The Paradox of Unintended Consequences: Echoes of Max

Weber in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* 

Doctor Faustus (1947) is Thomas Mann's attempt to understand the cultural conditions that made possible the emergence of fascism in a country firmly situated in the European Enlightenment tradition. As the novel's title indicates, the main character, the composer Adrian Leverkühn, is cast as a Faust figure willing to sell his soul to the devil in order to revitalize a moribund modern culture symbolically represented by music. In the early parts of the novel, Leverkühn is exposed to the enthusiasm of proto-fascist students and other intellectuals. At the same time, lectures on the history of music, especially on Beethoven, shape his aesthetic self-understanding. Mann explicitly invites the reader of Doctor Faustus to recognize a parallel between the composer's aesthetic aspirations and Germany's political descent into fascist totalitarianism. In the exact center of the novel, Leverkühn is "visited" by the devil who reveals to him that the pact he is asking him to sign is in fact simply the formal ratification of a demonic commitment he had already made.

Mann's treatment of the cultural roots of fascism in mythological terms suggests that the Nazi episode in Germany's history constitutes an irrational aberration from the rational project of modernity. At the same time, though, the novel undermines this "demonizing" of Germany by proposing that the roots of fascism must be sought in Germany's cultural tradition, a tradition to be situated within a broader European civilization. Although the intellectual debates of Mann's intellectuals target neo-Romanticism specifically, the network of cultural allusions in the novel reach back to medieval times. Fascism would then be continuous with modernity rather than a departure from it. While *Doctor Faustus* suggests that Mann subscribes to the so-called *Sonderweg* thesis that holds that National Socialism was a specifically German phenomenon, it simultaneously implies that the Holocaust was for him the most radical expression of a much broader crisis of modernity.

Doctor Faustus thus raises the conflicted issue of German guilt which in the 1980s has resurfaced in the famous Historikerstreit, a debate focusing on the controversial figure of Ernst Nolte, a well-respected scholar of

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totalitarianism who, in 1986, published a newspaper article in which he advanced the thesis that the long preoccupation with German "guilt" ought to be replaced by a more objective assessment of the Nazi period (see Nolte). Resisting the Sonderweg thesis that reductively demonized Germany, he called for a reintegration of the Nazi period into larger cultural and historical tendencies. According to Nolte, it was time for the black-and-white picture painted by earlier commentators to be replaced by a more complex representation of the multiple connections characteristic of all past events. While this emphasis on complexity seems unobjectionable enough, Nolte's revisionism was almost immediately interpreted as an apology for the Holocaust. No less a figure than Jürgen Habermas saw such revisionism as a reactionary attempt to exonerate Germany from guilt (see Habermas). Suspicions about Nolte's claim to objectivity were fuelled by his failure to distance himself from Holocaust deniers and by indications that he was sympathetic to the radical right (Rechtsradikalismus). As the Historikerstreit broadened, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen added fuel to the already heated debate by publishing Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (1996), another highly controversial revisionist history which, however, reinforces the Sonderweg thesis by insisting that the Holocaust was the outcome of a specifically German form of anti-Semitism, burdening all Germans with collective guilt (Kollektivschuld). Although Mann published Doctor Faustus in 1947, the question of Leverkühn's guilt remains pertinent to both the original Historikerstreit in the 1980s and the subsequent Goldhagen-Debatte in the 1990s.

There can be little doubt that, on the most obvious level, *Doctor Faustus* invites the "demonic" interpretation of Germany. However, on closer analysis, Mann in fact insinuates that the devil did not so much initiate as manipulate the cultural conditions which made the emergence of fascism possible. As Mann himself confirms in "Germany and the Germans," for him there "are not two German nations, an evil and a good one. There is only one Germany whose good sides turned evil through a devil's ruse. The evil Germany is the failure of the good one, the good in disaster, in guilt, in demise" (Mann 1977, 297). Does this authorial explanation indicate a temporal succession from a good to an evil phase in Germany's history? If this should be the case, then fascism would have to be understood as an atavistic eruption of irrational forces that inexplicably befell an otherwise thoroughly enlightened nation. In the context of the *Historikerstreit*, the ambiguous ending of *Doctor Faustus*, Mann's apparent refusal to clarify if Leverkühn is ultimately "saved" or not, might strike us as a deplorable vacillation. But this famous authorial passage can also be read more dialectically; the good and the evil sides of Germany could be interpreted not as diametrically opposed but as mutually constitutive. In this paper, I want to argue that Mann offers in *Doctor Faustus* a dialectical reading of the emergence of fascism that disrupts and complicates the rather reductive either/or tenor of

<sup>1</sup> These debates have generated too much literature to be listed here. However, the following may make a good starting point for further reading: Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit: ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit" (1988) and Wolfeane Wippermann, Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhaven-Kontroverse (1997).

the Historikerstreit. To this end, I will foreground a dialectical logic of "unintended consequences," a logic which receives its most provocative articulation in Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus) (1904-5). Showing that Mann's references to Protestantism and Puritanism alert us to significant echoes of Weber in Doctor Faustus, I hope to illustrate that Weber's logic informs the way Mann deals with fascism, both directly through the political debates of fictional characters based on historically verifiable figures, and indirectly through a history of music "borrowed," often verbatim, from Theodor W. Adorno's Philosophy of Modern Music (Philosophie der neuen Musik) (1949). By analyzing the ways in which the politically "murderous" Germany was always already implicit in the culturally "noble" Germany, Mann showed himself in Doctor Faustus to have been a more complex political thinker than has generally been recognized.

