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## *Sociogenesis of the Antithesis Between Kultur and Zivilisation in German Usage*

### I

#### Introduction

1. The concept of “civilization” refers to a wide variety of facts: to the level of technology, to the type of manners, to the development of scientific knowledge, to religious ideas and customs. It can refer to the type of dwelling or the manner in which men and women live together, to the form of judicial punishment, or to the way in which food is prepared. Strictly speaking, there is almost nothing which cannot be done in a “civilized” or an “uncivilized” way; hence, it always seems somewhat difficult to summarize in a few words everything that can be described as civilization.

But when one examines what the general function of the concept of civilization really is, and what common quality leads all these various human attitudes and activities to be described as civilized, one starts with a very simple discovery: this concept expresses the self-consciousness of the West. One could even say: the national consciousness. It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or “more primitive” contemporary ones. By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more.

2. But “civilization” does not mean the same thing to different Western nations. Above all, there is a great difference between the English and French use of the word, on the one hand, and the German use of it, on the other. For the former, the concept sums up in a single term their pride in the significance of their own nations for the progress of the West and of humankind. But in German usage, *Zivilisation* means something which is indeed useful, but nevertheless only a value of the second rank, comprising only the outer appearance of human beings, the surface of human existence. The word through which Germans interpret themselves, which more than any other expresses their pride in their own achievements and their own being, is *Kultur*.

3. A peculiar phenomenon: words like the English and French “civilization” or the German *Kultur* appear completely clear in the internal usage of the society to which they belong. But the way in which a piece of the world is bound up in them, the manner in which they include certain areas and exclude others as a matter of course, the hidden evaluations which they implicitly bring with them, all this makes them difficult to define for any outsider.

The French and English concept of civilization can refer to political or economic, religious or technical, moral or social facts. The German concept of *Kultur* refers essentially to intellectual, artistic and religious facts, and has a tendency to draw a sharp dividing line between facts of this sort, on the one side, and political, economic and social facts, on the other. The French and English concept of civilization can refer to accomplishments, but it refers equally to the attitudes or “behaviour” of people, irrespective of whether or not they have accomplished anything. In the German concept of *Kultur*, by contrast, the reference to “behaviour”, to the value which a person has by virtue of his or her mere existence and conduct, without any accomplishment at all, is very minor. The specifically German sense of the concept of *Kultur* finds its clearest expression in its derivative, the adjective *kulturell*, which describes the value and character of particular human products rather than the intrinsic value of a person. But this word, the concept embodied in *kulturell*, cannot be exactly translated into French and English.

The word *kultiviert* (cultivated) is very close to the Western concept of civilization. To some extent, it represents the highest form of being civilized. Even people and families who have accomplished nothing *kulturell* can be *kultiviert*. Like the term “civilized”, *kultiviert* refers primarily to the form of people’s conduct or behaviour. It describes a social quality of people, their housing, their manners, their speech, their clothing, unlike *kulturell*, which does not refer directly to people themselves, but exclusively to particular human accomplishments.

4. Another difference between the two concepts is very closely bound up with this. “Civilization” describes a process or at least the result of a process. It refers to something which is constantly in motion, constantly moving “forward”. The

German concept of *Kultur*, in current usage, has a different relation to motion. It refers to human products which are there like “flowers of the field”,<sup>1</sup> to works of art, books, religious or philosophical systems, in which the individuality of a people expresses itself. The concept of *Kultur* delimits.

To a certain extent, the concept of civilization plays down the national differences between peoples; it emphasizes what is common to all human beings or—in the view of its bearers—should be. It expresses the self-assurance of peoples whose national boundaries and national identity have for centuries been so fully established that they have ceased to be the subject of any particular discussion, peoples which have long expanded outside their borders and colonized beyond them.

In contrast, the German concept of *Kultur* places special stress on national differences and the particular identity of groups; primarily by virtue of this, it has acquired in such fields as ethnological and anthropological research a significance far beyond the German linguistic area and the situation in which the concept originated. But that situation is the situation of a people which, by Western standards, arrived at political unification and consolidation only very late, and from whose boundaries, for centuries and even down to the present, territories have again and again crumbled away or threatened to crumble away. Whereas the concept of civilization has the function of giving expression to the continuously expansionist tendency of colonizing groups, the concept of *Kultur* mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as a spiritual sense, and again and again had to ask itself: “What really is our identity?” The orientation of the German concept of culture, with its tendency towards demarcation and the emphasis on and detailing of differences between groups, corresponds to this historical process. The questions “What is really French? What is really English?” have long since ceased to be a matter of much discussion for the French and English. But for centuries the question “What is really German?” has not been laid to rest. One answer to this question—one among others—lies in a particular aspect of the concept of *Kultur*.

5. Thus the national self-images represented by concepts such as *Kultur* and “civilization” take very different forms. But however different the self-image of the Germans, who speak with pride of their *Kultur*, and that of the French and English, who think with pride of their “civilization”, they all regard it as completely self-evident that theirs is the way in which the world of humans in general wants to be viewed and judged. The Germans can perhaps try to explain to the French and English what they mean by the concept of *Kultur*. But they can communicate hardly anything of the specific national background and the self-evident emotional values which envelop the word for them.

The French or English person can perhaps tell the German what elements make the concept of civilization the sum of their national self-image. But

however reasonable and rational this concept may appear to them, it too grows out of a specific set of historical situations, it too is surrounded by an emotional and traditional aura which is hard to define but which nevertheless represents an integral part of its meaning. And the discussion really becomes futile when a German tries to show the French and English person why the concept of *Zivilisation* does indeed represent a value for him, but only one of the second rank.

6. Concepts like these two have something of the character of those words which from time to time make their appearance in some narrower group, such as a family or a sect, a school class or an association, and which say much to the initiate and little to the outsider. They take shape on the basis of common experiences. They grow and change with the group whose expression they are. The situation and history of the group are mirrored in them. And they remain colourless, they never become fully alive for those who do not share these experiences, who do not speak from the same tradition and the same situation.

The concepts of *Kultur* and “civilization”, to be sure, bear the stamp not of sects or families but of whole peoples, or perhaps only of certain classes of these peoples. But in many respects what is true of the specific words of smaller groups is also true of them: they are primarily used by and for people who share a particular tradition and a particular situation.

Mathematical concepts can be separated from the group which uses them. Triangles may be explicable without reference to historical situations. Concepts such as “civilization” and *Kultur* are not. It may be that particular individuals formed them from the existing linguistic material of their group, or at least gave them new meaning. But they took root. They became established. Others picked them up in their new meaning and form, developing and polishing them in speech or writing. They were tossed back and forth until they became efficient instruments for expressing what people had jointly experienced and wanted to communicate. They became fashionable words, concepts current in the everyday speech of a particular society. This shows that they met not merely individual but shared needs for expression. The shared history has crystallized in them and resonates in them. Individuals find this crystallization already in their possibilities of use. They do not know very precisely why this meaning and this delimitation are bound up with the words, why exactly this nuance and that new possibility can be drawn from them. They make use of them because it seems to him a matter of course, because from childhood they learn to see the world through the lens of these concepts. The social process of their genesis may be long forgotten. One generation hands them on to another without being aware of the process as a whole, and the concepts live as long as this crystallization of past experiences and situations retains an existential value, a function in the actual being of society—that is, as long as succeeding generations can hear their own experiences in the meaning of the words. The terms gradually die when the

functions and experiences in the actual life of society cease to be bound up with them. At times, too, they only sleep, or sleep in certain respects, and acquire a new existential value from a new social situation. They are recalled then because something in the present state of society finds expression in the crystallization of the past embodied in the words.

