72.

8. For Kocka’s views, see his ‘Das Problem der Nation in der deutschen Geschichte 1870–1945’ in idem, *Geschichte und Aufklärung* (Göttingen 1989), 82–101. For his place in German historiography, see my article ‘De *Sonderweg* in de Duitse historiografie na 1945. Posities, problemen en discussies’ in H. Beliën and G. J. van Setten (eds), *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 1992), especially 161–5.

9. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 17.

10. *Ibid.*, 60–3.

11. For the origin of this view, see E. Kehr, *Primat der Innenpolitik. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt 1970) and H. Rosenberg, *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Frankfurt 1967).

12. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 65.

13. *Ibid.*, 69.

14. *Ibid.*, 71.

15. *Ibid.*, 90–6.

16. H. A. Winkler (ed.), *Organisierter Kapitalismus. Voraussetzungen und Anfänge* (Göttingen 1974). See also *idem*, 'Organisierter Kapitalismus? Versuch eines Fazits' in *Liberalismus und anti-Liberalismus* (Göttingen 1979), 264–72.

17. See A. Mitchell, 'Bonapartism as a Model for Bismarckian Politics', *Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977), 181–209 and P. Pflanze, 'Bismarcks Herrschaftstechnik als Problem der gegenwärtigen Historiographie', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 234 (1983), 561–600.

18. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 67. See for discussion, G. Eley, 'Defining Social Imperialism: Use and Abuse of an Idea', *Social History*, 3 (1976), 265–91, and Mommsen, 'Triebkräfte und Zielsetzungen des deutschen Imperialismus' in *idem*, *Nationalstaat*, 182–214.

19. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 96–100.

20. This characterization and dating of the turning-point in nationalism corresponds with that of E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge 1990), especially 101–31.

21. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 117.

22. For a survey of recent discussions of German liberalism, see H. Brandt, 'Zu einigen Liberalismusdeutungen der siebziger und achtziger Jahre', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 17 (1991), 512–30.

23. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 19–41.

24. For the provenance of Wehler's view, see H. Rosenberg, 'Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse' in his *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt 1969), 7–51.

25. In all the criticism of the one-sidedness of Wehler's 'Empire', it is often forgotten that he consciously pursued it. See his *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 11–16, where he indicates that he took 'die Frage nach den eigentümlichen Belastungen der deutschen Geschichte', which hindered the democratization of German politics and made National Socialism possible, as his point of departure.

26. K. Hildebrand, 'Der Deutsche Eigenweg. Über das Problem der Normalität in der modernen Geschichte Deutschlands und Europas' in M. Funke et al. (eds), *Demokratie und Diktatur. Geist und Gestalt politischer Herrschaft in Deutschland und Europa* (Bonn 1987), 17, 24, 29, 31; A. Hillgruber, *Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der deutschen Außenpolitik von Bismarck zu Hitler* (Düsseldorf 1969), 24–5, as well as his *Die gescheiterte Großmacht. Eine Skizze des Deutschen Reiches 1871–1945* (Düsseldorf 1980), 31–61; Stürmer's contributions to *Historikerstreit*, 36–9, 98–100, 293–6.

27. For the roots of this *Mittellage* view in the work of Gerhard Ritter and Ludwig Dehio, see my 'De Sonderweg in de Duitse historiografie na 1945', 142–52. For a fundamental critique, see H.-U. Wehler, 'Renaissance der Geopolitik?' in *Preussen ist wider chic . . . Politik und Polemik* (Frankfurt 1983), 60–7.

28. We find this characterization of contemporary German history as tragic not only in Stürmer, but also in Hillgruber and Nipperdey.

29. Hildebrand, 'Eigenweg', 28; Stürmer, *Reich*, 405.

30. Hildebrand, 'Eigenweg', 18. Hillgruber, like Dehio, formulates the 'German problem' in terms of *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie* (equilibrium or hegemony);



the key problem was whether the European balance of power was dictated by London or Berlin. See his *Großmacht*, 18.

31. Stürmer, *Reich*, 402. Stürmer does not make clear why he regards this phenomenon as the 'German price for European peace'.

32. This conception of German politics, which is known as the *Primat der Außenpolitik* (the primacy of foreign policy), goes back to Ranke himself.