#### Mann and Weber

Although it is difficult to establish how well Mann was acquainted with Weber's work, he does refer to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in his "political essay" *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man (Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen)* (1918-20). Acknowledging that *Buddenbrooks* is indeed a depiction of the "modern-capitalist bourgeois," he claims to have arrived at this new type of person on his own, without having read philosophers like Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, or Werner Sobart who had all dealt with "the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" (Mann 1988, 137; my translation). He prides himself specifically on having "established on his own, without benefit of books, that the modern capitalistic entrepreneur — the bourgeois with his *ascetic idea* of duty to his vocation — is the creation of the protestant ethic — of puritanism and calvinism." Stressing that he arrived at this connection through "spontaneous insight," he tells us that he "discovered only recently, and hence retrospectively, that the same notion had been thought and articulated, at the same time, by other learned thinkers" (Mann 1988, 137; my translation). Even if Hermann Kurzke should be right when he suspects that "at that time" Mann had "most likely not really read any of these three authors [Weber, Troeltsch, Sombart]" (Kurzke 1985, 49) — and we can never know for sure — the similarity Mann alludes to emboldens me to see in the references to pietism in *Doctor Faustus* an intentional Weber citation.

That there are certain affinities between Weber and Mann has already been shown by Harvey Goldman's two excellent studies, *Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (1988) and *Politics, Death, and the Devil* (1992). Although Mann and Weber met only twice — shortly after the First World War (Goldman 1988, 1) — they share a similarly self-conscious attention to phenomena "they took to be crucial for the development of the modern world" (Goldman 1988, 2). Harvey's comparison focuses primarily on the two key issues of the "calling" or 'vocation' (*Beruf*) and 'personality' (*Persönlichkeit*)" (Goldman 1988, 2); his chapter on *Doctor Faustus* in the second study is concerned with "the notion of the devil's pact as service in a calling" (Goldman 1992, 232) and hence with the novel as a

confrontation with Nietzsche. Although I entirely concur with Goldman's argument that *Doctor Faustus* should be interpreted as a *critique* of Nietzsche, my reading of *Doctor Faustus* through Weber's lens returns to the "central problem of rationalization" (Goldman 1988, 3), which holds less interest for Goldman. Approaching Mann's novel from the perspective of Weber's analysis of the logic that allowed capitalism to arise out of Puritanism, I hope to shed light on the way the "evil" Germany was always already implicit in the "good" one. Through Weber's logic of unintended consequences it is possible to appreciate Mann's understanding that effects are often incommensurate with their causes so that Germany's "good" rational side is not only complicit with its "evil" other side but constitutes its enabling condition.

Weber's sociohistorical analysis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism draws out the paradoxical realization that the spiritual aspirations of Protestantism produced conditions conducive to the triumph of the very materialism most abhorrent to the religious mind. His understanding of capitalism constitutes both an extension of and a corrective to Karl Marx's economic theories. Like Marx, Weber sought to demystify the bourgeois-capitalist system but, unlike Marx, he contended that ideas are more powerful influences on economic conditions than Marx's materialist focus allows for. Although "recognizing [like Marx] the fundamental importance of the economic factor," Weber contends that "the opposite correlation must not be left out of consideration," namely "the ability and disposition of men to adopt certain types of rational conduct" (Weber 1992, 26). In other words, he articulates "the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of an economic spirit" by focusing on "the connection of the spirit of modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism" (Weber 1992, 27). Weber uncovers "an intimate relationship" between the contradictory terms of "other-worldliness, asceticism, and ecclesiastical piety on the one side, and participation in capitalistic acquisition on the other" (Weber 1992, 42). Although typical of all Protestants, this "combination of intense piety with just as strong a development of business acumen" was particularly pronounced in the Pietists. The spirit of capitalist enterprise is for Weber both rational, in that it depends on accurate calculation and systematic administration, and irrational, in that the necessity of work runs counter to our desire for a happy life. In other words, an ascetic tendency has to be developed in order to combat our natural inclination towards pleasurable and hedonistic pursuits.

According to Weber, it was Puritanism that supplied the personality best suited to the spirit of capitalism. Far from arguing that capitalism arose as a direct result of the Protestant Reformation, he contends that ideas may have unforeseen economic consequences: "We shall thus have to admit that the cultural consequences of the Reformation were to a great extent, perhaps in the particular aspects with which we are dealing predominantly, unforeseen and even unwished-for results of the labours of the reformers. They were often far removed from or even in contradiction to all that they themselves thought to attain" (Weber 1992, 90). Since Christ had died only for the elect, good works did not improve the chances of the individual for salvation. Depending for their salvation on God's unpredictable mercy, Puritans developed their spirituality in social isolation and inner loneliness. At the same time, they were

enjoined to organize social life so as to increase the "glory of God" (Weber 1992, 108); it follows that "labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear[s] to promote the glory of God and hence to be willed by Him" (Weber 1992, 109). In the first instance, asceticism is made compatible with capitalist accumulation because, "however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, [...] they are indispensable as a sign of election" (Weber 1992, 115). Worldly prosperity is thus interpreted as a sign of God's favor. In the second instance, Puritans were discouraged from enjoying the fruits of their labor; the wealth they accumulated was not to be used for hedonistic pleasures. The injunction against "idleness and the temptations of the flesh" (Weber 1992, 157) was particularly useful to capitalism in that people were morally obliged to work hard and not to waste time.