## II

### The Development of the Antithesis of *Kultur and Zivilisation*<sup>2</sup>

7. It is clear that the function of the German concept of *Kultur* took on new life in the year 1919, and in the preceding years, partly because a war was waged against Germany in the name of "civilization" and because the self-image of the Germans had to be defined anew in the situation created by the peace treaty.

But it is just as clear, and can be proved, that to a certain extent the historical situation of Germany after the war only gave a new impulse to an antithesis which had long found expression through these two concepts, even as far back as the eighteenth century.

It seems to have been Kant who first expressed a specific experience and antithesis of his society in related concepts. In 1784 he wrote in his *Ideas on a Universal History from the Point of View of a Citizen of the World*: "Cultivated to a high degree by art and science, we are civilized to the point where we are overburdened with all sorts of social propriety and decency . . ."

"The idea of morality," he added, "is a part of culture. But the application of this idea, which results only in the similitude of morality in the love of honour and in outward decency, amounts only to civilizing."

Related as this formulation of the antithesis already seems, in the moment of its genesis, to our formulation, its concrete point of departure in the experiences and situation in the late eighteenth century, though not without an historical connection to the experiences on which its present-day use rests, is nevertheless significantly different. The contraposition here, where the spokesmen of the developing German bourgeoisie, the middle-class German intelligentsia,<sup>3</sup> still spoke in large part "from the point of view of a citizen of the world", related only vaguely and at best secondarily to a national contrast. Its primary aspect was an internal contrast within the society, a social contrast which nevertheless bore within itself in a significant way the germ of the national contraposition: the contrast between the courtly nobility, predominantly French-speaking and "civilized" on the French model, and a German-speaking, middle-class stratum of intelligentsia recruited chiefly from the bourgeois "servers of princes" or officials in the broadest sense, and occasionally also from the landed nobility.

This latter was a stratum far removed from political activity, scarcely thinking in political terms and only tentatively in national ones, whose legitimation consisted primarily in its intellectual, scientific or artistic *accomplishments*. Counterposed to it is an upper class which “accomplished” nothing in the sense in which the others do, but for which the shaping of its distinguished and distinctive *behaviour* was central to its self-image and self-justification. And this is the class which Kant has in mind when he spoke of being “civilized to the point where we are overburdened”, of mere “social propriety and decency”, of “the similitude of morality in the love of honour”. It is in the polemic of the stratum of the German middle-class intelligentsia against the etiquette of the ruling courtly upper class that the conceptual contraposition of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* originated in Germany. But this polemic is older and broader than its crystallization in these two concepts.

8. It can be traced long before the middle of the eighteenth century, even if only as an undertone in thought much more muted than after the middle of the century. A good idea of this can be obtained from the articles on *Hof*, *Höflichkeit*, and *Hofmann* (Court, Courtesy, Courtier), too long to be reproduced here in full, in the *Zedler Universal Lexicon* of 1736.<sup>4</sup>

Courtesy undoubtedly gets its name from the court and court life. The courts of great lords are a theatre where everyone wants to make his fortune. This can only be done by winning the favour of the prince and the most important people of his court. One therefore takes all conceivable pains to make oneself agreeable to them. Nothing does this better than making the other believe that we are ready to serve him to the utmost of our capacity under all conditions. Nevertheless, we are not always in a position to do this, and may not want to, often for good reasons. Courtesy serves as a substitute for all this. By it we give the other so much reassurance, through our outward show, that he has a favourable anticipation of our readiness to serve him. This wins us the other's trust, from which an affection for us develops imperceptibly, as a result of which he becomes eager to do good to us. This is so common with courtesy that it gives a special advantage to him who possesses it. To be sure, it should really be ability and virtue which earn us people's esteem. But how few are the correct judges of these two! And how many fewer hold them worthy of honour! People, all too concerned with externals, are far more moved by what reaches their senses externally, especially when the accompanying circumstances are such as particularly affect their will. This works out exactly in the case of a courtier.

Simply, without philosophical interpretation and in clear relation to specific social configurations, the same antithesis was here expressed which eventuated in Kant, refined and deepened, in the antithesis of culture and civilization: deceptive external “courtesy” and true “virtue”. But the author only spoke of this

in passing, with a sigh of resignation. After the middle of the century the tone gradually changes. The self-legitimation of the middle classes by virtue and accomplishment becomes more precise and emphatic, and the polemic against the external and superficial manners to be found in the courts becomes more explicit.

### III

#### Examples of Courtly Attitudes in Germany

9. It is not easy to speak of Germany in general, since at this time there were special characteristics in each of the many states. But only a few were eventually decisive for the development of the country as a whole; the rest followed. And certain general characteristics were more or less clearly apparent everywhere.

To begin with, there is the depopulation and the dreadful economic devastation of the country after the Thirty Years War. In the seventeenth century, and even still in the eighteenth, Germany and in particular the German bourgeoisie were poor by French and English standards. Trade, and especially the foreign trade which was highly developed in parts of Germany in the sixteenth century, was in ruins. The huge wealth of the great mercantile houses had been destroyed, partly by the shift in trade routes due to the overseas discoveries, and partly as a direct consequence of the long chaos of the war. What was left was a small-town bourgeoisie with narrow horizons, living essentially by supplying local needs.

There was not much money available for luxuries such as literature and art. In the courts, wherever there was enough money to do so, people inadequately imitated the conduct of the court of Louis XIV and spoke French. German, the language of the lower and middle classes, was unwieldy and awkward. Leibniz, Germany's only courtly philosopher, the only great German of this time whose name won acclaim in wider courtly circles, wrote and spoke French or Latin, seldom German. And the language problem, the problem of what could be done with this awkward German language, occupied him as it occupied many others.

French spread from the courts to the upper layer of the bourgeoisie. All *honnêtes gens* (decent people), all people of "consequence" spoke it. To speak French was the status symbol of all the upper classes.

In 1730, Gottsched's bride wrote to her betrothed: "Nothing is more plebeian than to write letters in German."<sup>5</sup>

If one spoke German, it was considered good form to introduce as many French words as possible. In 1740, E. de Mauvillon wrote in his *Lettres Françaises et Germaniques*: "It is only a few years since one did not say four words of German without two of French." That was *le bel usage* (good usage).<sup>6</sup> And he had more to say about the barbaric quality of the German language. Its nature, he said, was

“d’être rude et barbare” (to be rude and barbarous).<sup>7</sup> There were the Saxons, who asserted “qu’on parle mieux l’Allemand en Saxe, qu’en aucun autre endroit de l’Empire” (German is spoken better in Saxony than in any other part of the Empire). The Austrians made the same assertion in regard to themselves, as did the Bavarians, the Brandenburgers and the Swiss. A few scholars, Mauvillon continued, wanted to establish rules of grammar, but “il est difficile, qu’une Nation, qui contient dans son sein tant de Peuples indépendans les uns des autres, se soumette aux décisions d’un petit nombre des Savans” (it is difficult for a nation that embraces so many peoples independent of one another to submit to the decisions of a small number of *savants*).

