

# Panagiotis Kondylis

## The German "special way" and German prospects (perspectives)

[Translated by C.F. from the German »Der deutsche »Sonderweg« und die deutschen Perspektiven« in Kondylis, P. *Das Politische im 20. Jahrhundert. Von den Utopien zur Globalisierung*, Heidelberg: Manutius, 2001, pp. 161-180. (First published in: Zitelman, Weißmann, Großheim (Hg.): *Westbindung, Chancen und Risiken für Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M. und Berlin, 1993. The Greek translation by Κώστας Κουτσουρέλης, «Η γερμανική «ιδιαίτερη πορεία» και οι γερμανικές προοπτικές» in Κονδύλης, Π. *Μελαγχολία και Πολεμική. Δοκίμια και μελετήματα*, Αθήνα: Θεμέλιο, 2002, σσ. 117-135, was consulted but not accorded anything near the kind of weight given to Kondylis's own Greek versions of his German texts.)

© all rights reserved 2014. This translation should not be reproduced in any form whatsoever without the express written permission of its author C.F. contactable through the following email address: [pkproject@live.co.uk](mailto:pkproject@live.co.uk)

All footnotes are by the translator and have nothing to do with Kondylis himself.]

The question of German prospects (perspectives) cannot be discussed independent of the question of the German "special way (Sonderweg or exceptionalism)". One in fact must accept an interrelation between the past and the future, irrespective of how one interprets the words "special way", even if with that just the necessitated unique path, which leads to the present situation and consequently has determined the framework for future action, is meant. With today's prevailing negative use of the

concept of the German "special way", one poses the question regarding the interrelation between the German past and future not, however, merely with historical, but also with political intent. Here it is namely a matter of the instrumentalisation of the perception of a German "special way" leading Germans astray, with the aim of forcing German prospects (perspectives) into a certain, normatively defined direction. Hence, these prospects are indeed influenced by the German "special way" - but not by the German "special way" in the objective historical sense explained above, but by the theory of the "special way", which is a political weapon. It would also not be expected that the "special way" theory could have had an effect differently. Because, as the retrospective review of the history of ideas shows, the said "special way" theory in all its versions was from the beginning polemically motivated and meant. However, this "special way" theory can only be understood as pure polemics if one becomes aware of the untenability of its fundamental assumptions through epistemological and historical critique.

Before we undertake this critique within the context of conciseness afforded here (i.e. within the confines of an article), it must be reminded that the thesis of the German "special way" was not always represented in the negative sense, and that the positive version, just as much as the negative version, had both domestic and foreign origins. The positive version is the original version and it can be tracked down already in the statements with which prominent German thinkers in the 18th century sought to outline the specific element (feature or difference) of the German intellect(-spirit) vis-à-vis the "West" and thereby contributed to the formation (or shaping) of the (German) national consciousness. A long list of famous authors, who praise in the highest tones the partly philosophical and metaphysical, partly aesthetic and education-like (i.e.

educational) superiority of the products of German thought vis-à-vis the "shallow" Enlightenment of the West, could be put together. The atrocities of the revolutionary Terror<sup>1</sup> were often interpreted as the inevitable result of this kind of Enlightenment and seemed to confirm the self-righteous perception that (their) higher culture had protected the Germans from such inhumanity. Those who since about 1750 had expressed themselves in such a way about the "West", and above all about the French neighbours, were for the most part liberal and humanistically minded literati (men of letters) who, however, in view of the at that time political haziness of the German nation, could fight for (achieve) a national identity only in the cultural field and only by means of the schematic demarcation against a neighbour whose splendour and wealth aroused mixed feelings in them. That is why it would be wrong and unjust to see in their remarks a bad omen and entirely unhistorically to misjudge the psychological and ideological mechanism through which *every* formation (or shaping) of the national consciousness is carried out. Incidentally, one at that time in general hardly took all this and the Germans the wrong way. Since land and sea were ruled by others, so, as the great poet<sup>2</sup> already knew, the Kingdom of Heaven of culture built on ideas and ideals was gladly left to the Germans and precedence in what is politically non-binding was laudatorily acknowledged. The self-assessment of German bearers of culture (e.g. literati and artists) was even shared by broad strata of the European public at large, and the positive German version of the "special way" theory already started early on to have on its side (i.e. in its favour) a foreign theory of the German "special way". French and English exponents of the Romantic-counterrevolutionary intellect(-spirit) glorified the Germans because they

---

<sup>1</sup> The Reign of Terror of the French Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> Presumably Kondylis is referring to Goethe, or perhaps Hölderlin.

were supposedly spared from the influence of the "shallow" Enlightenment and from capitalistic intoxication and remained true to what is Higher and Holy. The admiration for German accomplishments in the fields of humanities, but also in the natural sciences later joined such predilections, and talk of a "people of thinkers and poets" became a household word.

