Introduction: Democratic renewal and Germany's "zero hour"

"A wonderful Palm Sunday. The occupying powers were not yet there and the Nazis were already gone, and it was an especially beautiful spring day that will always remain in my memory."[1] This was how Walter Dirks, a journalist, independent-minded socialist, and devout Catholic, remembered his first day after National Socialism. That morning, the regime's local officials had fled Frankfurt, the US Army had taken control of nearby Darmstadt, and despite the surrounding destruction, the future seemed bright and open. This sense of rebirth became the shared point of departure for a diverse group of German intellectuals, opponents of Nazism who emerged from exile, incarceration, resistance, or – more often than not – from "inner emigration" during the spring and summer of 1945. The transition was both sobering and exhilarating. For sociology professor Alfred Weber, a "zero point" had been reached in humanity's development, a nadir that marked the German people with a special responsibility but also a special insight.[2] Axel Eggebrecht, a militantly unaffiliated leftist journalist in his mid forties, felt energized by the task at hand: "In May of 1945, I got ten years younger."[3] At that moment, jurist and literary critic Hans Mayer was making arrangements to return from Switzerland, having fled Germany as a Jew and a Communist in 1933. Decades later, and not without a melancholic note, he wrote, "We allowed ourselves much hope back then, when the war had ended and everything seemed possible."[4] Such men as these – and women too, though their roles and their voices were less prominent – experienced 1945 as

[1] *So alt wie das Jahrhundert: Walter Dirks – ein Journalist in drei Epochen* (television program, Hessischer Rundfunk, 1991); cited in Joachim Rotberg, *Zwischen Linkskatholizismus und bürgerlicher Sammlung: Die Anfänge der CDU in Frankfurt am Main 1945–1946* (Frankfurt a.M.: Knecht, 1999), 73.
[2] Alfred Weber, "Unsere Erfahrung und unsere Aufgabe," *Die Wandlung* 1, no. 1 (1945): 52.
[3] "Ein Rückblick auf die Zukunft: Hörspiel mit umgekehrtem Fernrohr," *Der Spiegel*, 15 March 1947, 19.
[4] Hans Mayer, *Ein Deutscher auf Widerruf: Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), I:303.

their moment, one full of promise for a renewal of Germany by Germans, against National Socialism and independent of the Allied powers to whom they were indebted for the regime's defeat. Dirks would recall it as the time "when we rolled up our sleeves," when he and a host of like-minded compatriots set about the hard work of building a new Germany at the heart of a new Europe.[5] Not by accident do their statements carry an emotional charge. The extent of moral and material devastation as well as Germany's unprecedented crimes raised two questions with existential urgency: How exactly should the postwar order look? And what did it mean to address this rebuilding process as a German, that is, from the epicenter of the catastrophe?

In answering these questions, postwar Germans envisioned, desired, and repressed many things. This book explores a distinctive set of responses developed by engaged intellectuals in the years after 1945 that together amounted to a German rethinking of democracy. The first half of Europe's twentieth century has been called an "age of catastrophe," in which the continent was shaken by two total wars, genocide, economic collapse, and an ongoing civil war that pitted the forces of communism and fascism against each other and against an embattled liberal establishment.[6] Yet it was also an "age of democracy," for after the mobilization of nations through the First World War, the people's political demobilization was no longer possible, and subsequent regimes were compelled to claim legitimacy in democratic terms.[7] After the Second World War, in the wake of massive violence and upheaval, building a free, just, and stable new order stood at the top of Europeans' postwar agendas. But what about "democracy"? To contemporaries in 1945, the notion seemed attractive yet elusive or even dangerous, omnipresent yet strangely empty.[8] By that time, people across the continent had come to explain the century's calamities by the shortcomings of earlier answers to the questions of modern political order. This book contends that a novel approach to the problematic of popular self-government in a mass age

[5] Walter Dirks, "Als wir die Ärmel aufkrempelten – zum Beispiel in Frankfurt," *Neue Gesellschaft / Frankfurter Hefte* 32, no. 4 (1985): 316–18.

[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

[7] Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011).

[8] Martin Conway and Volker Depkat, "Towards a European History of the Discourse of Democracy: Discussing Democracy in Western Europe 1945–60," in *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches*, ed. Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 134–44; Till van Rahden, "Clumsy Democrats: Moral Passions in the Federal Republic," *German History* 29, no. 3 (2011): 495–503.

appeared in an unlikely place: Germany itself, in the wake of Nazism, war, and Holocaust, defeated and occupied by American, British, French, and Soviet forces. It focuses on groups of public intellectuals and associated periodicals and organizations in the immediate postwar years. It then traces their trajectories over the foundation of two separate German states in 1949 and through the early years of both East and West German societies.