Here as in many other fields, a small, powerless, middle-class intelligentsia fell heir to tasks which in France and England were undertaken largely by the court and the aristocratic upper class. It was learned middle-class “servers of princes” who first attempted to create, in a particular intellectual class, models of what German was, and thus to establish at least in this intellectual sphere a German unity which did not yet seem realizable in the political sphere. The concept of *Kultur* had the same function.

But at first most of what he saw in Germany appeared crude and backward to Mauvillon, an observer grounded in French civilization. He spoke of the literature as well as the language in these terms: “Milton, Boileau, Pope, Racine, Tasso, Molière, and practically all poets of consequence have been translated into most European languages; your poets, for the most part, are themselves only translators.”

He went on: “Name me a creative spirit on your Parnassus, name me a German poet who has drawn from his own resources a work of some reputation; I defy you to.”<sup>8</sup>

10. One might say that this was the unauthoritative opinion of a badly informed Frenchman. But in 1780, forty years after Mauvillon and nine years before the French Revolution, when France and England had already passed through decisive phases of their cultural and national development, when the languages of the two Western countries had long since found their classic and permanent form, Frederick the Great published a work called *De la littérature allemande*,<sup>9</sup> in which he lamented the meagre and inadequate development of German writing, made approximately the same assertions about the German language as Mauvillon, and explained how in his opinion this lamentable situation might be remedied.

Of the German language he said: “I find a half-barbarous language, which breaks down into as many different dialects as Germany has provinces. Each local group is convinced that its patois is the best.” He described the low estate of German literature and lamented the pedantry of German scholars and the meagre development of German science. But he also saw the reasons for it: he spoke of

Germany's impoverishment as a result of continuous wars, and of the inadequate development of trade and the bourgeoisie.

"It is", he said, "not to the spirit or the genius of the nation that one must attribute the slight progress we have made, but we should lay the blame only on a succession of sad events, a string of wars which have ruined us and left us poor in men as well as money."

He spoke of the slowly beginning recovery of prosperity: "The Third Estate no longer languishes in shameful degradation. Fathers educate their children without going into debt. Behold, a beginning has been made in the happy revolution which we await." And he prophesied that with growing prosperity there would also come a blossoming of German art and science, a civilizing of the Germans which would give them an equal place among the other nations: this was the happy revolution of which he spoke. And he compares himself to Moses, who saw the new blossoming of his people approaching without experiencing it.

11. Was Frederick right? A year after the appearance of his work, in 1781, Schiller's *Die Räuber* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, to be followed in 1787 by Schiller's *Don Carlos* and Goethe's *Iphigenie*. There followed the whole blossoming of German literature and philosophy which we know. All of this seems to confirm his prediction.

But this new blooming had been long in preparation. The German language did not achieve its new expressive power in two or three years. In 1780, when *De la littérature allemande* appeared, this language had long ceased to be the half-barbaric "patois" of which Frederick spoke. A whole collection of works to which today, in retrospect, we assign considerable importance had already appeared. Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* had been produced seven years earlier, *Werther* was in circulation, Lessing had already published the major part of his dramatic and theoretical works, including *Laokoon* in 1766 and *Die Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1767. Frederick died in 1781, a year after the appearance of his book. Klopstock's writings had been published much earlier; his *Messias* appeared in 1748. This is without counting Herder, many of the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) plays, and a whole collection of widely read novels such as Sophie de la Roche's *Das Fräulein von Sternheim*. There had long since developed in Germany a class of buyers, a bourgeois public—even if still a relatively small one—which was interested in such works. Waves of great intellectual excitement had flowed over Germany and found expression in articles, books, plays, and other works. The German language had become rich and flexible.

Of all this Frederick gave no hint in his work. He either did not see it or assigned it no significance. He mentioned only a single work of the young generation, the greatest work of the period of *Sturm und Drang* and enthusiasm for Shakespeare, *Götz von Berlichingen*. He mentioned it, characteristically, in connection with the education and forms of entertainment of the *basses classes*, the lower strata of the population:

To convince yourself of the lack of taste which has reigned in Germany until our day, you only need go to the public spectacles. There you will see presented the abominable works of Shakespeare, translated into our language; the whole audience goes into raptures when it listens to these ridiculous farces worthy of the savages of Canada. I describe them in these terms because they sin against all the rules of the theatre, rules which are not at all arbitrary.

Look at the porters and gravediggers who come on stage and make speeches worthy of them; after them come the kings and queens. How can such a jumble of lowliness and grandeur, of buffoonery and tragedy, be touching and pleasing?

One can pardon Shakespeare for these bizarre errors; the beginning of the arts is never their point of maturity.

But then look at *Götz von Berlichingen* making its appearance on stage, a detestable imitation of these bad English pieces, while the public applauds and enthusiastically demands the repetition of these disgusting stupidities.

And he continued: "After having spoken of the lower classes, it is necessary for me to go on with the same frankness in regard to the universities."

12. The man who spoke thus was the man who did more than any of his contemporaries for the political and economic development of Prussia and perhaps indirectly for the political development of Germany. But the intellectual tradition in which he grew up and which found expression through him was the common tradition of Europe's "good society", the aristocratic tradition of pre-natal court society. He spoke its language, French. By the standard of its taste he measured the intellectual life of Germany. Its prescribed models determine his judgement. Others of this society had long spoken of Shakespeare in a way altogether similar to his. Thus, in 1730, Voltaire gave expression to very similar thoughts in the *Discours sur la tragédie*, which introduced the tragedy *Brutus*: "I certainly do not pretend to approve the barbarous irregularities with which it [Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar*] is filled. It is only surprising that there are not more in a work composed in an age of ignorance by a man who did not even know Latin and had no teacher except his own genius."

What Frederick the Great said about Shakespeare was, in fact, the standard opinion of the French-speaking upper class of Europe. He did not "copy" or "plagiarize" Voltaire; what he wrote was his sincere personal opinion. He took no pleasure in the rude and uncivilized jests of gravediggers and similar folk, the more so if they were mixed in with the great tragic sentiments of princes and kings. He felt that all of this had no clear and concise form; these were the "pleasures of the lower classes". This is the way in which his comments are to be understood; they are no more and no less individual than the French language he used. Like it, they bore witness to his membership in a particular society. And the paradox that while his politics were Prussian his aesthetic tradition was French (or, more precisely, absolutist-courtly) is less great than the nationally unified concepts of the present day may suggest. It is bound up with the special

structure of this court society, whose political institutions and interests were multifariously fissured, but whose social stratification was into estates whose taste, style and language were by and large the same throughout Europe.

The peculiarities of this situation occasionally produced inner conflicts in the young Frederick, as he slowly became aware that the interests of the ruler of Prussia could not always be brought into accord with reverence for France and adherence to courtly customs.<sup>10</sup> Throughout his life they produced a certain disharmony between what he did as a ruler and what he wrote and published as a human being and philosopher.