Although capitalism was anathema to religious spirituality, in its emphasis on thrift and "the systematic rational ordering of the moral life as whole" (Weber 1992, 126), Puritanism created the foundation for capitalist accumulation. The "ascetic compulsion to save" and the "restraints which were imposed upon the consumption of wealth" (Weber 1992, 172) served to increase acquisitive activity and hence made possible "the productive investment of capital" (Weber 1992, 172). Out of religious asceticism and inner spirituality had emerged a "specifically bourgeois economic ethic" (Weber 1992, 176). Quoting Baxter's view that "the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment," Weber comments that "fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage" (Weber 1992, 181). Goldman summarizes Weber's contention that protestantism functioned as a preformed system for the capitalist mode of production in the following useful terms:

For *modern* capitalism to have developed as it did, Weber argued, a *new kind* of person must have existed, a person with special qualities and capacities for work, with a natural inclination for the new kind of rationalized labor that capitalism as a system brought with it. But, he argued, these new men possessed that inclination and capacity *before* capitalism was established as a system capable of imposing such labor through the pressure of its material demands, and they derived this strength from noneconomic — in this case, religious — sources. (Goldman 1988, 19)

By demonstrating that the intentions of the Puritan ethos are incommensurate with the bourgeois-capitalist ends they ultimately served, Weber demystifies the self-understanding of rational systems as impermeable to unpredictable and irrational influences.

It is in the theological Halle episode that Mann's *Doctor Faustus* alludes most directly to Weber's argument that the ascetic spiritualism of Protestantism prepared the ground not only for the materialistic amorality of capitalism but also for the emergence of fascism that Weber did not live to witness. But Weber's dialectical understanding of historical processes manifests itself more generally in Mann's examination of the tragic consequences resulting from attempts to liberate both Germany and music from modernity's instrumentalization of reason.

## Halle Episode: Spiritual Aspirations and Regressive Consequences

While there is no conclusive evidence that Mann had, in fact, read Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Doctor Faustus contains muted but important echoes of Weber in the allusions to Puritanism and Protestantism that complicate the standard explanation of Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough and subsequent mental breakdown as the result of his pact with the devil. 
It is above all in the theological Halle episode that Pietism makes itself felt through numerous and often seemingly insignificant details. The University of Halle is associated with the historical figure of August Hermann Francke, the "patron saint" of the city whom Zeitblom calls a "pietistic pedagogue" (Mann 1968, 85). It was the first university to have a Lutheran superintendent, namely Justus Jonas, who in 1541 defected from Erasmus's humanist camp to Luther's reformed one. At the university's inception the faculty was also dominated by Pietists (Mann 1968, 87). By the time Leverkühn and Zeitblom arrived, Halle was still marked by "ecclesiastical brawls" (Mann 1968, 87) with which Mann illustrates that the dialectical interrelationship of superstitious magic and rational enquiry opens up the possibility of unintended reversals. For Mann, as for Weber, the Protestant Revolution represents a decisive moment of historical blindness; what appears to be progressive from the perspective of modernity may well reveal itself to be regressive. Leverkühn's amused tolerance of Professor Kumpf, the theologian who imitates Luther's "Table Talk" (Mann 1968, 96) and who believed "stoutly in revelation" while remaining "on a very familiar footing with the Devil, if also, of course, the reverse of a cordial one" (1968, 95), symbolizes the continued influence of magic in the age of reason. It is this atmosphere of superstition that makes Zeitblom uncomfortable in Halle. Instead of interpreting the Protestant Reformation as a new beginning, the catholic Zeitblom argues that it was a last-ditch effort by religion to maintain its power when it had in fact already been defeated. He wonders "if the reformers are not rather to be regarded as backsliding types and bringers of evil" (1968, 88). Although considered to have liberated religion from superstition, Luther in fact perpetuated superstition through his hostility to secular humanism. In a dialectical twist, the Protestant Revolution initiated a regressive rearguard action against the progressive tendencies of the Enlightenment.

The argument that modernity is always open to regressive influences is perhaps less important than the suggestion that the defeat of religion at the hands of reason would culminate in Weber's iron cage. Mann makes Weber's point that religious spirituality and rational science are dialectically related by indicating first of all that theology both saves and undermines itself through appeals to rational argumentation. Disapproving of the Pietists who sought "a sharp division between piety and science" (Mann 1968, 88), Zeitblom holds that, far from being

autonomous, theology has always been complicit with socio-economic tendencies and rationalizations. Above all, Zeitblom is neither convinced of the "ontological evidence for the existence of God," nor of the argument that God's "objective existence" can be derived "from the subjective idea of a Highest Being" (Mann 1968, 88). Kant's attempt to prove the existence of God through reason reveals itself to be fatal to religion: "Orthodoxy itself committed the blunder of letting reason into the field of religion, in that she sought to prove the positions of faith by the test of reason" (Mann 1968, 88-89). Instead of safeguarding religious magic against secular rationalism, this proof had the opposite effect by yielding the ground to secular Enlightenment principles.