These groups, I argue, formulated a vision of democratic renewal that emphasized the intrinsic value of each person's participation in shaping the political and socio-economic life of all. This was simultaneously a general prescription for a well-constituted polity and a specific response to the Nazi past, conditioned by distinctly German issues and commitments. Drawn together by their antifascist convictions and their democratic hopes, these intellectuals' interactions generated a new social network that linked people from a range of previously disconnected social and political milieus across the four zones of occupied Germany. With Allied support, they established the journals, founded the associations, and convened the congresses that became the vehicles of their activism. Thereby, they helped rebuild a kind of "public sphere" under occupation, as the value of "publicness" became a topic of their discussions.[9] To register the substance of their ideas as well as the forms of their activity, I call them Germany's "engaged democrats."[10] Attempting to reckon with the causes and consequences of Nazism, they saw 1945 as a chance to break with the national past as well as an occasion to reflect on its ambivalent legacies. As they scoured German cultural and political traditions, they found rich democratic potentials embedded there, entangled in a catastrophe from which they could not simply be cut loose. Instead, the actors in question recovered and reconfigured select elements, forging these into a novel amalgam. The resulting positions on democratic renewal reveal important possibilities and limits of the political imagination in a watershed moment of German history.

Their proposed solutions to the perceived problem of mass democracy entailed recasting conventional views on the relationship between

[9] Classically, these terms are associated with Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). As I argue below, Habermas inherited concerns and orientations from these earlier figures.

[10] I borrow the term from Claudia Fröhlich and Michael Kohlstruck, who refer to those few Germans that urged an early reckoning with the Nazi past, like the intellectuals considered here. In my usage, it underscores their public interventions and participatory views as well. See Claudia Fröhlich and Michael Kohlstruck, introduction to *Engagierte Demokraten: Vergangenheitspolitik in kritischer Absicht*, ed. Fröhlich and Kohlstruck (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999), esp. 14–18.

elites and the populace. It is a commonplace of scholarship on modern Germany and Europe that privileged social strata had confronted the rise of mass politics since the late nineteenth century as "elites against democracy."[11] And after 1914, elitism in various guises permeated the political spectrum. Pressured from below, liberals and conservatives reconciled themselves to more meritocracy while still seeking to exclude "the masses." The parties of the left preached popular power, but their own ways of withholding trust in the people found expression in Social Democrats' state-centered paternalism as well as Communists' party-centered vanguardism.[12] On the populist right, the Nazi "people's community" – bound by racist nationalism and governed by acclamation – claimed to have realized a purer, leader-centered form of popular rule.[13] In contrast to these models, Germany's engaged democrats were prompted by the perceived rupture of 1945 to conceive a politics that neither transpired over the heads of the population nor sought to organize them from above but rested on popular participation from below. Rather than approach "the masses" as objects – of exclusion, organization, or paternalist concern – they imagined them as the self-civilizing subjects of a self-constituting public, that is, of "the people" as the sole ground of sovereign authority. Strikingly, this held true even for their fellow Germans, who would transform themselves from Nazi supporters to active citizens by participation: practicing self-rule in myriad forms would be the means as well as the end of their post-fascist self-education to democracy.

Intra-German discussions took place not in a vacuum but on the frontlines of a budding conflict among Germany's occupiers, the victors of the Grand Alliance. Directly following the war, the Allies tightly regulated print media and associations, though they put them largely in German hands. On a practical level, engaged democrats cooperated with the occupiers while maintaining that Germans' "reeducation" could be effected only by Germans themselves. On a programmatic level, they distanced their agenda from the rapidly polarizing positions of the incipient Cold War and sought to preserve a united, neutral Germany within a united,

[11] Walter Struve, *Elites against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890–1933* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

[12] On the workers' movement's dual centralisms, see Geoff Eley, "Reviewing the Socialist Tradition," in *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe*, ed. Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 21–60.