The feelings of the German bourgeois intelligentsia towards him were also sometimes correspondingly paradoxical. His military and political successes gave their self-identity as Germans a tonic it had long lacked, and for many he became a national hero. But his attitude in matters of language and taste, which found expression in his work on German literature though by no means there alone, was exactly what the German intelligentsia, precisely as a *German* intelligentsia, had to fight against.

Their situation had its analogue in almost all the greater German states and in many of the smaller ones as well. At the top almost everywhere in Germany were individuals or groups who spoke French and decided policy. On the other side, there was a German-speaking intelligentsia, who by and large had no influence on political developments. From their ranks, essentially, came the people on whose account Germany has been called the land of poets and thinkers. And from them concepts such as *Bildung* and *Kultur* received their specifically German imprint and tenor.

## IV

### The Middle Class and the Court Nobility in Germany

13. It would be a special project (and a very fascinating one) to show how much the specific mental orientation and ideals of a courtly-absolutist society found expression in classical French tragedy, which Frederick the Great counterposes to the Shakespearean tragedies and *Götz*. The importance of good form, the specific mark of every genuine "society"; the control of individual feelings by reason, a vital necessity for every courtier; the reserved behaviour and elimination of every plebeian expression, the specific mark of a particular stage on the road to "civilization"—all this finds its purest expression in classical tragedy. What must be hidden in court life, all vulgar feelings and attitudes, everything of which "one" does not speak, does not appear in tragedy either. People of low rank, which for this class also means of base character, have no place in it. Its form is clear, transparent, precisely regulated, like etiquette and court life in general.<sup>11</sup> It shows the courtly people as they would like to be and, at the same time, as the

absolute prince wants to see them. And all who lived under the impress of this social situation, be they English or Prussian or French, had their taste forced into the same pattern. Even Dryden, next to Pope the best-known courtly poet of England, wrote about earlier English drama in the epilogue to the *Conquest of Granada* very much in the vein of Frederick the Great and Voltaire:

Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;  
Our native language more refined and free,  
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit  
In conversation, than those poets writ.

The connection with social stratification is particularly clear in this aesthetic judgement. Frederick, too, defends himself against the tastelessness of juxtaposing on the stage the "tragic grandeur" of princes and queens and the "baseness" of porters and gravediggers. How could he have understood and approved a dramatic and literary work which had central to it precisely the struggle against class differences, a work which was intended to show that not merely the sorrows of princes and kings and the courtly aristocracy but those of people lower on the social scale have their greatness and their tragedy?

In Germany, too, the bourgeoisie slowly became more prosperous. The King of Prussia saw this and promised himself that it would lead to an awakening of art and science, a "happy revolution". But this bourgeoisie spoke a different language from the king. The ideals and taste of the bourgeois youth, the models for its behaviour, were almost the opposite of his.

In *Dichtung und Wahrheit (Poetry and Truth)*, Book 9, Goethe wrote: "In Strasbourg, on the French border, we were at once freed from the spirit of the French. We found their way of life much too ordered and too aristocratic, their poetry cold, their criticism destructive, their philosophy abstruse and unsatisfying."

He wrote *Götz* from this mood. How could Frederick the Great, the man of enlightened, rational absolutism and aristocratic-courtly taste, have understood it? How could the King have approved the dramas and theories of Lessing, who praised in Shakespeare precisely what Frederick condemned: that his works fitted the taste of the people far more than do the French classics?

"If someone had translated the masterpieces of Shakespeare . . . for our Germans, I know well that it would have a better result than thus making them acquainted with Corneille or Racine. In the first place, the people would take far more delight in him than in them."

Lessing wrote this in his *Letters Concerning the Most Recent Literature* (part I, letter 17), and he demanded and wrote bourgeois dramas, appropriate to the newly awakening self-consciousness of the bourgeois classes, because courtly people did not have the exclusive privilege to be great. "This hateful distinction which men have made between themselves", he says, "is not known to nature. She parcels

out the qualities of the heart without any preference for the nobles and the rich."<sup>12</sup>

The whole literary movement of the second half of the eighteenth century was the product of a social class—and, accordingly, of aesthetic ideals—which was in opposition to Frederick's social and aesthetic inclinations. Thus, they had nothing to say to him, and he therefore overlooks the vital forces already active around him and condemned what he could not overlook, like *Götz*. This German literary movement, whose exponents included Klopstock, Herder, Lessing, the poets of *Sturm und Drang*, the poets of "sensibility", and the circle known as the *Göttinger Hain*, the young Goethe, the young Schiller, and many others, was certainly no political movement. With isolated exceptions, one finds in Germany before 1789 no idea of concrete political action, nothing reminiscent of the formation of a political party or a political party programme. One does find, particularly in Prussian officialdom, proposals and also the practical beginning of reforms from the standpoint of enlightened absolutism. In the work of philosophers such as Kant one finds the development of general basic principles which were, in part, in direct opposition to the prevailing conditions. In the writings of the young generation of the *Göttinger Hain* one finds expressions of wild hatred directed against princes, courts, aristocrats, "Frenchifiers", courtly immorality and intellectual frigidity. And everywhere among middle-class youth one finds vague dreams of a new united Germany, of a "natural" life—"natural" as opposed to the "unnatural" life of court society—and again and again an overwhelming delight in their own exuberance of feeling.

Thoughts, feelings—nothing which was able in any sense to lead to concrete political action. The structure of this absolutist society of petty states offered no opening for it. Elements within the bourgeoisie gained self-assurance, but the framework of the absolute states was completely unshaken. The bourgeois elements were excluded from any political activity. At most, they could "think and write" independently; they could not act independently.

In this situation, writing became the most important outlet. Here the new self-confidence and the vague discontent with what existed find a more or less covert expression. Here, in a sphere which the apparatus of the absolute states had surrendered to a certain extent, the young middle-class generation counterposed its new dreams and oppositional ideas, and with them the German language, to the courtly ideals.

As has been said, the literary movement of the second half of the eighteenth century was not a political one, but in the fullest sense of the word it was the expression of a social movement, a transformation of society. The bourgeoisie as a whole did not yet find expression in it. It was at first the expression of a sort of bourgeois vanguard, what is here described as the middle-class intelligentsia: many individuals in the same position and of similar social origin scattered throughout the country, individuals who understood one another because they

were in the same position. Only occasionally did individual members of this vanguard find themselves together in some place as a group, for a shorter or longer time; often they lived in isolation or solitude, an élite in relation to the people, persons of the second rank in the eyes of the courtly aristocracy.

Again and again one can see in these works the connection between this social situation and the ideals of which they spoke: the love of nature and freedom, the solitary exaltation, the surrender to the excitement of one's own heart, unhindered by "cold reason". In *Werther*, whose success shows how typical these sentiments were of a particular generation, it was occasionally said quite unequivocally.

In the letter of 24 December 1771, one reads: "The resplendent misery, the boredom among the detestable people gathered together here, the competition for rank among them, the way they are constantly looking for a chance to get a step ahead of one another."

And under 8 January 1772: "What sort of people are these whose whole soul is rooted in ceremonial, and whose thoughts and desires the year round are centred on how they can move up a chair at table."

