

**What the Germans Lack**  
**Friedrich Nietzsche**  
**(1888)**

**1.**

Among Germans today it is not enough to have spirit: one must arrogate it, one must have the *arrogance* to have spirit.

Perhaps I know the Germans, perhaps I may even tell them some truths. The new Germany represents a large quantum of fitness, both inherited and acquired by training, so that for a time it may expend its accumulated store of strength, even squander it. It is *not* a high culture that has thus become the master, and even less a delicate taste, a noble "beauty" of the instincts; but more virile virtues than any other country in Europe can show. Much cheerfulness and self-respect, much assurance in social relations and in the reciprocity of duties, much industriousness, much perseverance--and an inherited moderation which needs the spur rather than the brake. I add that here one still obeys without feeling that obedience humiliates. And nobody despises his opponent.

One will notice that I wish to be just to the Germans: I do not want to break faith with myself here. I must therefore also state my objections to them. One pays heavily for coming to power: *power makes stupid*. The Germans--once they were called the people of thinkers: do they think at all today? The Germans are now bored with the spirit, the Germans now mistrust the spirit; politics swallows up all serious concern for really spiritual matters. *Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles*--I fear that was the end of German philosophy.

"Are there any German philosophers? Are there German poets? Are there *good* German books?" they ask me abroad. I blush; but with the courage which I maintain even in desperate situations I reply: "Well, *Bismarck*." Would it be permissible for me to confess what books are read today? Accursed instinct of mediocrity!

**2.**

What the German spirit might be--who has not had his melancholy ideas about that! But this people has deliberately made itself stupid, for nearly a millennium: nowhere have the two great European narcotics, alcohol and Christianity, been abused more dissolutely. Recently even a third has been added--one that alone would be sufficient to dispatch all fine and bold flexibility of the spirit--music, our constipated, constipating German music.

How much disgruntled heaviness, lameness, dampness, dressing gown--how much *beer* there is in the German intelligence! How is it at all possible that young men who dedicate their lives to the most spiritual goals do not feel the first instinct of spirituality, the *spirit's instinct of self-preservation*--and drink beer? The alcoholism of young scholars is perhaps no question mark concerning their scholarliness--without spirit one can still be a great scholar--but in every other respect it remains a problem. Where would one not find the gentle degeneration which beer produces in the spirit? Once, in a case that has

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almost become famous, I put my finger on such a degeneration--the degeneration of our number-one German free spirit, the *clever* David Strauss, into the author of a beer-bench gospel and "new faith." It was not for nothing that he had made his vow to the "fair brunette" [dark beer] in verse--loyalty unto death.

### 3.

I was speaking of the German spirit: it is becoming cruder, it is becoming shallower. Is that enough? At bottom, it is something quite different that alarms me: how German seriousness, German depth, German *passion* in spiritual matters are declining more and more. The verve has changed, not just the intellectuality. Here and there I come into contact with German universities: what an atmosphere prevails among their scholars, what desolate spirituality--and how contented and lukewarm it has become! It would be a profound misunderstanding if one wanted to adduce German science against me--it would also be proof that one has not read a word I have written. For seventeen years I have never tired of calling attention to the *despiritualizing* influence of our current science-industry. The hard helotism to which the tremendous range of the sciences condemns every scholar today is a main reason why those with a fuller, richer, profounder disposition no longer find a congenial education *and congenial educators*. There is nothing of which our culture suffers more than of the superabundance of pretentious jobbers and fragments of humanity; our universities are, against their will, the real hothouses for this kind of withering of the instincts of the spirit. And the whole of Europe already has some idea of this--power politics deceives nobody. Germany is considered more and more as Europe's *flatland*. I am still looking for a German with whom I might be able to be serious in my own way--and how much more for one with whom I might be cheerful! *Twilight of the Idols*: who today would comprehend *from what seriousness* a philosopher seeks recreation here? Our cheerfulness is what is most incomprehensible about us.

### 4.

Even a rapid estimate shows that it is not only obvious that German culture is declining but that there is *sufficient reason* for that. In the end, no one can spend more than he has: that is true of an individual, it is true of a people. If one spends oneself for power, for power politics, for economics, world trade, parliamentarianism, and military interests--if one spends in the direction the quantum of understanding, seriousness, will, and self-overcoming which one represents, then it will be lacking for the other direction.

Culture and the state--one should not deceive one-self about this--are antagonists: "Kultur-Staat" is merely a modern idea. One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even *anti-political*. Goethe's heart opened at the phenomenon of Napoleon--it *closed* at the "Wars of Liberation." At the same moment when Germany comes up as a great power, France gains a new importance as a *cultural power*. Even today much new seriousness, much new *passion* of the spirit, have migrated to Paris; the question of pessimism, for example, the question of Wagner, and almost all psychological and artistic questions are there weighed incomparably more delicately and thoroughly than in Germany--the Germans are altogether incapable of this kind of seriousness. In the history of European culture the rise of the "Reich" means one thing above all: *a displacement of the center of gravity*. It is already known everywhere: in what matters most--and that always

remains culture--the Germans are no longer worthy of consideration. One asks: Can you point to even a single spirit *who counts* from a European point of view, as your Goethe, your Hegel, your Heinrich Heine, your Schopenhauer counted? That there is no longer a single German philosopher--about that there is no end of astonishment.