The founding of the (German) Reich<sup>3</sup> largely put an end to the willingness of foreigners to follow the Germans in their self-understanding. Because now this self-understanding was extended to a dimension which appeared dangerous to (European) foreign countries so that their response to the Germans' self-understanding was inevitable. The response consisted in the gradual moulding of that negative version of the "special way" theory, which prevails today. The victories of the Prussian army and the political and economic strength of the young Reich brought about (the situation) that the until then decisive cultural aspect of German (ideological) self-understanding was combined with another aspect at least of equal value, at whose centre stood the idea of military virtue and power. This conglomeration cobbled together from heterogeneous, and in terms of content, vague or fragile materials, constituted the basis for the nationalistic mythology of the professors and the literati of the First World War and was then adopted in large part by national-socialistic propaganda. Here the "German idea" could be portrayed as the ideal union of the warrior and of the thinker, which counters the Western "ideal of the trader" and is far superior to this Western ideal. The German "special way" accordingly by-passed this "trader" as well as the entire "shallow" Western Enlightenment whose alleged narrow-minded rationality supported the world theory (i.e. world view) of the "trader".

---

<sup>3</sup> I.e. the Second Reich in 1871.

One must believe in the vulgar Marxist perception of ideas as reflection of reality in order to want to measure the actual historical distance of Germany from the modern era by means of these mythologems. However, ideas, especially normatively charged ideas, are not reflections, but weapons, and their content is negatively determined by what is supposed by each and every respective foe. Just as from the confessions of faith of English and French ideologues in the humanistic "Enlightenment", a strict moral praxis of these nations may not at all be inferred, so too it must be seen that the polemics of the ideologues of the positively conceived German "special way" against the inverted caricature of this same "Enlightenment" and "of the West" in general was supposed to strike (and hurt) a foe who for traditional reasons had occupied the ideological terrain of the "Enlightenment". The ideological constellation could under other historical circumstances look entirely differently, since both the "Enlightenment" in the German intellectual(-spiritual) pantheon as well as "reaction" in that of the "West" were richly represented. We cannot spare, by the way, a certain piquancy in ascertaining that many "progressive" adherents of the theory of the German "special way" backed up their theory by invoking the "reactionary" statements of the ideologues of this same "special way" as if these ideologues were the most reliable interpreters of historical movement. However, it is a very naive methodological principle to deduce from the polemically conditioned self-understanding of actors their real relation with the course of history. For the apprehension of the state of affairs it is, at any rate, highly misleading to confuse the theory of the "special way" with the special way as historical fact.

A negative "Western" version opposed the extended positive German version of the German "special way". This negative version was formed,

just like the German ideological conglomeration, on the basis of dissimilar and nebulous materials and first of all served the understandable psychological and propagandistic needs of the French, who as a reaction to the defeat of 1870 thirsted for revanche, as well as those of the English, who dreaded the imperial competition of the dynamic (German) Reich. The negative rating (i.e. evaluation) of the "special way" appeared in the Anglo-Saxon and French war propaganda since 1914 with the claim to an interpretation going a long way back (in time) of a German terrible or dreadful state of affairs, in order to be constituted after 1933 as a regular systematic construction, which was supposed to make clear the fateful course of German history from Luther to Hitler via Friedrich the Great and Bismarck. It is certainly no coincidence that the long and rich history of ideas of this construction has not so far been the object of in-depth investigation (or research), although the topic is extremely explosive: scientific insight into the circumstances surrounding this construction's formation or its polemical-ideological character - to say nothing of its manifold spitefulness - would inevitably exert disruptive effects on "re-education"<sup>4</sup>, which was, in terms of content, based not least on this construction.