33. Stürmer, *Reich*, 401–2.

34. Stürmer, *Reich*, 400: 'Zufall noch Anachronismus war der Weltkrieg. Er war äußerste, tragische Eventualität der europäischen Zivilisation'.

35. Hillgruber, *Kontinuität*, 13–14; *Großmacht*, 31–61.

36. Hillgruber, *Großmacht*, 41.

37. Hildebrand, 'Eigenweg', 19; Hillgruber, *Großmacht*, 33.

38. K. Hildebrand, 'Staatskunst oder Systemzwang? Die "Deutsche Frage" als Problem der Weltpolitik', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 228 (1979), 624–44 and especially 642. Compare the opinion of Hillgruber's student J. Dülffer, 'Deutschland als Kaiserreich (1871–1918)' in M. Vogt (ed.), *Rassow. Deutsche Geschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Stuttgart 1991), 543, that Germany's inability to mobilize sufficient financial means to keep up with the expansion of the English fleet should be ascribed to parliament. These interpretations sound like distant echoes of the 'stab in the back' legend.

39. Hildebrand, 'Eigenweg', passim; Stürmer, *Reich*, 117–18.

40. Stürmer, *Reich*, 401–3; Hildebrand, 'Eigenweg', 19; Hillgruber, *Großmacht*, 112.

41. Stürmer, *Reich*, 98–100.

42. For the development of Stürmer's thinking from a *Bielefelder* to *Mittellage* view, see V. Berghahn, 'Geschichtswissenschaft und Große Politik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B11/87, 14 March 1987, 25–37 and H.-U. Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?* (Munich 1988), 28–37 and 69–78.

43. Stürmer, *Reich*, 105.

44. *Ibid.*, 114, 118.

45. *Ibid.*, 107, 113, 404.

46. D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), expanded and translated into English as *The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford 1989); see also, R. Evans, *Rethinking German History. Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London 1987).

47. See, in particular, D. Blackbourn, 'Wie es eigentlich nicht gewesen' in Eley and Blackbourn, *Mythen*, 71–8.

48. See especially G. Eley, 'Deutscher Sonderweg und englisches Vorbild' in Eley and Blackbourn, *Mythen*, 23–37.

49. Against this criticism it should be remembered that most of the studies of the Bielefeld school have, in fact, been written from the viewpoint that a capitalist economy can operate in combination both with parliamentary democratic and authoritarian undemocratic political systems. Why the latter combination became dominant in Germany is exactly the historical *Sonderweg* problem they hope to explain through international comparisons.

50. Eley, 'Sonderweg', 11–15.

51. See especially Blackbourn, 'Wie es eigentlich nicht gewesen', 85–98.

52. For Wehler's anti-critique, see his "Deutscher Sonderweg" oder allgemeine

Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus?' in *Preussen ist wider chic...*, 19–33. Wehler recognizes that the history of Western Europe and the United States has been used as the measure of comparison for German history and that, strictly speaking, all these countries have experienced their own *Sonderweg*. None of them, however, developed into a National-Socialist dictatorship and that makes German history 'special'.

53. G. Eley, *Reshaping the German Right* (London 1980).

54. See V. Berghahn, 'Militär, industrialisierte Kriegsführung und Nationalismus', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 26 (1981), 25–9. Mock points out that the professional politicians of the 'old right' and the 'new right' largely stemmed from the same bourgeois milieu, which seems to contradict Eley's contention that 'the base' mobilized itself. See W. Mock, "'Manipulation von oben" oder "Selbstorganisation an der Basis"? Einige neuere Ansätze in der englischen Historiographie zur Geschichte des deutschen Kaiserreichs', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 232 (1983), 372–3.

55. In his *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, Wehler, following Hans Rosenberg, actually did assign the Great Depression of 1873–96 an important explanatory role in the development of Bismarck's politics. On this point, see my 'De *Sonderweg* in de Duitse historiografie na 1945', especially 152–61.

56. For this discussion, see Mock, "'Manipulation"', 358–75.

57. See Kocka (ed.) *Bürger*, and H.-U. Wehler (ed.), *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950* (Göttingen 1990).