### 5.

The entire system of higher education in Germany has lost what matters most: the *end* as well as the *means* to the end. That education, that *Bildung*, is itself an end--and not "the Reich"--and that educators are needed to that end, and not secondary-school teachers and university scholars--that has been forgotten. Educators are needed *who have themselves been educated*, superior, noble spirits, proved at every moment, proved by words and silence, representing culture which has grown ripe and sweet--not the learned louts whom secondary schools and universities today offer our youth as "higher wet nurses." Educators are *lacking*, not counting the most exceptional of exceptions, the very *first* condition of education: *hence* the decline of German culture. One of this rarest of exceptions is my venerable friend, Jacob Burckhardt in Basel: it is primarily to him that Basel owes its pre-eminence in humaneness.

What the "higher schools" in Germany really achieve is a brutal training, designed to prepare huge numbers of young men, with as little loss of time as possible, to become *usable, abusable*, in government service. "Higher education" and *huge numbers*--that is a contradiction to start with. All higher education belongs only to the exception: one must be privileged to have a right to so high a privilege. All great, all beautiful things can never be common property: *pulchrum est paucorum hominum*. What contributes to the decline of German culture? That "higher education" is no longer a privilege--the democratism of *Bildung*, which has become "*common*"--too common. Let it not be forgotten that military privileges really compel an *all-too-great attendance* in the higher schools, and thus their downfall.

In present-day Germany no one is any longer free to give his children a noble education: our "higher schools" are all set up for the most ambiguous mediocrity, with their teachers, curricula, and teaching aims. And everywhere an indecent haste prevails, as if something would be lost if the young man of twenty-three were not yet "finished," or if he did not yet know the answer to the "main question": which calling? A higher kind of human being, if I may say so, does not like "callings," precisely because he knows himself to be called. He has time, he takes time, he does not even think of "finishing": at thirty one is, in the sense of high culture, a beginner, a child. Our overcrowded secondary schools, our overworked, stupefied secondary-school teachers, are a scandal: for one to defend such conditions, as the professors at Heidelberg did recently, there may perhaps be *causes--reasons* there are none.

### 6.

I put forward at once--lest I break with my style, which is *affirmative* and deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means, only involuntarily--the three tasks for which educators are required. One must learn to *see*, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to *see*--accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it; postponing judgment, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from all sides. That is the *first* preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control of all the

inhibiting, excluding instincts. Learning to *see*, as I understand it, is almost what, unphilosophically speaking, is called a strong will: the essential feature is precisely *not* to "will"--to be able to suspend decision. All unspirituality, all vulgar commonness, depend on the inability to resist a stimulus: one *must* react, one follows every impulse. In many cases, such a compulsion is already pathology, decline, a symptom of exhaustion--almost everything that unphilosophical crudity designates with the word "vice" is merely this physiological inability not to react. A practical application of having learned to see: as a *learner*, one will have become altogether slow, mistrustful, recalcitrant. One will let strange, *new things* of every kind come up to oneself, inspecting them with hostile calm and withdrawing one's hand. To have all doors standing open, to lie servilely on one's stomach before every little fact, always to be prepared for the leap of putting oneself into the place of, or of *plunging into*, others and other things--in short, the famous modern "objectivity"--is bad taste, is ignoble *par excellence*.

### 7.

Learning to *think*: in our schools one no longer has any idea of this. Even in the universities, even among the real scholars of philosophy, logic as a theory, as a practice, as a craft, is beginning to die out. One need only read German books: there is no longer the remotest recollection that thinking requires a technique, a teaching curriculum, a will to mastery--that thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a kind of dancing. Who among Germans still knows from experience the delicate shudder which *light feet* in spiritual matters send into every muscle? The stiff clumsiness of the spiritual gesture, the bungling hand at grasping--that is German to such a degree that abroad one mistakes it for the German character as such. The German has no *fingers* for nuances.

That the Germans have been able to stand their philosophers at all, especially that most deformed concept-cripple of all time, the *great* Kant, provides not a bad notion of German grace. For one cannot subtract *dancing* in every form from a *noble education*--to be able to dance with one's feet, with concepts, with words: need I still add that one must be able to dance with the *pen* too--that one must learn to *write*? But at this point I should become completely enigmatic for German readers.

[http://www.publicappeal.org/library/nietzsche/Nietzsche\\_twilight\\_of\\_the\\_idols/the\\_twilight\\_of\\_the\\_Idols.htm#sect8](http://www.publicappeal.org/library/nietzsche/Nietzsche_twilight_of_the_idols/the_twilight_of_the_Idols.htm#sect8)

<http://www.handprint.com/SC/NIE/GotDamer.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/twi.htm>