[13] On the integrative authority of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and of Hitler's person, see Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

neutral Europe as an independent force.[14] The foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949 soon stymied these hopes and cleaved apart the spaces in which their network had arisen. On both sides of the divide – albeit under dissimilar conditions of liberal democracy and socialist dictatorship – engaged democrats' frustrated hopes fueled vocal dissent in the 1950s. This, in turn, transmitted impulses to protest mobilizations that would transform both Germanys from the 1960s to the 1980s.[15] In what follows, I trace the manifest and subterranean legacies of their vision, a German contribution to long-standing debates on the promises and perils of mass democracy. Domestically, they countered the still-powerful intellectuals of the radical right, whose decisionist, aristocratic political conceptions they vigorously opposed.[16] With their participatory, public orientations, they gave vital early stimuli to what Konrad Jarausch has called post-Nazi Germany's "recivilizing process."[17] In a broader frame, their vision represented one strand of an alternative postwar politics that, by contesting the terms of the global confrontation between welfare-capitalist liberal democracy and state-socialist "people's democracy," countered the Cold War era's bipolar fixities.

The postwar conjuncture in Germany and Europe

This book stresses an initial sense of fluidity and hope that fostered creative impulses in the immediate postwar period and provoked forceful critiques as the Cold War system solidified. More conventionally, the history of political culture in Germany after 1945 is framed in terms of

[14] On German neutralisms, see Alexander Gallus, *Die Neutralisten: Verfechter eines vereinten Deutschlands zwischen Ost und West 1945–1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2001). On the early movement for European federation, see Walter Lipgens, *A History of European Integration*, vol. I, *1945–1947*, trans. P. S. Falla and A. J. Ryder (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); Vanessa Conze, *Das Europa der Deutschen: Ideen von Europa in Deutschland zwischen Reichstradition und Westorientierung (1920–1970)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 291–321.

[15] Their story thus illuminates Germany's divided yet intertwined postwar history. See Christoph Kleßmann, "Verflechtung und Abgrenzung: Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörenden Nachkriegsgeschichte," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B29/30 (1993): 30–41; Konrad H. Jarausch, "'Die Teile als Ganzes erkennen': Zur Integration der beiden deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichten," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1, no. 1 (2004): 10–30.

[16] Dirk van Laak, *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens: Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993); Daniel Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit: Konservatives Denken bei Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger und Friedrich Georg Jünger 1920–1960* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007).

[17] Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

restoration and assimilation. The collapse of fascism led to great disorientation among Germans, the argument goes, while their occupiers proffered clear but divergent orientations; on that basis, reconstruction evolved in a two-fold process. On the one hand, Germans regained limited sovereignty and accommodated a bipolar world through "Sovietization" and "Americanization" or, more broadly, "Westernization."[18] On the other hand, political culture was shaped by "multiple restorations" of pre- and non-Nazi German traditions in both East and West.[19] As the best scholarship underscores, an interplay of assimilation and restoration indeed determined the dominant character of each postwar Germany. Geopolitical pressures provided the context in which certain traditions revived while others were sidelined; in the process, Germans and allies responded and adapted to each other in asymmetrical but bilateral interaction.[20] In this frame, the immediate postwar years appear as a mere prelude to polarization or a revival of the past. Alternately, they are treated in isolation as a peculiar period of dynamic yet disparate activity without lasting relevance.[21]

By contrast, this book foregrounds the significance of occupation-era developments as well as their legacies for subsequent conflicts in East and West Germany. To do so, it both contextualizes and takes seriously the conviction, prevalent among Germany's engaged democrats, that "restorations" were to be avoided and independent paths pursued at all costs. As Hans Mayer put it, he and like-minded compatriots imagined that something resembling "the synthesis of a democratically renewed

[18] Landmark statements include Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, "Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung: Eine vergleichende Fragestellung zur deutsch-deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte," in *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970*, ed. Jarausch and Siegrist (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1997), 11–46 and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

[19] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[20] On intellectuals and political culture, see Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Peter C. Caldwell, *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Marcus M. Payk, *Der Geist der Demokratie: Intellektuelle Orientierungsversuche im Feuilleton der frühen Bundesrepublik: Karl Korn und Peter de Mendelssohn* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008); Nina Verheyen, *Diskussionslust: Zur Kulturgeschichte des "besseren Arguments" in Westdeutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

[21] Along the latter lines, see Clare Flanagan, *A Study of German Political-Cultural Periodicals from the Years of Allied Occupation, 1945–1949* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 2000); Michael Th. Greven, *Politisches Denken in Deutschland nach 1945: Erfahrung und Umgang mit der Kontingenz in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit* (Opladen: Budrich, 2007). A welcome exception: Friedrich Kießling, *Die undeutschen Deutschen: Eine ideengeschichtliche Archäologie der alten Bundesrepublik 1945–1972* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012).