In so far as we should now pre-empt the conclusions of such an investigation, we can *grosso modo*<sup>5</sup> distinguish between the two variants of the foreign negative "special way" theory. The first version argued almost in terms of racist categories. It wanted to see in Germans the Germanic blonde beast or even the "Hun", who put the means of modern technology (technique) at the service of a barbaric appetite (or desire) for destruction, which was supposedly always typical of his essence (nature) and had to lead him into permanent conflict with civilised mankind. The

---

<sup>4</sup> In respect of Germans in Germany after World War 2 as part of "denazification".

<sup>5</sup> Roughly or approximately.

second version, which was of course often mixed with the first, at least in its pure form, exclusively asserted a social-historical point of view and seeks the reasons for the German "special way" in the incomplete or arrested development (hypoplasia) of the bourgeoisie and in the weakness of the bourgeois-liberal intellect(-spirit), which was accompanied by the corresponding strength of the reactionary-military cast of mind as a result of the social predominance of semi-feudal strata. Though this social-historical variant of the negative "special way" theory had already been formulated in Germany itself at an earlier point in time, i.e. in the period (of German history) from 1815 until the March Revolution of 1848. We remind ourselves here of Karl Marx's well-known formulation that the Germans have shared in the restorations of modern peoples, without sharing in their revolutions. Originators and the first public advocates of such a variant of the "special way" theory was a Young Hegelian, but also liberal in the broader sense, inspired group of intellectuals, very active and intellectually(-spiritually) sophisticated, which appropriated the notion of Progress in order to immediately turn it into a sharp weapon against the Establishment: the "monarchical-feudal" or "bourgeois-philistine" order not only lagged behind the demands of the historical future, but also vis-à-vis the social level of the European present, that is, it was at an outdated stage of development and left the mark of belatedness on the nation.

The original crossing over (i.e. interweaving or intersecting) as regards the history of ideas, and logical crossing over (i.e. interweaving or intersecting), of the negative "special way" theory with the notion of Progress, as well as with the idea of a stage-like course of history, points to the already fundamental epistemological dubiousness of the whole concept. Because it does not make sense to talk of a "special way" if one

does not base a certain, essentially teleological schema of historical development on historical development's unity (uniformity), whose conclusiveness one could prove empirically. In other words: before special ways in a scientifically or epistemologically tenable sense may be spoken of, the difficult question of historical evolution must be convincingly and definitively solved. I know the long debate over this question, yet I know nothing of such a solution. The course of the debate has hitherto rather confirmed the impression that there is no problem in itself at all, and that a problem can only arise from the perspective of the Progress-believing philosophies of history of the 18th and 19th century. If however "development" in the sense of these philosophies of history constitutes a mere construct, then what one might call with pragmatic-descriptive intent "historical development", only consists of special ways - and then the "special way" is not in the least a shortcoming or an affliction.

The methodologically highly dubious working method of the "special way" theory's exponents inevitably springs from the fundamental and unabolishable epistemological flaw of the social-historically justified negative "special way" theory. In order to be able to sensibly accept a German "special way", it does not namely suffice to compare German (historical) development with a general and moreover idealised schema of liberal parliamentarism, which in the final analysis was distilled from the aforementioned teleological perception of ideal historical development, (and) not from the historical reality of parliamentarism. It also does not suffice to compare German (historical) development with that of another nation. Over and above that, comparisons must be made between the most important national forms of (historical) development beyond Germany in order to ascertain the supposedly generally binding type from

which Germany fatefully diverged. However, such comparisons would demonstrate the impossibility of working out such a uniform (unified) type. The paths of England and France to parliamentarism were e.g. completely different, and besides, on closer examination it turns out that the prevailing of parliamentarism by no means has to automatically coincide with the social predominance of the liberal-industrial bourgeoisie. In England the formation of the parliamentary system preceded the social rise of this bourgeoisie; on the other hand, in bourgeois-shaped France of the 19th century until 1870 an - incidentally strictly oligarchic - parliamentarism ruled only during the few years of the July Monarchy<sup>6</sup>, and the situation changed not for instance through the resistance of the French bourgeoisie against the Bonapartist dictatorship, but through Prussian weapons.