By the time Leverkühn reached Halle, orthodox religion and critical humanism had accommodated themselves to each other. The university was now under the sign of the enlightened theologian Wolff who had excluded from the Bible whatever did not serve the humanist drive for "the 'moral betterment'" (Mann 1968, 89) of social beings. Attempting to accommodate religion to science, Professor Schleppfuss contends in a dialectically sophisticated fashion that the devil must be seen as "a necessary emanation and inevitable accompaniment of the Holy Existence of God Himself" (Mann 1968, 99). It was now possible to explain the theodicy, that is "a certain logical incompleteness of the All-powerfulness and All-goodness of God" (Mann 1968, 99), by reasoning that the freedom to sin requires the existence of evil. Although Schleppfuss solves the logical dilemma through rational argument, religion in its enlightened form had sacrificed its ritual power to accommodate the ethical demands of bourgeois society.

Where Kumpf could not liberate religion from superstition, Schleppfuss rationalized away its spiritual core. Moreover, in a most significant dialectical twist, the privileging of reason over superstition in the narrative of modernity resulted in a humanism blind to the "demonic character of human existence" (Mann 1968, 89). Leverkühn, no less than the Winfried students, yearns for a release of the instinctual vitality assumed to have been repressed by enlightened rationalism. Mann thus suggests that liberal humanism put itself at risk precisely because it had successfully supplanted religious irrationalism; the students at the university of Halle were susceptible to the "irrational currents of philosophy" (Mann 1968, 90) because they felt stifled by what Weber has called the administered world or "the iron cage" of modernity. Later in the novel, this yearning for a regressive vitalism is explained by the fascist ideologue and anti-humanist Breisacher who maintains that "all morality was 'a purely intellectual' misunderstanding of the ritualistic" (Mann 1968, 274), the "vulgarized and rationalistically watered-down late form of something very vital, active and strong: the magic invocation, the coercion of God" (Mann 1968, 274). Like Weber, Mann maintains that the pietistic atmosphere of Halle points to the complicity of religion with the rationalizing tendencies not only of science but also of bourgeois-capitalist existence.

In the first instance, then, the Halle episode draws attention to the dangerous consequences of Pietism's spiritual inward-turning and blindness to the dialectical interdependence of rational and irrational forces. Like Weber, Zeitblom recognizes that Puritanism creates the autonomous and socially isolated individual when he objects

to the Protestant Reformation for having allowed the "revolt of subjective willfulness [...] against the objective bond" (Mann 1968, 87). In other words, Luther validates the merely personal and contingent at the expense of a communal order based on rational principles. For Zeitblom the true Enlightenment hero is not Luther but Erasmus who set out to defeat superstition through the institution of a humanistic education. What irritates both Erasmus and Zeitblom is "the hatred that Luther and his partisans brought down upon classical learning — Luther had personally little enough of it — as the source of the spiritual turmoil" (Mann 1968, 87). By pretending to be a progressive movement against superstition, the Protestant Reformation disguises its hostility to the very liberal humanism it claims to serve.

#### Mann's Fictional Proto-Fascist Intellectuals and their Historical Models: Dialectic of Progress and Regress

Luther's hostility to humanism anticipates the anti-liberal atmosphere in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, which Mann evokes in the debates of the Winfried students at Halle and the Kridwiss circle in Munich. What is at issue in the Winfried debate that pits the aptly named socialist Arzt against the even more aptly named nationalist Deutschlin is the social totality whose authority the individual should accept. Representing the political left and the political unquestionably expressing anti-liberal tendencies that echo Paul de Lagarde's adamant rejection of "parliament, state parliament, liberalism, progress" (Lagarde 1913, 74) in favor of "institutions which bind" (Lagarde 1913, 74). In contrast to the socialist Arzt who looks to ethical principles to create a just society serving the interests of the commonwealth, the nationalists endorse an indivisible principle of sovereignty capable of enforcing social cohesion. Arzt's utopian vision thus takes its cue from the ethical teachings of the New Testament whereas Deutschlin's model is the powerful father figure of the vengeful Old Testament God. For Arzt, Christianity had originally been a political revolution that had failed because it came to privilege individual morality over social responsibility. Implicitly attacking the German tendency toward "inwardness," he believes that Christianity needs to complete the missed political revolution by creating a bond between social and religious aspirations. Although seemingly agreeing with Arzt that the atomistic subject needs to be reconciled with the social collectivity, Deutschlin overwrites this socialist position with a more sinister nationalistic alternative. Disdainful of the "social idea of an economic social organization," which has to rely on "rationalism" and "autonomous [...] enlighten[ed] thinking," Deutschlin points out that Arzt's tendency to equate "the just" with the "socially useful" naively overlooks the "mighty forces either above or below the rational" (Mann 1968, 118). Echoing Lagarde's volkish contempt for all "radical forces that

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Lagarde was an influential voice in Germany. His Deutscher Glaube, Deutsches Vaterland, Deutsche Bildung (1913) offered proto-fascist opinions which were later to be exploited by the Nazis.

<sup>3</sup> In my use of "volkish" to translate the nationalistic-racist reference to "Volk," (folk) I follow the spelling used in George L. Mosse's

promoted modernity, democracy, and socio-economic progress" (Mosse 1964, 35-36), Deutschlin accuses Arzt of being blinded by Rousseau's "shufflings of the Contrat Social" (Mann 1968, 119). The true nation needs to feed on more powerful emotions than utilitarian self-interest. Unlike Arzt, who assumes that rational subjects consent to limitations on their freedom in the interest of social justice for all, Deutschlin maintains that emotional subjects yearn to obey a paternal authority with which they can identify and bond. What the nationalists advocate is not the negative freedom of liberation from constraint but the positive freedom of accepting one's place in a social order which articulates one's essence.