Soviet Union with a further development of Roosevelt's 'New Deal' thinking in the United States" could ground a distinct postwar order in Germany.[22] This possibility was rooted in the seemingly successful negotiation of a European settlement and, specifically, of common goals for four-power occupation of Germany at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences of 1945. It thus presumed continued effective – if not necessarily amicable – cooperation among the war's erstwhile allies.

Was such hope not an illusion? Historians of the Cold War remain divided on the Allies' intentions for Europe and for the world, a question in which Germany's fate looms large. For decades, debates dwelt on the question of responsibility for the superpower conflict, and the opening of some archives in the former Eastern bloc added new sources without settling old questions. Subsequent scholarship blends traditionalists' stress on Soviet expansionism, revisionists' stress on American economic imperialism and Soviet security concerns, and post-revisionists' emphasis on mutual misperceptions and escalatory reactions. While some assert that the orthodox view of Soviet aggression and Western defense had the basics right all along, others question such a strident conclusion.[23] Even the "revolutionary-imperial" drive of Soviet foreign policy confronted the imperative of security for the war-battered USSR. This required a buffer zone of influence to the west – and, in the long term, foresaw socialism across the globe – but much evidence suggests Stalin's initial approach was flexible, pragmatically averse to inter-Allied hostility and attentive to European agendas and responses. For its part, the USA – under Truman as well as Roosevelt – at first also privileged a cooperative spheres-of-interest settlement over zero-sum confrontation.[24] The antagonistic, polarized course soon taken was not set from the start.

The signal case of Germany highlights flux, not fixity, in relations between the Allies and within each camp. For neither the USSR nor the USA was policymaking monolithic. Even if the German Communist leadership eagerly pursued maximal control over a rump eastern state, there was no such consensus among their Soviet patrons. In Moscow as well as in Berlin, officials who sought their share of influence over a united, neutral, Soviet-friendly Germany contended with those who preferred to dominate an East German satellite. US elites were divided

[22] Mayer, *Ein Deutscher*, I:303.
[23] Compare John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) with Melvyn P. Leffler, "The Cold War: What Do 'We Now Know'?" *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999): 501–24.
[24] See the contributions by Leffler, Vladimir O. Pechatnov, and Norman M. Naimark to Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), I:67–73, 90–100, 175–83, 195–7.

between advocates of a West German solution and advocates of a pacified Germany under four-power stewardship. As tensions rose, American determination to harness West German industrial might for capitalism's reconstruction and Soviet reparations demands as well as political repression of non-Communists all contributed to division.[25] Crucially, to German actors on the ground, signals about the horizon of possible outcomes were decidedly mixed. Beneath the immediate postwar fluidity lay an ideological confrontation that made geopolitical rivalry likely, if not inevitable.[26] Yet the precise form this would take was murky in 1945. It was clear enough that two fundamentally different orders stood opposed in the international system, an opposition inscribed across the territory of occupied Germany. That this would entail the division of the country and the world as well as the blockage of all other paths was not a foregone conclusion.

Before occupation and superpower conflict, the end of the war brought liberation from National Socialism. The sense of renewal that infused engaged democrats' experience of 1945 resonates with a founding myth of both postwar Germanys: that this moment marked a "zero hour" (*Stunde Null*), clearing the ground of history and enabling a fresh start. This notion elides many-layered continuities across 1945, some of which were denied at the time, others embraced. Elite careers were little impacted. Despite denazification, all but the most tainted civil servants (including academics), jurists, military men, scientists, doctors, journalists, and businessmen successfully shored up or re-established their power, with some variation across fields and occupation zones.[27] Meanwhile, Germans of all social ranks experienced the years directly before and after war's end as uninterrupted "bad times" of dislocation and privation.[28] Memories of their own suffering – from air raids and mass

[25] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Carolyn Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[26] For the Cold War as an ideological conflict between "liberty" and "justice" or competing claims to true "democracy," see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Bernd Stöver, *Der Kalte Krieg 1947–1991: Geschichte eines radikalen Zeitalters* (Munich: Beck, 2007).

[27] West German elites are better researched than their Eastern counterparts. Compare, e.g., the synthetic Norbert Frei, ed. *Karrieren im Zwielicht: Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2001) with the article forum by Dolores Augustine, Heinrich Best and Axel Salheiser, Rüdiger Stutz, and Georg Wagner-Kyora, "Nazi Continuities in East Germany," *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2006): 579–619.