Under 15 March 1772: "I gnash my teeth . . . I eat at the Count's house and after dinner we walk back and forth in the great park. The social hour approaches. I think, God knows, about nothing." He remains, the nobles arrive. The women whisper, something circulates among the men. Finally the Count, somewhat embarrassed, asks him to leave. The nobility feel insulted at seeing a bourgeois among them.

"'You know' ", says the Count, "'I notice that the company is displeased at seeing you here.' . . . I stole away from the distinguished company, and drove to M., to watch the sunset from the hill there while reading in my Homer the noble song of how Ulysses was hospitably received by the excellent swineherds."

On the one hand, superficiality, ceremony, formal conversation; on the other, inwardness, depth of feeling, immersion in books, development of the individual personality. It is the same contrast which was expressed by Kant in the antithesis between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, relating to a very specific social situation.

In *Werther*, Goethe also shows particularly clearly the two fronts between which the bourgeoisie lives. "What irritates me most of all", we read in the entry of 24 December 1771, "is our odious bourgeois situation. To be sure, I know as well as any other how necessary class differences are, how many advantages I owe to them myself, only they should not stand directly in my way." Nothing better characterizes middle-class consciousness than this statement. The doors below must remain shut. Those above must open. And like any other middle class, this one was imprisoned in a peculiarly middle-class way: it could not think of breaking down the walls that blocked the way up, for fear that those separating it from the lower strata might also give way in the assault.

The whole movement was one of upward mobility: Goethe's great-grandfather

was a blacksmith,<sup>13</sup> his grandfather a tailor, then an innkeeper with a courtly clientele and courtly-bourgeois manners. Already well-to-do, his father became an imperial counsellor, a rich bourgeois of independent means, with a title. His mother was the daughter of a Frankfurt patrician family.

Schiller's father was a surgeon, later a badly paid major; his grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather were bakers. From similar social origins, now closer, now farther off, from the crafts and the middle administration, came Schubart, Bürger, Winckelmann, Herder, Friedrich August Wolff, Fichte and many other members of this movement.

14. There was an analogous movement in France. There, too, in conjunction with a similar social change, a profusion of outstanding people emerged from middle-class circles. They included Voltaire and Diderot. But in France these talents were received and assimilated without great difficulty by the large court society of Paris. In Germany, on the other hand, sons of the rising middle class who were distinguished by talent and intelligence were debarred, for the most part, from courtly-aristocratic life. A few, like Goethe, achieved a kind of elevation to these circles. But aside from the fact that the court at Weimar was small and relatively poor, Goethe was an exception. By and large, the walls between the middle-class intelligentsia and the aristocratic upper class in Germany remained, by Western standards, very high. In 1740 the Frenchman Mauvillon noted that "one observes in the German gentleman an air that is haughty to the point of arrogance. Swollen with a lineage the length of which they are always ready to prove, they despise anyone not similarly endowed. Seldom", he continues, "do they contract *mésalliances*. But no less seldom are they seen behaving simply and amiably towards middle-class people. And if they spurn connubiality with them, how much less do they seek out their company, whatever their merit may be."<sup>14</sup>

In this particularly sharp social division between nobility and middle class, to which countless documents bear witness, a decisive factor was no doubt the relative indigence of both. This impelled the nobles to cut themselves off, using proof of ancestry as the most important instrument for preserving their privileged social existence. On the other hand, it blocked to the German middle class the main route by which in the Western countries bourgeois elements rose, intermarried with, and were received by the aristocracy: through money.

But whatever the causes—they were doubtless highly complex—of this very pronounced separation, the resulting low degree of fusion of the courtly-aristocratic models with their "ascriptive", "quality-based" values on the one hand with bourgeois values based on achievement on the other, had a decisive influence for long periods on the emergent national character of the Germans. This division explains why a main linguistic stream, the language of educated Germans, and almost the entire recent intellectual tradition expressed in literature received their decisive impulses and their stamp from a middle-class

intellectual stratum which was far more purely and specifically middle-class than the corresponding French intelligentsia and even than the English, the latter seeming to occupy an intermediate position between those of France and Germany.

The gesture of self-isolation, the accentuation of the specific and distinctive, which was seen earlier in the comparison of the German concept of *Kultur* with Western "civilization", reappears here as a characteristic of German historical development.

It was not only externally that France expanded and colonized early in comparison with Germany. Internally, too, similar movements are frequently seen throughout her more recent history. Particularly important in this connection is the diffusion of courtly-aristocratic manners, the tendency of the courtly aristocracy to assimilate and, so to speak, colonize elements from other classes. The social pride of the French aristocracy was always considerable, and the stress on class differences never lost its importance for them. But the walls surrounding them had more openings; access to the aristocracy (and thus the assimilation of other groups) played a far greater role here than in Germany.

The most vigorous expansion of the German empire occurred, by contrast, in the Middle Ages. From that time on, the German Reich diminished slowly but steadily. Even before the Thirty Years War and more so after it, German territories were hemmed in on all sides, and strong pressure was exerted on almost all the external frontiers. Correspondingly, the struggles within Germany between the various social groups competing for limited opportunities and autonomy, and therefore the tendencies towards distinction and mutual exclusiveness, were generally more intense than in the expanding Western countries. As much as the fragmentation of the German territory into a multiplicity of sovereign states, it was this extreme isolation of large parts of the nobility from the German middle class that stood in the way of the formation of a unified, model-setting central society, which in other countries attained decisive importance at least as a stage on the way to nationhood, setting its stamp in certain phases on language, on the arts, on manners and on the structure of emotions.

## V

### Literary Examples of the Relationship of the German Middle-Class Intelligentsia to the Court

15. The books of the middle classes which had great public success after the mid-eighteenth century—that is, in the period when these classes were gaining in prosperity and self-assurance—show very clearly how strongly this dissimilarity was felt. They also demonstrate that the differences between the

structure and life of the middle class, on the one hand, and the courtly upper class, on the other, were matched by differences in the structure of behaviour, emotional life, aspirations and morality; they show—necessarily one-sidedly—how these differences were perceived in the middle-class camp.

An example of this is the well-known novel by Sophie de la Roche, *Das Fräulein von Sternheim*,<sup>15</sup> which made the authoress one of the most celebrated women of her time. “My whole ideal of a young woman”, wrote Caroline Flachsland to Herder after reading *Sternheim*, “gentle, delicate, charitable, proud, virtuous, and deceived. I have spent precious, wonderful hours reading the book. Alas, how far I still am from my ideal, from myself.”<sup>16</sup>

The curious paradox that Caroline Flachsland, like many others of similar make-up, loved her own suffering—that she included being deceived, along with charity, pride and virtue, among the features of the ideal heroine whom she wished to resemble—is highly characteristic of the emotional condition of the middle-class intelligentsia, and particularly of the women among them, in the age of sensibility. The middle-class heroine was deceived by the aristocratic courtier. The warning, the fear of the socially superior “seducer” who could not marry the girl because of the social discrepancy between them, and the secret wish for his approach, the fascination that lay in the idea of penetrating the closed and dangerous circle, finally the identifying empathy with the deceived girl: all this is an example of the specific ambivalence which beset the emotional life of middle-class people—and not only women—with regard to the aristocracy. *Das Fräulein von Sternheim* is, in this respect, a feminine counterpart of *Werther*. Both works point to specific entanglements of their class, which found expression in sentimentality, sensibility and related shades of emotion.