There is therefore no generally valid historical prescription and no obligatory composition of social forces leading towards the prevailing of parliamentarism. That is why one cannot assert that the social structure of the (German) Empire is in itself the reason for the absence (non-materialisation) of parliamentarisation, i.e. the sovereign rule of parliament - quite apart from the fact that a sovereign parliament did not have to be eo ipso "more liberal" or "more progressive" than other forms of government. If again one does not seek the reason for the special development in the social structure of German society in itself at that time, but in the partly forced political predominance of a pre-capitalistic and anti-liberal minority, then one must on the one hand explain why the liberal bourgeoisie did not revolt against this minority, and on the other hand weigh up what the long-term tendencies of political development were. As far as the first point is concerned, the political readiness to

---

<sup>6</sup> 1830-1848.

compromise or the indifference of the bourgeoisie was not the result of its weakness, but - conversely - rather of the fact that in the socio-economic realm the bourgeoisie developed rapidly and could take over the undisputed leadership; *this* leadership in fact interested first and foremost the bourgeoisie as a historically concrete class, and not for instance the normative tasks with which "progressive" historians have commissioned it in retrospect. Its loyalty was also not to "reaction" in itself and in general, but to a Crown which, despite all the anachronistic, bizarre or even burlesque characteristics, remained open to the bearers of industrial progress and to the bourgeoisie of education and culture. The socially perfectly natural alliance of the bourgeoisie and Junkerdom (i.e. the (Prussian) landed gentry) as the possessing or ownership classes against the strongest and most demanding social democracy of Europe took place - and this is decisive - not for instance on a semi-feudal social basis, but on the terrain of modern capitalism, to which the owners of large estates had now also adapted.

Under these circumstances parliamentarism could be delayed, but only because its bourgeois supporters did not have any urgent *socio-economic* reason to press for it with extreme means. As domestic political (policy) developments during the course of the First World War let us recognise, the breakthrough of full parliamentarism would nevertheless have been in practice inevitable even in the case of a German victory. But even full parliamentarism's unfortunate connection with the fact of defeat would not have necessarily proven to be fatal if the foreign policy situation after 1918 had been a different one. The great economic crisis would not have been able to take the well-known political turn in Germany without the nationalistic radicalisation of the bourgeoisie and broader masses of people as a reaction to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, the

occupation of the Ruhr and the refusal of the right to self-determination for *all* Germans. After 1945 though, it was hardly possible in Germany to talk about these facts openly and impartially, i.e. to objectively assess their psychological and ideological repercussions. Future historians will, however, have to come to the conclusion that National Socialism was not the outcome of irresistible currents of German history, but the product of a concrete and unique historical constellation. As a product of a specifically German situation it had to, of course, bear German characteristics, and in its world-theoretical presumption it had to even lay claim, for itself, to the whole of German history. From that, however, no historical necessity can be derived.

The social-historically oriented negative "special way" theory puts the German catastrophes of 1918 and 1945 ultimately down to the social backwardness or the "belatedness" of the German nation, i.e. it deduces foreign policy from domestic policy. In addition to its epistemological leaps of its actual false assessments is, therefore, the still questionable (at best, one-sided) notion of the "primacy of domestic policy (politics)", which is then moreover connected with a normatively understood political confession of faith. The basic idea (notion or thought) of this is: liberalism and parliamentarism are of their essence tolerant and humane; that is why a liberal, parliamentarily answerable government could not ever pursue an aggressive and expansionistic politics. This hymn of praise for liberalism and parliamentarism does not of course anachronistically apply to the oligarchical doctrine of rule or dominion of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century, but to a very modern democratic ideal. But even if we disregard that fact, it must remain enigmatic from this perspective as to why the heyday of English and French liberalism coincided with the zenith of the imperialistic expansion of these nations.

Also in need of explanation remains why on the German side rather national-liberal matters of concern were behind the (already demanded by the bourgeoisie in 1848!) building of fleets, and why in fact the demand for parliamentarisation, even in its Weberian version, sprang from the express wish to overcome at last the imperial incapability of provincial Junkerdom (i.e. the (Prussian) landed gentry) in order to be able to appear as a "master people (or race)" next to other "master peoples (or races)". Accordingly, a liberal and parliamentary Germany would most likely have been exposed to the same geopolitical and foreign policy temptations and difficulties as a "semi-feudal" or "militaristic" Germany. Moreover, Social Darwinistic, racist and related ideas belonged in many cases to the thoughts world (i.e. ideology) of the liberals before 1914. Only a gross ignorance of the English and the French history of ideas allows the conclusion that these ideas originally came into being in Germany or throve best on German soil. Of course these ideas in Germany were eventually connected in the end with the offence of genocide, which however was the result of the concrete decisions of concrete people and not the outcome of an unavoidable historical necessity in this ideological packaging.