58. Mommsen, 'Das deutsche Kaiserreich als System umgangener Entscheidungen' in idem, *Nationalstaat*, 11–39.

59. Mommsen, 'Die latente Krise des Wilhelminischen Reiches: Staat und Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1890–1914' in idem, *Nationalstaat*, 287–316.

60. See Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 64–9.

61. Mommsen, 'Das deutsche Kaiserreich als System umgangener Entscheidungen', 36.

62. *Ibid.*, 37.

63. G. A. Ritter, 'Gesellschaft und Politik im Kaiserreich 1871–1914' in idem, *Arbeiterbewegung, Parteien und Parlamentarismus* (Göttingen 1976), 11.

64. G. A. Ritter, *Die deutsche Parteien 1830–1914* (Göttingen 1985), 29.

65. *Ibid.*, 31.

66. *Ibid.*, 31.

67. *Ibid.*, 16.

68. Cf. J. Kocka, 'Deutsche Geschichte vor Hitler. Zur Diskussion über den "deutschen Sonderweg"' in idem, *Geschichte*, 101–14.

69. Ritter, 'Gesellschaft', 14.

70. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

71. Ritter, *Die deutsche Parteien*, 65.

72. *Ibid.*, 70.

73. *Ibid.*, 18.

74. *Ibid.*, 25.

75. Thus, according to Ritter, the criticism of Eley and Blackbourn of interpretations of the Empire in which it is portrayed as a backward political system is at least partially correct. On this point the image of the delayed modernization of Germany must be adjusted. In Ritter's opinion the extent to which the base was

manipulated from above, or rather organized itself, should be researched case by case. See Ritter, *Die deutsche Parteien*, 34 and 25.

76. Ritter, *Die deutsche Parteien*, 84–8. Cf. M. Rauh, *Die Parlamentarisierung des deutschen Reiches, Beiträge zur Geschichte des deutschen Parlamentarismus und der deutschen Parteien*, Band 60 (Düsseldorf 1977). Rauh is a former assistant of Nipperdey.

77. *Ibid.*, 38–42.

78. *Ibid.*, 23–4.

79. *Ibid.*, 89–90. Kolb points out that the German defeat of 1918, too, may not simply be adduced as a factor partially explaining the slight viability of the Weimar Republic; for, after all, the viable French Third Republic was also the product of a military defeat. See E. Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Munich 1988), 2.

80. T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Band 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich 1990) and *Deutsche Geschichte. Band 2: Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (Munich 1992). For recent considerations of Nipperdey, see R. Evans, 'Nipperdey's Neunzehnten Jahrhundert' in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 20 (1994), 1, 119–40; W. J. Mommsen, 'Die vielen Gesichter der Clio. Zum Tode Thomas Nipperdey's in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (1993), 3, 408–23; L. Gall, 'Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit. Zum Lebenswerk von Thomas Nipperdey' in *Historische Zeitschrift* 256 (1993), 297–308; H. Möller, 'Bewahrung und Modernität. Zum historiographischen Werk von Th. Nipperdey' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 40 (1992), 469–82; P. Dassen, 'De geschiedenis als open toekomst. Over het werk van Thomas Nipperdey', in *Bulletin Geschiedenis, Kunst, Cultuur*, 3 (1994), 2, 136–53. Cf. I. Veit-Brause's review essay on Nipperdey's *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866* in *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 209–21.

81. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol. 1*, 9 and *idem, Geschichte 1800–1866*, 11.

82. Nipperdey strongly resists the 'politicization' (and 'functionalization') of the Empire from the perspective of '1933'. See Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol. 1*, 812, 823.

83. See T. Nipperdey, '1933 und Kontinuität der deutschen Geschichte', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 227 (1978), 88.

84. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800–1866*, 91. In light of his allergy to the idea of 'necessity' in history, this formulation is all the more remarkable. Cf. also Evans's critique of Nipperdey's disguised determinism in 'Nipperdey's Neunzehnten Jahrhundert', 124; 'Nipperdey plädiert für historische Zwangsläufigkeit, wenn es die Gründung des Kaiserreichs und die Grundzüge seiner Aussenpolitik legitimiert, aber entscheidet sich für Offenheit und Zufall, wenn dies die deutsche Geschichte von einem Teil der Schuld, die ihr von den "kritischen" Historikern aufebürdet wurde, entlastet, wenn es darum geht, die deutsche Geschichte des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts von den späteren Entwicklungen im "Dritten Reich" abzukoppeln.' As a result Nipperdey tends 'die Grenze zwischen Unparteilichkeit und Apologetik zu überschreiten.' See also note 88.

85. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800–1866*, 91.

86. *Ibid.*, 100.

87. *Ibid.* In his eagerness to counter the *Primat der Innenpolitik* of the Bielefeld historians, Nipperdey frequently goes very far in the direction of the *Primat der Außenpolitik*. Thus, he states that the anti-French character of German nationalism from the period of the Napoleonic wars of liberation put its stamp on the German

national movement 'for more than 100 years' ('über mehr als ein Jahrhundert geprägt') (304). Later, he appeals to the 'threat' to the Germans of Posen from Polish nationalism to explain the phobic nature of German nationalism (628). Napoleon's Continental System is elevated to 'ein Ereignis von eminenter Folgewirkung für die deutsche Geschichte' because it allegedly had brought the decline of industry and the agrarianization of Germany east of the Elbe (182). The absence of a constitution in Prussia is largely reduced to the presence of Russia and Austria as reactionary neighbours (278) and the failure of the Revolution of 1848 to international reactions to the German-Danish conflict over Schleswig-Holstein (624-6). Wehler qualifies this last notion as a 'zählebigen Legende' in his *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815-1845/48*, 757.

88. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800-1866*, for example, 630, where he speaks of the 'legitimate' security interests of Germany in relation to the problem of nationalities on its borders.

89. See T. Nipperdey, 'Wehlers Gesellschaftsgeschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 14 (1988), 415; 'Nicht die starken Farben und die Kontraste sind das Wichtige, sondern die Grautöne, die Nuancen, die Mischungen, die Übergänge. Die Geschichte ist grau. Darum ist mein Tugend-Ideal auch nicht die Emphase, sondern die Gelassenheit.' Cf. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol. 2, 905: 'Die Menschen unterschieden sich nicht in gute und böse, das Kaiserreich war nicht gute und böse oder nach Gutem und Bösem deutlich unterscheidbar'... 'die Grundfarbe der Geschichte ist grau, in unendlichen Schattierungen'. From this perspective Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol.1, 823-4, also criticizes the supposition that it is possible to speak of a single monolithic German (political) culture: 'Die deutsche Kultur vor 1914 war doch — bei allen bürgerlich-nationalistischen und antisozialdemokratischen Grenzen und Konformitätszwängen — eine Kultur des Pluralismus und der Dissenze.'

90. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 69-79 and 320-55.

91. *Ibid.*, 45-8; cf. 77 and 346. Cf. H. Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy. The Prussian Experience 1660-1815* (Harvard 1958).

92. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol.1, 335-55.

93. *Ibid.*, 426. Nipperdey misinterprets Wehler here, since Wehler too had emphasized the economic growth as a legitimization of the political system. See his *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 58.

94. In Nipperdey's view, the contrary was sooner the case: until 1866 Prussia had usually been much more liberal and reformist than Bavaria or Austria. In point of fact, the Prussian state was for a long period not the opponent but rather the ally of the liberals. Prussia epitomized not only a classic state of the Restoration, but was also an exemplar of reformist politics. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 169, 288-9 and 333-4.

95. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol.1, 417. For Nipperdey's conception of German society, see also *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 255-71.

96. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol.1, 418.

97. *Ibid.*, 419-21, 427. Nipperdey discerns the 'bourgeois hegemony' in society as early as 1815; Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 400-1.

98. In *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 663-6 and 802, he had already taken the German liberals into his protection against the charge that they had 'failed' historically.

99. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800-1866*, 667-70.

100. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866-1918*, Vol.1, 421. He regards the fact that the

Catholics were able to organize themselves into an independent political party as an extra problem for the German liberals; Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800–1866*, 385.

101. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.1*, 813–14, and *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.2*, 250–65, 604.

102. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.1*, 815–16.

103. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.2*, 289–311 and 286–9.

104. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.2*, 233–8.

105. Nipperdey traces the ‘unpolitical’ thinking to the repression of intellectual life by the Prussian state during the Restoration; Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1800–1866*, 57–62 and 285.

106. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918*, 600, 816–20. Following Fritz Stern, Nipperdey points to a tendency towards ‘vulgar idealism’ and ‘vulgar romanticism’ in German political culture, which stimulates an ‘unpractical’ proclivity for principle and a *Gesinnungs-* instead of a *Verantwortungsethik*.

107. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.1*, 824–7 and *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.2*, 602–9.

108. Nipperdey, *Geschichte 1866–1918, Vol.1*, 828–30.

109. *Ibid.*, 824: ‘Die deutsche Kultur vor 1914 war — auch mit ihren politischen Einschlügen — nicht entfernt eine Vorstufe von 1933’. See also 834.

110. This synthesis will form part of Wehler’s project *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700–1945*, of which the first two volumes have appeared: *Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur Defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära 1750–1815*, and *Von der Reformära bis zur industriellen und politischen ‘Deutschen Doppelrevolution’ 1815–1845/49*, (both Munich 1987). I take the provisional shifts in his standpoints with regard to the bourgeoisie, liberalism and democracy from these two volumes and especially from his contribution to the discussion in ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das Deutsche Kaiserreich?’ in Kocka (ed.), *Bürger*, 243–87.

111. J. Kocka, ‘Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Probleme der deutschen Geschichte vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert’ in *idem* (ed.), *Bürger*, 21–64.

112. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das deutsche Kaiserreich?’, 243–8; Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/48*, 174–241.

113. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 413–40.

114. *Ibid.*, 442–57.

115. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das deutsche Kaiserreich?’, 253; Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700–1815*, 236–40.

116. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das deutsche Kaiserreich?’, 258. See also 262, where he calls the Empire a ‘*Verfassungsstaat*’ ‘trotz seines Kompromißcharakters auch den Triumph bürgerlicher Liberaler’ and where he observes that between 1808 and 1871 ‘Vordringen, dann die Durchsetzung bürgerlicher Politikvorstellungen’ became more and more clear.

117. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 768, 774, 778.

118. *Ibid.*, 768–74.

119. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das deutsche Kaiserreich?’, 258–9.

120. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 203–10, 237, 561–4.

121. *Ibid.*, 297, 571.

122. Langewiesche, ‘Reich’, 362–3 criticizes this fixation on ‘little German’ (*kleindeutsch*) history from which, in his opinion, Nipperdey also suffers.

123. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 322.

124. Wehler, ‘Wie “bürgerlich” war das deutsche Kaiserreich?’, 263.

125. *Ibid.*, 263. Cf. 274: 'Die funktionalen Imperative einer wachsenden kapitalistischen Wirtschaft, einer anhaltenden, immer differenzierten Ausweitung der Staatsfunktionen unterstützen als anonyme Schubkräfte den bürgerlichen Aufstieg.'

126. Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das deutsche Kaiserreich?' (1987), expresses himself somewhat cryptically on this point: 'Erfahrungen auf Politikfeldern wie dieses müssen eigentlich das Gefühl genährt haben, daß das Kaiserreich doch noch modernisierungsfähig, im Sinne bürgerlicher Ziele mit viel Geduld weiter reformierbar sei.'

127. Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das deutsche Kaiserreich?', 268.

128. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 415; Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das deutsche Kaiserreich?', 272.

129. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700–1815*, 509–30, where he historically traces the 'mit dem Nationalismus häufig verschwisterte Xenophobie'. See further Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 241, 394–412, 572, 673.

130. Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1815–1845/49*, 743–4.

131. Like Hobsbawm, Wehler therefore now thinks the effectiveness of nationalism as a political force must also be explained from the 'receiving end'. Cf. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, especially 46–80.

132. For the discussion on the dating of the fatal turning-point in liberalism, see Brandt, 'Liberalismusdeutungen'.

133. Wehler, 'Wie "bürgerlich" war das deutsche Kaiserreich?', 272–3.

134. *Ibid.*, 273–4.

135. *Ibid.*, 276–7.

136. *Ibid.*, 243–4.

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