On the face of it, both Arzt and Deutschlin espouse neo-Romantic values deriving from Rousseau's noble aspirations to create optimal conditions for subjects to freely realize their human potential. However, what Doctor Faustus also suggests is that Rousseau is like Luther in that he, too, initiates not a progressive but a regressive revolution. As intellectuals of the Kridwiss circle meeting in Munich in 1919 point out, the French Revolution had illustrated that Rousseau's notion of freedom is internally self-contradictory: "[F]reedom [is] by the act of assertion being driven to limit the freedom of its antagonist and thus to stultify itself and its own principles" (Mann 1968, 352). This is, of course, the dilemma of the Social Contract. If Rousseau is forced to restrict the freedom of those opposed to the will of the majority, then some individuals are not free to act as they wish. Rousseau's emancipatory agenda is thus reactionary in that it privileges the "heart" over the "mind" and remains complicit with violence in that justifies the exclusion of dissenting voices. Most distressingly, perhaps, Rousseau's notion of freedom always already contains the potential for repression. What lurks in the exchange between Arzt and Deutschlin is the justification for political terror as a means for quelling social chaos. Given Leverkühn's later invention of the rigorously controlled twelve-tone system, it is significant that he concurs with Deutschlin by arguing that the Church is necessary as "an institution for the objective disciplining" of religious impulses that would otherwise succumb to "subjectivist [...] chaos [Verwilderung]" and hence to a "world of fantastic uncanniness, an ocean of daemony" (Mann 1968, 117-18). Volkish ideology affirms that the naturally social individual subject is to be returned to itself, to be saved from the modern institutions which separate it from its authentic self or inner essence while contradictorily also stating that any affirmation of subjectivity risks plunging society into disorder and needs to be constrained by the institution of a powerful locus of discipline. The noble desire for spiritual regeneration thus leads to two interconnected unintended consequences in that it unleashes atavistic impulses and calls for submission to a totalizing authority.

The anti-liberal attitudes of volkish or proto-fascist intellectuals dramatized in *Doctor Faustus* reflect opinions expressed by historically verifiable figures, including Thomas Mann's own views in *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. In this telling political essay first published between 1918 and 1920, Mann distinguishes between his brother Heinrich,

who embraced a French notion of civilization, and himself, who remained faithful to a German notion of culture. True spirit (*Geist*) will have no truck with democracy: "The difference between spirit and politics includes that of culture and civilization, of soul and society, of freedom and voting rights, of art and literature; and German tradition is culture, soul, freedom, art and *not* civilization, society, voting rights, and literature" (Mann 1983, 17; translation amended). Civilization is further negatively identified with the "mathematized-rationalized social world" (Mann 1983, 21; translation amended); it is progressive, materialistic, artificial, superficial, and sterile. In Ernst Bloch's terms, Mann could be said to have been "[n]auseated by the stock market age, the depression of the lost war, the lack of ideals in this dull Republic" (Bloch 1990, 148). In contrast, culture suggests "reverence for the spirit" (Mann 1983, 22; trans. amended); it preserves traditional values, strives for spiritual satisfaction, creates emotional depth, and has kept its soul.

Reflections parallels ideas expressed in Oswald Spengler's popular history, The Decline of the West (Der Untergang des Abendlandes) (1918), which Mann obviously read with considerable interest. For Spengler, the world ought to be an "organism" rather than a "mechanism" (Spengler 1926, 16). In a passage underlined by Mann, Spengler reverses the standard progressive view of history by arguing that civilization is a falling away from culture: "Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable" (Spengler 1926, 31). Anticipating the Nazis' celebration of the peasant rooted in blood and soil, Spengler disdains the "parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman" (Spengler 1926, 31). Civilization is consistently denigrated as a "cosmopolitanism in place of 'home,' as a 'scientific irreligion' in place of 'the older religion of the heart'" (Spengler 1926, 33). In these early years of the new century, Mann and Spengler typify neo-Romantic longings expressing a deeply felt hostility to modernity.

The Winfried students in *Doctor Faustus* accurately reflect the tendency of German students to see their "spiritual roots dislodged through industrialization and the atomization of modern man" (Mosse 1964, 8-9). Although such spiritual unease was registered throughout Europe, in Germany it generated conservative-regressive rather than socialist-utopian reactions. As George Mosse points out in *The Crisis of German Ideology*, German students were "heir to a long develop-ment in German thought which tended toward abstract rationalism and idealism" (Mosse 1964, 9) which manifested themselves in what Robert Faesi calls their "super cleverness, their romantic and reactionary irrationalism, their intoxication with the mythic and barbaric primordial state, their contempt for human values" (Faesi 1955, 161; my translation). They sought the future not in liberal emancipation but in a nostalgic return to a social collectivity predicated on bonds of blood rather than on political rights and freedoms.

<sup>4</sup> Among the books from Thomas Mann's library preserved in the Thomas-Mann Archiv in Zürich there is an underlined copy of Spengler's book.

History has, of course, shown that it was precisely this well-intended desire to restore Germany's lost spirituality that produced the enabling conditions for Germany's political nightmare.