The present dominant negative "special way" theory with its dogma of the "belated nation" prevailed in Germany after the Second World War, however not as the result of a gradual acceptance and working out of notions which the Left or liberal intelligence had developed here in the past, but first of all through the inevitable dominance of opinions which the victors had about the essence (nature) and history of the vanquished. Even in the communistically governed part of Germany the concept gained the upper hand through the interpretations which the Soviet occupying forces introduced. But it would be incorrect to interpret its

imposition as a forcible octroi (i.e. tax, tariff or duty) of the ideological will of the victors and as a concomitant of a political diktat. Rather, it is a matter of a very complicated social and psychological process which won through to the extent that the economic and institutional foundations of the old Federal Republic (i.e. West Germany) were consolidated and proved a success. In other words: the new consciousness of success of the Germans did not come into conflict at all with the perception of the "belated nation" and the negative picture of Germany, but consolidated both.

This apparent paradox must be explained. If one reverses the outlined relation, it would follow that a longer period of misery and squalor and of social hopelessness would have entailed a much more sceptical or even hostile stance vis-à-vis the negative "special way" theory, especially a predominantly imported one. However, under the conditions of the "economic miracle" and of growing affluence, the negative "special way" theory turned not merely into a widespread article of faith, but over and above that it was connected with an admission of guilt to those crimes which were supposed to have inevitably resulted from the "special way". In the dual form of the social-historical construction and of the admission of guilt, the "special way" theory became a fixed constituent part of (German) national life, and a positioning in relation to it betrayed the position of the intellectual(-spiritual)-political parties and (the course of) where the battlefronts are on each and every respective occasion.

This phenomenon has been possible on a broad social basis only because a deeper relation could be manufactured between the collective admission of guilt and collective affluence. The "one-off crimes" were in fact punished in a truly one-off way: a people made up of criminals was allowed to export, consume and travel to an increasing extent, but it was

not allowed to possess for instance atomic weapons or bear world-political responsibility. That is, next to material well-being, a far-reaching political carefreeness was also secured for this people made up of criminals. The louder one admitted to collective crimes, the more certain one could be that one did not have to take any risks, but could enjoy affluence, as it were, away from or out of the way of history. With that, I do not want to at all play down the purely moral aspect of the problem, although it must equally be noted that for very many people the moral ritual was rather a compulsory exercise or an act of social conformism which did not demand sacrifices, but on the contrary, met with useful social recognition. In any case, the purely moral aspect is not, as is known, sufficient in order to bring into being and keep alive ideologems (i.e. kinds of sub-ideology) supporting a state. For that social conditions are also and above all called for, with which collective morals (i.e. ethics) can be maintained. Precisely this was achieved through the linking of the collective admission of guilt and collective affluence. Whoever embodies this mechanism must of course deny its existence, because such mechanisms can only function when they, through their effect, precisely confirm the ideal self-understanding of actors. However, even a naive observer would have to conjecture that the negative "special way" theory in its combination with the collective admission of guilt would have a considerably different status in German national life were Germany not the first but for instance the fortieth exporting country in the world. And this naive observer would have to also expect that with decreasing affluence, willingness for the admission of guilt will also decrease. One more likely feels guilty in Tuscany or in Alsace than as a welfare recipient (recipient of social assistance (i.e. income support or welfare)).

That morally underpinned or embellished prescription of collective happiness became theoretically framed by sociologists and political theorists to the effect that politics and economy, of their character, are different activities. Whoever, that is, in political modesty exclusively devotes himself to economic activity finds himself on the best path to elude the confusion (or chaos) and crimes of politics. The convenient dichotomy between politics and economy flows therefore directly or indirectly into a coupling of the economic (economics) with the ethical (ethics). Also here the aforementioned connection of morals (i.e. ethics) and affluence becomes noticeable. Because the exclusive or, according to preference, preoccupation with the economic (economics) seems to simultaneously guarantee both: the ethical way of life beyond the atrocities of power politics *and* affluence. Thus, an imperative was formulated which summarised the practical teachings of the "special way" theory. According to that imperative, the thorough (universal) democratisation or ethicisation of politics and society on the basis of a prospering economy was supposed to henceforth complete westernisation, consolidate ties to the West and make every special way impossible *a limine*<sup>7</sup>; it is characteristic that the central meaning of the economic basis has not been disputed until now even by those inspired ethicists who contemptuously pass by such prosaic questions.