The problem presented in the novel: A high-minded country girl, from a family of landed gentry with bourgeois origins, arrives at court. The Prince, related to her on her mother’s side, desires her as his mistress. Having no other escape, she seeks refuge with the “scoundrel” of the novel, an English lord living at the court, who speaks just as many middle-class circles would have imagined an “aristocratic seducer” to speak, and who produces a comic effect because he utters middle-class reproaches to his type as his own thoughts. But from him, too, the heroine preserves her virtue, her moral superiority, the compensation for her class inferiority, and dies.

This is how the heroine, Fräulein von Sternheim, the daughter of an ennobled colonel, speaks:<sup>17</sup>

To see how the tone, the modish spirit of the court suppresses the noblest movements of a heart of admirable nature, to see how avoiding the sneers of the ladies and gentlemen of fashion means laughing and agreeing with them, fills me with contempt and pity. The thirst for amusement, for new finery, for admiration of a dress, a piece of furniture, a new noxious dish—oh, my Emilie, how anxious and sick my soul grows. . . . I will not speak of the false ambition that hatches so many base intrigues, grovels

before vice ensconced in prosperity, regards virtue and merit with contempt, and unfeelingly makes others wretched.

“I am convinced, Aunt,” she says after a few days of court life, “that life at court does not suit my character. My taste, my inclinations, diverge from it in every way. And I confess to my gracious aunt that I would leave more happily than I came.”

“Dearest Sophie”, her aunt tells her, “you are really a most charming girl, but the old vicar has filled your head with pedantic ideas. Let go of them a little.”<sup>18</sup>

In another place Sophie writes: “My love of Germany has just involved me in a conversation in which I sought to defend the merits of my Fatherland. I talked so zealously that my aunt told me afterwards that I had given a pretty demonstration of being the granddaughter of a professor. . . . This reproach vexed me. The ashes of my father and grandfather had been offended.”

The clergyman and the professor—these are indeed two of the most important representatives of the middle-class administrative intelligentsia, two social figures who played the most decisive part in the formation and diffusion of the new language of educated Germans. This example shows quite clearly how the vague national feeling of these circles, with its spiritual, non-political leanings, appears as bourgeois to the aristocracy at the petty courts. At the same time, both the clergyman and the professor point to the social centre most important in fashioning and disseminating the German middle-class culture: the university. From it generation after generation of students carried into the country, as teachers, clergymen, and middle-rank administrators, a complex of ideas and ideals stamped in a particular way. The German university was, in a sense, the middle-class counterweight to the court.

Thus it is in words with which the pastor might thunder against him from the pulpit that the court scoundrel expressed himself in the middle-class imagination:<sup>19</sup>

You know that I have never granted love any other power than over my senses, whose most delicate and lively pleasures it affords . . . All classes of beauty have pandered to me. . . . I grew sated with them. . . . The moralists . . . may have their say on the fine nets and snares in which I have captured the virtue and pride, the wisdom and the frigidity, the coquetry and even the piety of the whole feminine world . . . Amour indulged my vanity. He brought forth from the most wretched corner of the countryside a colonel's daughter whose form, mind, and character are so charming that . . .

Twenty-five years later, similar antitheses and related ideals and problems could still earn a book success. In 1796, *Agnes von Lilien*,<sup>20</sup> by Caroline von Wolzogen, appeared in Schiller's *Horen*. In this novel the mother, of the high aristocracy, who must for mysterious reasons have her daughter educated outside the court circle, says:

I am almost thankful for the prudence that compels me to keep you far from the circle in which I became unhappy. A serious, sound formation of the mind is rare in high society. You might have become a little doll that danced to and fro at the side of opinion.

And the heroine says of herself:<sup>21</sup>

I knew but little of conventional life and the language of worldly people. My simple principles found many things paradoxical to which a mind made pliable by habit is reconciled without effort. To me it was as natural as that night follows day to lament the deceived girl and hate the deceiver, to prefer virtue to honour and honour to one's own advantage. In the judgement of this society I saw all these notions overturned.

She then sketches the prince, a product of French civilization:<sup>22</sup>

The prince was between sixty and seventy, and oppressive to himself and others with the stiff, old French etiquette which the sons of German princes had learned at the court of the French king and transplanted to their own soil, admittedly in somewhat reduced dimensions. The prince had learned through age and habit to move almost naturally under this heavy armour of ceremony. Towards women he observed the elegant, exaggerated courtesy of the bygone age of chivalry, so that his person was not unpleasing to them, but he could not leave the sphere of fine manners for an instant without becoming insufferable. His children . . . saw in their father only the despot.

The caricatures among the courtly people seemed to me now ridiculous, now pitiable. The reverence that they were able, on the appearance of their lord, to summon instantly from their hearts to their hands and feet, the gracious or angry glance that passed through their bodies like an electric shock . . . the immediate compliance of their opinions to the most recent utterance from the princely lips, all this I found incomprehensible. I seemed to be watching a puppet theatre.

Courtesy, compliance, fine manners, on the one hand, sound education and preference of virtue to honour, on the other: German literature in the second half of the eighteenth century is full of such antitheses. As late as 23 October 1828, Eckermann said to Goethe: "An education as thorough as the Grand-Duke appears to have had is doubtless rare among princely personages." "Very rare", Goethe replies. "There are many, to be sure, who are able to converse cleverly on any subject, but they do not possess their learning inwardly, and merely tickle the surface. And it is no wonder, if one thinks of the appalling diversions and truncations that court life brings with it."

On occasion he uses the concept of *Kultur* quite expressly in this context. "The people around me", he says, "had no idea of scholarship. They were German courtiers, and this class had not the slightest *Kultur*."<sup>23</sup> And Knigge once observed explicitly: "Where more than here [in Germany] did the courtiers form a separate species."

16. In all these statements a quite definite social situation is reflected. It is the same situation that is discernible behind Kant's antithesis of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. But even independently of these concepts, this phase and the experiences deriving from it became deeply imprinted in the German tradition. What was expressed in this concept of *Kultur*, in the antithesis between depth and superficiality and in many related concepts, was primarily the self-image of a middle-class intellectual stratum. This was a relatively thin layer scattered over the whole territory, and therefore individualized to a high degree and in a particular form. It did not constitute, as did the court, a closed circle, a "society". It was composed predominantly of officials, of civil servants in the broadest sense of the word—that is, of people who directly or indirectly derive their income from the court, but who, with few exceptions, did not themselves belong to courtly "good society", to the aristocratic upper class. It was a class of intellectuals without a broad middle-class background. The commercial-professional middle class, who might have served as a public for the writers, was relatively undeveloped in most German states in the eighteenth century. The rise to prosperity was only beginning in this period. The German writers and intellectuals were therefore floating in the air to some extent. Mind and books were their refuge and their domain, achievements in scholarship and art their pride. Scope for political activity, political goals, scarcely existed for this class. Commerce and the economic order were, for them, in keeping with the structure of their life and society, marginal concerns. Trade, communications and industry were comparatively undeveloped and still needed, for the most part, protection and promotion by mercantilist policy rather than liberation from its constraints. What legitimized this eighteenth-century middle-class intelligentsia to itself, what supplied the foundation of its self-image and pride, was situated beyond economics and politics. It existed in what was called for precisely this reason *das rein Geistige* (the purely spiritual), in books, scholarship, religion, art, philosophy, in the inner enrichment, the intellectual formation (*Bildung*) of the individual, primarily through the medium of books, in the personality. Accordingly, the watchwords expressing this self-image of the German intellectual class, terms such as *Bildung* and *Kultur*, tended to draw a sharp distinction between accomplishments in the areas just mentioned, between this purely spiritual sphere as the only one of genuine value, and the political, economic and social sphere, in complete contrast to the watchwords of the rising bourgeoisie in France and England. The peculiar fate of the German bourgeoisie, its long political impotence, and the late unification of the nation acted continuously in one direction, reinforcing concepts and ideals of this kind. Thus the development of the concept of *Kultur* and the ideals it embodied reflected the social situation of the German intelligentsia, a class which lacked a significant social hinterland, and which, being the first bourgeois formation in Germany, develop an expressly