## Leverkühn's Breakthrough into Aesthetic Totality

Doctor Faustus echoes not only Weber's argument in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism that the ascetic spiritualism of Protestantism prepared the ground for the materialistic amorality of capitalism but also his dialectical understanding of historical processes as such. As we have seen, the spiritual aspirations of Mann's intellectuals find their legitimization either in Luther's religious or Rousseau's political call for revolution. Yet the "good intentions" of the Winfried students, their desire to counteract modernity's rationalizing tendencies through appeals to Germany's authentic cultural origins, prepare the ground for Hitler's genocidal rhetoric of "blood and soil." In the political arena, parliamentary reforms intended to advance Germany's process of democratiza-tion became similarly complicit with the very anti-liberal elements they were meant to defeat. We need only remember that the repressive measures Hitler was to use to such great effect had in fact been facilitated by particularly liberal provisions in the Weimar Republic. But it is in Mann's analysis of Leverkühn's aesthetic aspirations that Weber's logic of unintended consequences receives its most sustained articulation. Basing Leverkühn's avant-garde theories on Theodor W. Adorno's sociohistorical analysis of Schönberg's twelve-tone system in Philosophy of Modern Music, Mann incorporates into his mythological Faust narrative a neo-Marxist cultural critique that links fascism and communism as common reactions against the evils of modernity embodied in late capitalism. <sup>6</sup> If we consider Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough in the light of Adorno's neo-Marxist critique of modern music, then the well-established critical consensus that Leverkühn is doomed by his most noble aspirations takes on a sophisticated theoretical dimension not sufficiently accounted for by the mythical Faust paradigm.

Central to Mann's exploration of the cultural roots of fascism is Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough into atonality. Focusing on the explicit parallels between proto-fascist intellectuals (Winfried and Kridwiss circles) and Leverkühn's early comments on music, critics tend to conclude that the composer's breakdown and Germany's political "Götterdämmerung" are the logical outcome of volkish investments in irrational forces. In conformity with Mosse's analysis of the neo-Romantic sources of proto-fascist endorsements of the Volk as a site of organic unity, this critical consensus assumes that the composer's atonal revolution is driven by regressive volkish ambitions. But a closer reading of the history of music in *Doctor Faustus* complicates this identification of the twelve-tone system with the volkish ideology of the Winfried students and Breisacher. Once we are alerted to Weber's logic of unintended

<sup>5</sup> Emergency decrees and plebiscites are prominent examples of this irony.

<sup>6</sup> Adorno shared with other members of the Frankfurt School this tendency to link fascism and capitalism.

consequences, we realize that Leverkühn breaks with the volkish emphasis on organic unity and institutes a highly paradoxical system that succeeds in freeing the note from its assigned place in the tonal hierarchy only to submit it to the indifferent totality of twelve-tone music. Weber's logic of unintended consequences finds its most tragic exemplification in Leverkühn's paradigm shift from tonal to atonal music.

In the crucial scene with the devil, Leverkühn seems to affirm the parallel between volkish arguments and his own aesthetic aspirations. Echoing the Winfried students and Breisacher, he dreams of liberating music by uniting "the archaic [...] with the revolutionary" (Mann 1968, 184; my translation) so as to return, as the devil puts it, "to the archaic, the primeval, that which long since has not been tried" (Mann 1968, 230). But a closer look at Leverkühn's aesthetic education reveals that the scene with the devil marks the end of his volkish investment in organic wholeness. This scene signals Leverkühn's recognition that he is fated to conclude the break with tonality that his teacher Kretschmar traces to Beethoven's deconstruction of the traditional sonata form. What manifested itself as a temporary crisis in Beethoven's case becomes a permanent condition for Leverkühn. Where Beethoven was still able to revitalize music by inventing the shockingly dissonant "diminished seventh" (Mann 1968, 232), Leverkühn finds that all the resources of tonal music have degenerated into clichés or parodies. Unlike the novel's proto-fascist intellectuals, the composer knows that there is no nostalgic return to organic unity. In a highly significant moment, the devil tells him that "the masterpiece, the self-sufficient form, belongs to traditional art, emancipated art rejects it" (Mann 1968, 232). Far from affirming the volkish arguments of Deutschlin and Breisacher, the devil in fact confirms Kretschmar's deconstruction of tonal music in his lectures on Beethoven.

Kretschmar's Beethoven lectures show Leverkühn that volkish attempts to recover organic wholeness fail to recognize that the current sociohistorical conditions prevent this nostalgic return. "Borrowed" from Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Kretschmar's lectures reveal that tonal music had in effect reached its culmination, and hence its limits, in Beethoven's second or heroic phase. His later composition, piano sonata opus 111, already carries early signs of the process of self-deconstruction that will find its final articulation in Leverkühn's breakthrough into atonality. Incorporating Adorno's socio-historical reading of music, Mann implies that Beethoven's heroic phase corresponds to the triumphant moment when capitalism was able to throw off the constraints of feudal oppression. Calling Beethoven a "musical Hegel," Adorno sees reflected in Beethoven's great symphonies the high point of capitalism in its most dynamic historical moment. The Enlightenment dream of the individual subject organically coinciding with the social collective seemed on the verge of realization. The Hegelian sublation did not mean that subject and object would merge or subsume each other; on the contrary, achieving a dynamic tension, each term of the opposition would maintain its identity. In other words, the subject was free because it acknowledged its coincidence with the object. In Adorno's analysis of Beethoven, tonal music aspired to a similar dynamic tension between individual notes and the constraints of the key system. Since in the tonal key system each note received its

expressive value from its place in a harmoniously arranged whole, the compositions of Beethoven's heroic phase approximate this organic ideal.

