



Letter From Switzerland

by Harold O.J. Brown

The German Swindle

To walk along a narrow ridge or cliff path, German-speakers will tell you, you have to be *schwindelfrei*. The French word *vertige* exists in English (*vertigo*), but we would be more likely to say "dizziness." The German word is for *vertige* or dizziness *der Schwindel*, but *Schwindel* also can mean what it does in English—swindle. "Mir *schwindelt's*": I am dizzy; but, "Ich *schwindele*": I swindle. Brigitte Sauzay, a young professional translator at international conferences, knows modern Germany as well as she knows German. Most people who have done simultaneous translation—which involves speaking the translation into a microphone as fast as the words in the original language—say that it is a tremendous strain. I did it for a number of years and remember that it produced headaches, and sometimes even *Schwindel*. "False friends"—such as *demande*, which means "ask", not "demand" in French, are bad enough, but when one runs into a succession of words such as *Schwindel*, which may truly mean swindle or treacherously mean vertigo, even the most skillful interpreter may be hard put to render a correct simultaneous translation. Dealing with contemporary Germany, it is hard to tell whether one is getting dizzy, being swindled, or both. In *Le vertige allemand* (Paris: Olivier Organ), Brigitte Sauzay tries to clarify matters a bit.

One of Mme. Sauzay's characteristic comments evokes an earlier remark by Nietzsche: "Germany is a country where a more ancient past and a more

imminent future than ours dwell together." The contrast between Germany as the creator of the most sublime culture and the perpetrator of the most sordid crimes has been noted in many variations: The land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms is also the land of Hitler, Himmler, and Goering.

Mme. Sauzay identifies the problem in a new way. After its catastrophic defeat in World War II, Germany—or rather West Germany, the *Bundesrepublik*—engaged in a frenzy of economic expansion wrapped in an orgy of self-reproach. Germans tend to wallow in their own guilt—sometimes voluntarily: Every new season, West Germany's government television networks bring week after week of dramatization of the country's criminal, Nazi past. Schoolchildren have to take as much as a full year of "Holocaust Studies." Officially this is to help Germany "come to terms with its past," but it has become a dead weight on Germany's present and a heavy mortgage on the future—not to mention a psychological disaster for countless schoolchildren. Many Germans seem to take a macabre satisfaction in denouncing Germany's past atrocities. The slogan "Nie wieder!" (Never again!) involves more than repentance, however. It seems to involve a certain claim to moral nobility for the present generation, authenticated by the intensity of the moral atrociousness of the second generation past.

Germany gave us the Protestant Reformation and in a sense dialectical theology. (The most eminent representative of dialectical theology, Karl Barth, was a German-speaking Swiss, but very much a part of the German intellectual world.) Both of these movements emphasize the depravity of man in contrast with the holiness of God, and each of them is subject to a

peculiar perversion by which man, having identified himself as depraved and God alone as holy, reevaluates himself as holier still by virtue of his insight in recognizing the "absolute qualitative difference" between God and man. Seeing how evil he is makes him superior to everyone else.

German intellectuals, students, much of the press, and the better-publicized parts of the Protestant Church are caught up in a frenzy of pacifism, environmentalism, and anti-authoritarianism. Reagan may be accepted as the moral equal of Stalin but certainly not of Gorbachev. West Germans live in the shadow of the Berlin Wall (which was a quarter-century old in August 1986) yet as a matter of course excoriate South Africa, Chile, and even the United States as the world's paramount examples of oppressive regimes. One curious paradox is that the very intellectuals who engage in vituperating all authority in the West make excuses for totalitarian absolutism in the East. Because this is so, it might be supposed that much of the German intellectual world is in thrall to Marxism if not to Moscow. This is true, in part, but it is not the entire explanation. German environmentalists—the "Greens"—reacted to the Chernobyl disaster by demanding, among other things, the abolition of West Germany's defense system. So that the Soviets might be able to move in and build similar reactors in West Germany? The logic is perplexing. Are Pershing rockets and Germany's own *Nachrüstung* (catch-up armament) the real threats to peace and freedom? The environmentalistic, pacifistic, antiauthoritarian, moralistically supercilious Greens are a smaller minority in Germany in the mid-80's, no more important than the Nazis were in the early 1930's, and yet in an

important sense it is they who represent the real spirit of end-century Germany. It is easy to explain this apparent Green hypocrisy as the Bavarian Chancellor Franz Josef Strauss does: "A rose is Green before it is red." Strauss, whose real chance of becoming West German chancellor a few years ago provoked fear and loathing verging on hysteria in all the best German circles, is widely considered a relic of nationalism if not of Nazism. Yet Strauss also makes sweeter deals with the Communistic East than any other West German leader except the former Socialist chancellor, Willy Brandt.

"Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust" (Two souls dwell, alas! within my breast), lamented the greatest German poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). Much has changed since Goethe's days, but that fierce ambivalence has not changed. As Sauzay explains, the most strident German opponents of all authority, of all defense, and of every form of violence exerted for one's own protection, could easily fall into a violent frenzy and possibly outdo Nazism. The American nuclear umbrella is widely acclaimed as the only force that has made 40-odd years of uneasy peace possible for Europe. Sauzay's analysis leads one to suspect that it is only the overwhelming Soviet presence on their borders that inhibits Germans from once again combining phenomenal energy with unpredictable fantasy to produce a product the nature and color of which no one can imagine but the terrible intensity of which would be only too familiar. It makes no sense to predict a revival of Nazism. But it probably would have made no sense, in 1924, to predict its rise in the first place. Let there be no misunderstanding: Neither Mme. Sauzay nor this reviewer predicts a new Nazism. But there is a fear that something could come, idealistic, noble in sentiment, self-righteous and pharisaical in its condemnation of all the evils of lesser and more mongrel nations, that could create another inferno.

The Swiss, on Germany's southern border, and particularly the German-speaking Swiss, who share many of the most typically German virtues and vices, look on the Germans with a mixture of superciliousness and super-

stitious awe. After all, the Germans followed Hitler, the Swiss did not—in large part thanks to the firmness of their French-speaking General Henri Guisan. The Swiss were far too wise for that. At the same time, all the Swiss—but particularly the German-speakers with their variety of peculiar Allemanic dialects—have placed themselves in a kind of golden mountain ghetto and realize that if the Germans are morally their inferiors, they themselves are cultural parasites on Germany. They buy and borrow culture from everywhere, but they graft it onto Germanic roots. The Swiss have feelings of inferiority to and contempt for the Germans that resemble those of Germans toward the rest of the West, and especially towards the United States. The French, among whom the most brilliantly perceptive analyst to date is Brigitte Sauzay, neither disdain nor venerate their German neighbors: but they wonder, in both senses of the word. The Swiss expect nothing good to come out of Germany; the French expect something astonishing and do not know whether it will be good or evil.

Mme. Sauzay evokes the revival of Lutheranism in postwar Germany and sees it exemplified—although in a secularized form—in Green enthusiasm. The 18th-century Enlightenment was antireligious in France and England but religious in Germany, which created quite a different spiritual climate and quite different spiritual tensions. Mme. Sauzay has correctly observed that even the anti-authoritarian protest movements, which are anti-Christian in so much of the world, are strangely religious in Germany. One omission in her incisive analysis lies in her underestimation of the strength of the *Evangelical* renewal—not political religion, but Christian renewal. This has not yet been discovered by the media, but it is there—as the *Evangelical* or *Fundamentalist* renaissance was there in the United States long before the media noticed Jerry Falwell. *Evangelicalism* in Germany differs from that in the United States in that it consists almost entirely of piety, very little of politics. Mme. Sauzay reminds us that we must expect something big from Germany, although she cannot say what. She warns us that it could suddenly

turn nasty—the Green bud could produce a black flower. She is correct to tell us to expect *something*, and also when she says that whatever it is, it will not be what we are looking for. The German top, full of energy, continues to spin, and it can move in almost any direction—right or left, or perhaps even "just right."

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Letter From New York

by Richard Kostelanetz

Ask Dr. Grants

How do I get a grant?

You first must get an application. Forget about those grants for which you cannot apply, such as MacArthur Fellowships, which are essentially designed for people already known, which is to say celebrities, or incipient celebrities.

Once you get the application, read its guidelines carefully to make sure you qualify and, if you do, then to organize your presentation. If you don't understand something in the guidelines, call or write the granting agency's administrators, who are required to give advice to applicants. Should you find them unhelpful or discouraging, you can either assume they want to save your time, or suspect that they are trying to lessen the competition, rather than increase it, in order to channel available funds to applicants who are administratively favored. Administrators, it should not be forgotten, are supposed only to administer, not to choose. The selection of winners is the responsibility of either the funding agency's board or an ad hoc panel convened for a particular competition.

Application forms fall into two groups: those for individuals and those for organizations. The former are customarily simple, no more than two pages in length, requiring minimal information: name, birthday, birthplace, current address and telephone