bourgeois self-image, specifically middle-class ideas, and an arsenal of trenchant concepts directed against the courtly upper class.

Also in keeping with their situation was what this intelligentsia saw as most worth fighting against in the upper class, as the opposite of *Bildung* and *Kultur*. The attack was directed only infrequently, hesitantly and usually resignedly against the political or social privileges of the courtly aristocracy. Instead, it was directed predominantly against their human conduct.

A very illuminating description of the difference between this German intellectual class and its French counterpart is likewise to be found in Goethe's conversations with Eckermann: Ampère has come to Weimar. (Goethe did not know him personally but had often praised him to Eckermann.) To everyone's astonishment the celebrated Monsieur Ampère turns out to be a "cheerful youth of some twenty years". Eckermann expressed surprise, and Goethe replied (Thursday, 3 May 1827):

It has not been easy for you on your heath, and we in middle Germany have had to buy dearly enough such little wisdom as we possess. For at bottom we lead an isolated, miserable life! Very little culture comes to us from the people itself, and all our men of talent are scattered across the country. One is in Vienna, another in Berlin, another in Königsberg, another in Bonn or Düsseldorf, all separated from each other by fifty or a hundred miles, so that personal contact or a personal exchange of ideas is a rarity. I feel what this means when men like Alexander von Humboldt pass through, and advance my studies further in a single day than I would otherwise have travelled in a year on my solitary path.

But now imagine a city like Paris, where the outstanding minds of the whole realm are gathered in a single place, and in their daily intercourse, competition, and rivalry teach and spur each other on, where the best from every sphere of nature and art, from the whole surface of the earth, can be viewed at all times. Imagine this metropolis where every walk over a bridge or across a square summons up a great past. And in all this do not think of the Paris of a dull, mindless epoch, but the Paris of the nineteenth century, where for three generations, through men like Molière, Voltaire, and Diderot, such a wealth of ideas has been put into circulation as is not found anywhere else on the entire globe, and you will understand that a good mind like Ampère, having grown up in such plenitude, can very well amount to something in his twenty-fourth year.

Further on, Goethe says with reference to Mérimée: "In Germany we cannot hope to produce such mature work when still so young. This is not the fault of the individual, but of the cultural state of the nation, and the great difficulty that we all experience in making our way in isolation."

From such statements, which in this introductory context must suffice as documentation, it is very clear how the political fragmentation of Germany was connected to a quite specific structure, both of the German intellectual class and of its social behaviour and way of thinking. In France the members of the intelligentsia were collected in one place, held together within a more or less

unified and central “good society”; in Germany, with its numerous, relatively small capitals, there was no central and unified “good society”. Here the intelligentsia was dispersed over the entire country. In France conversation was one of the most important means of communication and, in addition, had been for centuries an art; in Germany the most important means of communication was the book, and it was a unified written language, rather than a unified spoken one, that this German intellectual class developed. In France even young people lived in a milieu of rich and stimulating intellectuality; the young member of the German middle class had to work his way up in relative solitude and isolation. The mechanisms of social advancement were different in both countries. And finally, this statement of Goethe’s also shows very clearly what a middle-class intelligentsia without a social hinterland really meant. Earlier a passage was quoted in which he attributed little culture to the courtiers. Here he said the same of the common people. *Kultur* and *Bildung* are the watchwords and characteristics of a thin intermediate stratum that had risen out of the people. Not only the small courtly class above it, but even the broader strata below still showed relatively little understanding for the endeavours of their own élite.

However, precisely this underdevelopment of the broader, professional middle strata was one of the reasons why the struggle of the middle-class vanguard, the bourgeois intelligentsia, against the courtly upper class was waged almost entirely outside the political sphere, and why the attack was directed predominantly against the conduct of the upper class, against general human characteristics like “superficiality”, “outward politeness”, “insincerity” and so on. Even the few quotations that have been used here show these connections extremely clearly. Admittedly, it is only rarely and without great emphasis that the attack focused on specific concepts antithetical to those which served as self-legitimization for the German intellectual class, concepts such as *Bildung* and *Kultur*. One of the few specific counter-concepts was “civilized-ness” in the Kantian sense.

## VI

### The Recession of the Social Element and the Advance of the National Element in the Antithesis between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*

17. Whether the antithesis is expressed by these or other concepts, one thing is always clear: the contraposition of particular human characteristics which later came to serve primarily to express a national antithesis appears here primarily as the expression of a social antithesis. As the decisive experience underlying the formulation of pairs of opposites such as “depth” and “superficiality”, “honesty” and “falsity”, “outward politeness” and “true virtue”, and from which, among

other things, the antithesis between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* grew up, we find at a particular phase of German development the tension between the middle-class intelligentsia and the courtly aristocracy. Certainly, there was never a complete lack of awareness that courtliness and French were related entities. G. C. H. Lichtenberg expressed this very clearly in one of his aphorisms, in which he spoke of the difference between the French *promesse* and the German *Versprechung* (Part 3, 1775–1779<sup>24</sup>). “The latter is kept”, he said, “and not the former. The usefulness of French words in German. I am surprised that it has not been noticed. The French word gives the German idea with an admixture of humbug, or in its court meaning. . . . A discovery (*Erfindung*) is something new and a *découverte* something old with a new name. Columbus discovered (*entdeckte*) America and it was Americus Vesputius’s *découverte*. Indeed, *goût* and taste (*Geschmack*) are almost antithetical, and people of *goût* seldom have much taste.”

But it was only after the French Revolution that the idea of the German courtly aristocracy unmistakably receded, and that the idea of France and the Western powers in general moved towards the foreground in the concept of “civilization” and related ideas.

One typical example: in 1797 there appeared a small book by the French émigré Menuret, *Essai sur la ville d’Hambourg*. A citizen of Hamburg, Canon Meyer, wrote the following commentary on it:

Hamburg is still backward. After a famous epoch (famous enough, when swarms of emigrants are settling here), it has made progress (really?); but to increase, to complete I do not say its happiness (that would be addressing his God) but its civilization, its advance in the career of science and art (in which, as you know, we are still in the North), in that of luxury, comfort, frivolity (his special field!) it still needs a number of years, or events which draw to it new throngs of foreigners (provided they are not more swarms of his civilized compatriots) and an increase of opulence.