In piano sonata opus 111, though, this organic connection between subjective expression and objective constraint started to disintegrate. According to Adorno, tonal music entered into crisis because it was no longer able to express the alienating social conditions under capitalism. The organic wholeness of tonal music is now at best a compensatory gesture that conceals the social antagonisms in bourgeois culture. Kretschmar's lectures demystify the illusory self-understanding of tonal music as an organically constituted harmonious whole. In my reading of Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough, then, his atonal experiments deconstruct rather than nostalgically reinforce the neo-Romantic investment in organicism that characterizes both Mann's fictional intellectuals and their proto-fascist historical models. Contradicting the orthodox view that Beethoven's late music constitutes the triumph of subjective freedom over objective oppression, Kretschmar argues that the subject is not free but alienated from the objective world. Instead of enjoying its autonomy, the subject feels abandoned and thus yearns for reintegration into some kind of totality. The sinister aspect of Leverkühn's aesthetic aspirations is not proto-fascist neo-Romanticism but the desire for a new totalizing system.

The key-centered tonal system is for Leverkühn both too rigidly hierarchical and insufficiently binding on that have grown too static and sterile to allow for authentic expression. At the same time, music has become too subjective, threatening to descend into anarchy and chaos. In other words, the stagnant subject has withdrawn into self-indulgent contemplation while the key system imposes sterile limits on subjective expression. Leverkühn's task is to free the note from its subordination to the key system while also curbing its anarchic tendencies towards subjective willfulness. In a first move, then, the composer seeks to liberate music by inventing what Adorno calls "free atonality." This phase in Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough is marked by a genuine emancipatory potential. As Witkin points out, the "avant-garde 'free atonality' of the years around 1910, the period of [Schönberg's] Erwartung, remained the mode of musical construction to which Adorno himself was musically committed throughout his life" (Witkin 1998, 133). This commitment is not surprising in view of the fact that Adorno studied under Alban Berg and used free atonality in some of his own compositions. In "free atonal music each work creates afresh the compositional context" (Witkin 1998, 122) rather than accepting a predetermined system as in Schönberg's later twelve-tone technique. "It is this ideal of a free 'musique informelle," explains Witkin, "in which order is realised spontaneously and expressively from below in response to the living context, which Adorno sets up as one pole of an antinomy, the other being that of an absolute subject-alien totalitarian administrative order" (Witkin 1998, 122). Around 1910, then, the "possibility of creating a genuinely free and spontaneous music" (Witkin 1998, 133) still existed, a potential later shut down by the development of strict serial music. Liberating music from the limitations of "octave registrations," atonality opened up "the total rhythmic configuration" (Adorno 1973, 63) and elevated orchestral color and timbre to

organizational principles. In his analysis of Schönberg's music, Carl Schorske comments that the "emancipation of dissonance has done more here than destroy harmonic order and cadential certainty. By establishing a democracy of tones, it has vastly enlarged *all* the expressive possibilities, thematic and rhythmic as well as coloristic and tonal" (Schorske 1981, 351). The progressive, emancipatory aspirations of atonality should not be underestimated. No longer assigned a specific place in an oppressive hierarchy, each musical note or element enjoys the same status, functions on the same level, exists side by side with all other elements. Where the tonal system "was a musical frame in which tones had *un*equal power to express, to validate, and to make bearable the life of man under a rationally organized hierarchical culture" (Schorske 1981, 346), free atonal music could be said to define the democratic ideal of equality.

But, as Mann learns from Adorno's history of music, the emancipatory potential of "free atonality" already contains the seeds of the "totalitarian" order of the twelve-tone system. Paralleling the way fear of anarchy justified the suppression of freedoms in German politics, Leverkühn's flight from tonality initiated a radical form of relativism whose anarchic potential the twelve-tone row was called upon to curtail. In terms of Germany's history, free atonality could be said to correspond to the promise of the country's process of democratization. In his attempt to match episodes in the novel with historical events, Ritschie Robertson in effect shows that Leverkühn's completion of the atonal Apocalypsis cum figuris in August 1919 corresponds to the moment when Weimar Parliament "approved the constitution of the Weimar Republic" (Robertson 1993, 143). Free atonality is then representative of the historical moment when Germany fully embraces democracy by throwing off the last vestiges of feudalism. However, if democratic aspirations find their expression in a composition with the ominous title of Apocalypsis cum figuris, then the emancipatory moment of free atonality must already be infected by the tropes poised to doom both Leverkühn and Germany. While Leverkühn endorses a Nietzschean affirmation of radical relativism and rejects normative values in the interest of emancipated music, Zeitblom is from the start frightened by the risk of anarchy implicit in the dissemination of meaning opened up by the radical relativism of free atonality. In the end, even Leverkühn himself retreats from the radical freedom enjoyed by the note in free atonality. Freeing the note from its tonal constraints threatens to open up a capricious subjectivism he rejects as sentimental romanticism. Zeitblom draws attention to this disdain for the subjective through his friend's reaction to the music of Johann Conrad Beissel, the idiosyncratic composer who had escaped from Germany to join a Pietistic community in Pennsylvania. Where proto-fascist intellectuals advocate a warm fusion between individual and Volk, Leverkühn is more impressed by Beissel's fascination with order than by his yearning for lost authenticity. Although he appreciates this eccentric composer's ability to blend religious passion with a return to a simple system of notation, he is even more taken by a compositional strategy that is simultaneously relativistic and totalizing. Instead of establishing a "fixed relation between the values of the notes" (Mann 1968, 67), Beissel invents scales that differentiate between "master" and "servant" notes within an absolute order. Where Zeitblom refuses to take seriously the "dogmatic arrangement" and

"childish rationalism" of this "backwoods dictator" (Mann 1968, 69), Leverkühn admires his "sense of order" because "a silly order is better than none at all" (Mann 1968, 69). What attracts Leverkühn is not so much Beissel's endorsement of authoritarianism as his attack on subjectivism in music, his "ascetic cooling off" (Mann 1968, 70) of the "cow warmth" (Mann 1968, 69) or the sentimental humanism of Zeitblom.