[28] Ulrich Herbert, "Good Times, Bad Times: Memories of the Third Reich," in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 97–110; Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, and Hans Woller, eds. *Von Stalingrad zur*

rapes, as refugees from eastern territories, and as prisoners of war – overshadowed memories of complicity in Nazism.[29] Self-pity was exacerbated by resentment at indiscriminate charges of "collective guilt" leveled by a seemingly hostile world.[30] Dominant narratives of the recent past thus cast Germans predominantly as victims, implicitly or explicitly equating them with the victims of Germans – or simply passing in silence over the latter. The "zero hour" was a linchpin in this construction.

Just as it helped fashion usable individual and collective pasts, so the "zero hour" abetted the rehabilitation of both German states after 1949, domestically and internationally. Official memory in the GDR drew the starkest break of all, trading on leftists' resistance and persecution to disavow all continuities, claim an unequivocally anti-Nazi identity, and legitimate Communist rule. Although the early FRG acknowledged responsibility for crimes committed "in Germany's name," it coupled restitution payments and pro-Israel diplomacy with the reintegration of heavily compromised politicians and officials.[31] These self-representations merged seamlessly with broader Cold War orthodoxies, as state-sanctioned "antifascism" and anti-"totalitarianism" enabled each side to tar the other with the brush of Nazism and distance itself from that legacy.[32]

For all its ideological uses, the "zero hour" also names a deep rupture, the ethical and political as well as physical nadir wrought by unprecedented violence that many Germans clearly felt. Material hardship and avoidance of the past directed much attention to the present, but

Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988).

[29] Elizabeth Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1996): 354–95; Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[30] Though partly imagined, these accusations were palpably felt. Norbert Frei, "Von deutscher Erfindungskraft; oder, Die Kollektivschuldthese in der Nachkriegszeit," *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 16 (1997): 621–34; Barbara Wolbring, "Nationales Stigma und persönliche Schuld: Die Debatte über Kollektivschuld in der Nachkriegszeit," *Historische Zeitschrift* 289, no. 2 (2009): 325–64.

[31] Herf, *Divided Memory*; Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Christoph Classen, *Faschismus und Antifaschismus: Die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit im ostdeutschen Hörfunk (1945–1953)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

[32] Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien: Die Entwicklung der Diskussion von den Anfängen bis heute*, 7th edn. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 11–57; Anson Rabinbach, *Begriffe aus dem Kalten Krieg: Totalitarismus, Antifaschismus, Genozid* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 7–42.

openness and opportunity also sparked imaginings of the future.[33] To a few intellectuals, often German Jews in exile, the times were elegiac or austere; redemption seemed inaccessible after the civilizational caesura of Nazism and Holocaust.[34] On the ground in Germany, other intellectuals energized by their sense of radical "contingency" embraced the project of renewal.[35] The challenge, however, was how to move forward, and for educated elites, this involved assessing the nation's cultural heritage in the wake of discredit and defeat. What did it mean that the land of "poets and thinkers" had unleashed a politics of devastation? Scholars of German intellectual life have diagnosed two diverging responses in the wake of 1945: a minority attempt at a total break with the past versus a mainstream project to salvage its "good" elements from the "bad."[36] Alongside cool-headed arguments, deep-seated emotions associated with pollution and purity were also at stake. Operating at the nexus of cognition and affect, such bifurcated stances expressed an underlying psychological structure – a basic binary of disavowing versus defending Germanness – that shaped decades of polarized public wrangling over the meaning of the past.[37]

Neglected in these accounts is an inherently equivocal stance toward German traditions that was prominent in postwar discussions. On this view, the national cultural heritage was ambivalent *in itself*, simultaneously an indicator of Germans' disastrously apolitical past and a resource for their democratic future. For engaged democrats, notions of "culture" and "spirit" prevalent in German letters since the late eighteenth century implied a rich, specifically participatory way of thinking about freedom and agency; at the same time, they recognized, the very focus on things spiritual had fed a political quiescence – and a rearguard hostility to the disenchanted modern world – that paved the way for Nazism. After

[33] See, e.g., Kleßmann, "Stationen des öffentlichen und historiographischen Umgangs in Deutschland mit der Zäsur von 1945," in *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dietrich Papenfuß and Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 460; Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

[34] Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Dan Diner, "'Rupture in Civilization': On the Genesis and Meaning of a Concept in Understanding," in *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime*, ed. Moshe Zimmermann (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2006), 33–48.

[35] Greven, *Politisches Denken*, esp. 14–17.

[36] See, e.g., Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2004); Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Mark W. Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe: German Intellectuals and Cultural Renewal after World War II, 1945–1955* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2006).

[37] A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).