Here, therefore, the concepts “civilized” and “civilization” are already linked quite unequivocally with the image of the Frenchman.

With the slow rise of the German bourgeoisie from being a second-rank class to being the bearer of German national consciousness, and finally—very late and conditionally—to being the ruling class, from having been a class which was first obliged to perceive or legitimize itself primarily by contrasting itself to the courtly-aristocratic upper class, and then by defining itself against competing nations, the antithesis between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, with all its accompanying meanings, changed in significance and function: *from being a primarily social antithesis it becomes a primarily national one.*

And a parallel development was undergone by what was thought of as specifically German: here, likewise, many originally middle-class social characteristics, imprinted in people by their social situation, became national character-

istics. Honesty and sincerity, for example, were now contrasted as German characteristics with dissimulating courtesy. But sincerity, as used here, originally emerged as a specific trait of the middle-class person, in contrast to the man of the world or courtier. This, too, can be clearly seen in a conversation between Eckermann and Goethe.

“I usually carry into society”, says Eckermann on 2 May 1824, “my personal likes and dislikes and a certain need to love and be loved. I seek a personality conforming to my nature; to that person I should like to give myself entirely and have nothing to do with the others.”

“This natural tendency of yours”, Goethe answers, “is indeed not of a sociable kind; yet what would all our education be if we were not willing to overcome our natural tendencies. It is a great folly to demand that people should harmonize with us, I have never done so. I have thereby attained the ability to converse with all people, and only thus is knowledge of human character gained, as well as the necessary adroitness in life. For with opposed natures one must take a grip on oneself if one is to get on with them. You ought to do likewise. There’s no help for it, you must go into society. No matter what you say.”

The sociogenesis and psychogenesis of forms of human behaviour are still not well understood. Even to raise the questions may seem odd. It is nevertheless observable that people from different social units behave differently in quite specific ways. We are accustomed to take this for granted. We speak of the peasant or the courtier, of the Englishman or the German, of the medieval man or the man of the twentieth century, and we mean that the people of the social units indicated by such concepts behave uniformly in a specific manner which transcends all individual differences when measured against the individuals of a contrasting group: for example, the peasant behaves in many respects differently from the courtier, the Englishman or Frenchman from the German, and the medieval man from the man of the twentieth century, no matter how much else they may have in common as human beings.

Different modes of behaviour in this sense are apparent in the conversation just quoted between Eckermann and Goethe. Goethe was certainly a man who was individualized to a particularly high degree. As a result of his social destiny, modes of behaviour with different social origins merged in him into a specific unity. He, his opinions, and his behaviour were certainly never entirely typical of any of the social groups and situations through which he had passed. But in this quotation he spoke quite explicitly as a man of the world, as a courtier, from experiences which were necessarily foreign to Eckermann. He perceived the compulsion to hold back one’s own feelings, to suppress antipathies and sympathies, which was inherent in court life, and which was often interpreted by people of a different social situation, and therefore with a different affect structure, as dishonesty or insincerity. And with the consciousness that distinguished him as a relative outsider from all social groups, he emphasized the beneficial, human

aspect of his moderation of individual affects. His comment was one of the few German utterances of this time to acknowledge something of the social value of “courtesy” and to say something positive about social adroitness. In France and England, where “society” played a far greater role in the overall development of the nation, the behavioural tendencies he speaks of also played—though less consciously than in his case—a far more important part. And ideas of a similar kind, including the notion that people should seek to harmonize with and show consideration for each other, that individuals may not always give way to their emotions, recur quite frequently, with the same specifically social meaning as in Goethe, in the court literature of France, for example. As a reflection, these thoughts were the individual property of Goethe. But related social situations, life in the *monde*, led everywhere in Europe to related precepts and modes of behaviour.

Similarly, the behaviour which Eckermann described as his own is—as compared to the outward serenity and amiability concealing opposed feelings that was first developed in this phase in the courtly-aristocratic world—clearly recognizable as originating from the small-town, middle-class sphere of the time. And it was certainly not only in Germany that it was found in this sphere. But in Germany, owing to the particularly pure representation of the middle-class outlook by the intelligentsia, these and related attitudes became visible in literature to an exceptional degree. And they recurred in this relatively pure form produced by the sharper, more rigorous division between courtly and middle-class circles, above all in the national behaviour of the Germans.

The social units that we call nations differ widely in the affect-economies of their members, in the schemata through which the emotional life of individuals is moulded under the pressure of institutionalized tradition and of the present situation. What was typical in the behaviour described by Eckermann was a specific form of “affect-modelling”, that open submission of individual inclination which Goethe considers unsociable and contrary to the affect formation necessary for “Society”.

For Nietzsche, many decades later, this attitude had long been the typical national attitude of the Germans. Certainly, it had undergone modifications in the course of history, and no longer had the same social meaning as at Eckermann’s time. Nietzsche ridiculed it: “The German”, he says in *Beyond Good and Evil* (Aphorism 244), “loves ‘sincerity’ and ‘uprightness’. How comforting it is to be sincere and upright. It is today perhaps the most dangerous and deceptive of all the disguises in which the German is expert, this confidential, obliging, German honesty that always shows its cards. The German lets himself go, looking the while with trustful blue empty German eyes—and foreigners immediately mistake him for his nightshirt.” Leaving aside the one-sided value judgement, this is one of the many illustrations of how, with the slow rise of the

middle classes, their specific social characteristics gradually become national characteristics.

And the same becomes clear from the following judgement of Fontane on England, to be found in *Ein Sommer in London* (Dessau, 1852):

England and Germany are related in the same way as form and content, appearance and reality. Unlike things, which in no other country in the world exhibit the same solidity as in England, people are distinguished by form, their most outward packing. You need not be a gentleman, you must only have the means to appear one, and you are one. You need not be right, you must only find yourself within the forms of rightness, and you are right. . . . Everywhere appearance. Nowhere is one more inclined to abandon oneself blindly to the mere lustre of a name. The German lives in order to live, the Englishman to represent. The German lives for his own sake, the Englishman for the sake of others.

It is perhaps necessary to point out how exactly this last idea coincides with the antithesis between Eckermann and Goethe: "I give open expression to my personal likes and dislikes", said Eckermann. "One must seek, even if unwillingly, to harmonize with others", argued Goethe.

"The Englishman", Fontane observes, "has a thousand comforts, but no comfort. The place of comfort is taken by ambition. He is always ready to receive, to give audiences. . . . He changes his suit three times a day; he observes at table—in the sitting room and drawing room—certain prescribed laws of propriety. He is a distinguished man, a phenomenon that impresses us, a teacher from whom we take lessons. But in the midst of our wonderment is mixed an infinite nostalgia for our petty-bourgeois Germany, where people have not the faintest idea how to represent, but are able so splendidly, so comfortably and cozily, to live."

The concept of "civilization" was not mentioned here. And the idea of German *Kultur* appears in this account only from afar. But we see from it, as from all these reflections, that the German antithesis between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* did not stand alone; it was part of a larger context. It was an expression of the German self-image. And it pointed back to differences of self-legitimization, of character and overall behaviour, that first existed preponderantly, even if not exclusively, between particular German classes, and then between the German nation and other nations.