The tragedy (or tragicality) of the Germans often consisted in that their theoretical concepts and prescriptions were far superior to reality so that they, in their properly thought-out perfection, had to founder on all the confused imperfection of real life. The theoretical idealisation of politically lukewarm affluence by means of the dichotomy of economy and politics likewise constitutes an ethereal construction which has little

---

<sup>7</sup> From the threshold (or starting point or beginning).

to do with the downsides of the life of nations. Not because the political (politics) must someday catch up with the economic (economy) - as romantic decisionists believe, who heed the aforementioned dichotomy with inverted signs (i.e. symbolism) -, but because the economic is no less political than the political itself is, i.e. it constitutes just like the political (in the familiar narrow sense of the word) a question of concrete relations and power relations (or the correlations of forces) between concrete people<sup>8</sup>. Even if all of Europe or all people should decide to dissolve their states and nations into a gigantic public limited company or corporation, the question would again be posed as to who will possess which parcel of shares. Since Germans in general have internalised the dichotomy of the political and the economic in such a way that this coincides with a notion of happiness and morals (i.e. ethics), then they will probably find their way in the planetary situation after the Cold War not without difficulties. In this way they want to grasp the problem of European unification in principle in respect of economic or political-economic categories, and to the extent of their powers, put up a fight against the bewildering and embarrassing, yet gradually pressing insight that after German reunification and the cessation of American patronage, with every central economic question, like e.g. the question of monetary union, the question of political hegemony inevitably appears on the horizon at the same time. That is why Germans confuse their present-day undoubtedly existing good will with the dynamics of the historical situation, and in a genuinely moralistic manner they make a direct

---

<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of the economic or the economy, and politics or the political, within the overall network of relations which constitute society and social order or the political in its broad sense (i.e. society as political collective) was to be the principal subject of the second volume of Kondylis's magnum opus *Das Politische und der Mensch* [The Political and Man] (Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1999), which only exists fragmentarily in the form of notes owing to the author's unexpected death. The topic of society as political collective is alluded to at a number of points in the almost complete first volume but is not fully examined as such.

connection between their subjective intent and the objective outcome of events.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning this, the French and the English are much more realistic, and they are absolutely right when they do not want to deduce the course of history from the assurances of each and every respective Mr. Kinkel<sup>10</sup>. Because from their point of view they see what the Germans cannot admit: that these assurances are able to be given so sincerely and so generously today only because the assurances are expressed from the position of the objectively stronger side - the stronger side in the present and presumably the even stronger side in the future. The formation of the future balance of power (forces) against the background of the inescapable question of hegemony, not bygone "special ways" worry them - although discrete and indiscrete references to the past necessarily add spice to every European debate. In reality, the past would have faded long ago if the present Germany was a moderately mechanised rural country. That is why it is not very helpful to greatly emphasise the difference between the German past and present with respect to morals (i.e. ethics) and political intent, when the problem of the balance of power awakens in others a mistrust which is thoroughly understandable: it is that mistrust which 55 million Germans would feel vis-à-vis 80 million more productive French with a vast unfolding space in the East. The French and the English therefore grasp, with such self-understanding, the problem of European unification not least as a question of hegemony and as a question of the "integration" of Germany, because they are old

---

<sup>9</sup> Events such as those surrounding the financial or economic crisis in 2008 and later, including the treatment of other EU countries or "debt colonies" such as Greece, as well as e.g. the apparently or actually tense situation between Germany and Russia over Ukraine in 2014 etc., raise interesting questions both as to the extent Germany has "rediscovered its political self", and, the level of Germany's geopolitical subservience to the USA. Of course, Kondylis's article was first published in 1993, and Kondylis never claimed he was a prophet, but merely an "observer of human affairs".

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Kinkel, Foreign Minister of Germany 1992-1998.

imperialistic peoples with considerably longer world-political traditions and correspondingly richer experiences as well as a finer diplomatic instinctive feel than the Germans. As for the Germans, on the other hand, it is possible that the ungainliness in respect of power politics of the past will now be superseded by a moralistic ungainliness which will likewise necessarily lead to dead ends. Qualities, which could protect from that, do not exactly belong to the merits of the German national character. The Germans indeed possess, as has been proved, the virtues of the plebeian (industriousness, thrift, ethical earnestness, action in accordance with orders or instructions and a plan); however in general they lack the virtues of the aristocrat: ironic and self-ironic sovereignty (i.e. the irony and self-irony of the sovereign), composure in the event of the failure of orders or instructions, the superior way of dealing with all sorts of norms.

The future fluctuations and prospects (perspectives) of the European unification process or other forms of political co-existence will therefore determine who will make use of the "scientific" or the "vulgar" versions of the negative "special way" theory. The outcome of European events does not however depend simply on the will of the participants, but rather on the overall planetary situation. Were "Europe" as a large space surrounded by other large spaces and this were felt by broad masses in the larger European nations to be a threat and a provocation, then there would be little room for "special ways" in praxis and in polemics. If on the other hand, the whole planet heads - perhaps with a few oases - towards a balkanisation, then the centrifugal forces inside of Europe will gain in intensity, and the national paths will be described anew by all the respective injured parties or outcasts as "special ways" and will inevitably be correlated with the past. However, they are merely two extreme intellectual possibilities. It is in itself unlikely that the first scenario can

be simply realised so quickly and so dramatically that the question of hegemony in Europe will not apply within the framework of a collective survival effort. Therefore, the national tug-of-war will continue for the foreseeable future - and it is also very questionable whether a comprehensive and genuine political unification, should it ever come about under external pressure, would take place on the path of the planned procedures. At all events, such a comprehensive and genuine political unification will not come about in normal times if the economically stronger nation would not be ready to cede political-military precedence as compensation and a guarantee. However, that does not only presuppose a lasting harmony of interests, but also that dichotomy between economy and politics, whose dubiousness, especially under today's mass-democratic conditions, we already explained. With a high degree of interweaving of "politics" and "economy", the political-military decisions would directly touch upon the interests of the economically stronger nation so that this nation, already in order to guard its undisputed terrain, will have to make a demand for political co-determination (i.e. the mutual determination of politics as between nations), a demand which however in view of its economic supremacy will sooner or later suddenly change into an actual demand for the hegemonic (political) position. That is why it is to be expected that the Germans will take a highly political and perhaps conflict-ridden path on the seemingly unpolitical roundabout way of the defence of their affluence against overall European wishes for redistribution<sup>11</sup>. They will do it in good conscience because they have learnt in past decades to closely connect affluence or the economy and morals (i.e. ethics) with one another. Sensitive observers have known for a long time how much history takes delight in such strange games.

---

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 9.

If at the same time balkanisation at a global level makes progress, then it must be expected that such foreign policy tendencies will be further reinforced and - especially under the pressure of the repercussions of the population explosion as well as the chronic social crises as a result of an unstoppable spreading of "new poverty" - will be accompanied by crises in domestic politics, which would probably have as a consequence a change in today's (political) party landscape. In this case, the negative "special way" theory will not only be summoned in and from abroad, but will also become inside of Germany an important ideological point of contention - then however the number of its opponents will also (still) significantly increase. That the negative "special way" theory was and is a mere weapon in a great political debate, should today be clearer than ever. Because today the social structures of Germany are of course by no means perfect, yet they are probably the most advanced (in a mass-democratic sense) within the European Community. Already because of that it is from now on obsolete and in fact meaningless to carry on talking of a "reactionary" German "special way". The supporters of the negative "special way" theory, who, in the sense of the primacy of domestic politics asserted by them, would like to argue consistently, would have to hence expect a "reactionary" foreign policy from today's Great Britain or Portugal rather than from present-day Germany. However this debate has never been about (logical) consistency, and it will also never be about that. Only the naive can have confidence that the aggressive instrumentalisation of the "special way" theory belongs to the past in view of the democratisation of German society that has taken place and bearing in mind the moral behaviour of Germans. There will always be someone at home or abroad who will reserve the right to judge whether and when this society might be called "truly" liberal or democratic, and whether and when the behaviour of Germans is "truly" moral or not. The

shadow of the negative "special way" theory will therefore still accompany Germany in the foreseeable future. Whether as a reaction to that a positive, self-satisfied-mythological "special way" theory comes into being anew, is not so much a question of incantations and educational programmes, but is dependent on the concrete situation. Nothing can be excluded in advance and forever. The monsters of today have often become the gods of tomorrow, yesterday's atrocities, today's models.