The danger Leverkühn perceives in the excessive subjectivism opened up by free atonality is that unfettered self-expression will encourage uncontrollable combinations of tones or, in political terms, the specter of anarchy. For him the problem of the tonal tradition lies in the constant struggle for domination of "various elements — melody, harmony, counterpoint, form, and instrumenta-tion" (Mann 1997, 204), which have developed independently of each other, in a historically accidental manner. His solution is to end disputes among squabbling forms by making them all radically equal. The hierarchical model of tonality is to be replaced with "the idea of a rational total organization of all musical material [...], one that would clear away anachronistic incongruities and prevent one element from being the mere function of another, the way melody became a function of harmony in the Romantic period. It would be a matter of developing all dimensions simultaneously and of generating them separately so that they then converge" (Mann 1997, 205). In the twelve-tone system, this convergence will become so total that it will mock both Beethoven's Hegelian ideal of organic harmony and the democratic ideal of the Weimar Republic.

Mann's Adorno-inspired description of Leverkühn's aesthetic breakthrough makes it clear that the totalizing twelve-tone system is the unintended consequence of the composer's desire for an egalitarian system. In his attempt to recuperate polyphony as a site of emancipation from harmony, Leverkühn stretches and intensifies the properties of counterpoint until he produces a rigorously rational effect he had not intended. Mann once again relies on Adorno who argues that Schönberg both emancipated and eliminated counterpoint: "However, it is questionable as to whether twelve-tone technique — to the extent that it carries the contrapuntal idea of integration to an absolute — does actually abolish the principle of counterpoint by means of its own totality" (Adorno 1973, 94-95). Adorno was in fact particularly sensitive to the dangerous implications of Schönberg's dismantling of the key system. In the process of trying to "eliminate all such hierarchical means of ordering the new music" (Witkin 1998, 134), Schönberg created a system which was for Adorno "questionable as an ideal" (Adorno 1973, 96) because the drive towards the total integration of all elements struck him not only as totalitarian in fascist terms but also as complicit with the destruction of meaningful social relations under the reifying impact of late capitalism. To put this another way, in an effort to escape tonal constraints, Leverkühn privileges the principle of variation until it destroys the norms against which variation is perceived as meaningful.

The totalization described in both *Doctor Faustus* and *Philosophy of Modern Music* is marked by a significantly different logic from the one characterizing the centered hierarchical totality of bourgeois music and social organization. According to organic concepts of form, each part contributes to the whole and is in turn completed by it. In contrast, the form of serial compositions is representative of the mechanical aggregation of

disconnected parts within an indifferent totality. What Mann conveys through Leverkühn's breakthrough is that his decentering of tonal music "liberates" atomistic elements only to subject them to a more rigorously deterministic totality. As Adorno recognizes, the totally organized system of twelve-tone music functions as a "violent synthesis" of all musical elements which aims to restrain "all coincidental moments of music" (Adorno 1973, 57). Through the uncanny combination of total integration and unchecked dissemination, the twelve-tone row is said to abandon its elements to fate. In Leverkühn's serial music, the notes are so disconnected from each other and from the totality that the formation of accords is now "left to chance and accident" (Mann 1968, 188). It is precisely because the totality binds all musical elements to itself that these are "free" to converge in accidental, contingent, and unpredictable ways. By incorporating and appropriating all counter-hegemonic strategies, this chaotic totality neutralizes the kind of resistance still possible in bourgeois ideology. Once all variation has become relegated to mere coincidence, it is no longer possible to speak meaningfully of transgression and resistance. Having escaped the blind domination of the tonal system, the atomistic note (or the social subject) is driven to deny "its own spontaneity" and to seek "protection and security" in a "regulatory system" which Adorno calls "a second blind nature" (Adorno 1973, 68). The dream of Hegelian idealism in Beethoven's tonal music, to achieve the "identity of the most varied forms" (Mann 1968, 468), has fatally and catastrophically come true in Leverkühn's "formal treatment strict to the last degree, which no longer knows anything unthematic, in which the order of the basic material becomes total, and within which the idea of a fugue rather declines into an absurdity, just because there is no longer any free note" (Mann 1968, 468). In Leverkühn's masterpiece, "The Lament of Doctor Fausti," whose "general theme of the variations" (Mann 1968, 467) consists of the twelve syllables of the lyric "[f]or I die as a good and a bad Christian" (Mann 1968, 467), technical sophistication can only express the most elemental "howling" of the suffering human creature.

## Conclusion: The Magic Square

Allusions to Weber in the Halle episode thus point to Mann's recognition that fascism was at some level the unintended consequence of an investment in the ideals of liberal humanism. It follows that the "bad" Germany did not take the place of the "good" Germany but that the "bad" had always already been implicit in the "good" Germany. In *Doctor Faustus*, Mann shows dramatically that fascism can be seen as the country's tragic fate on the level of politics, aesthetics, and philosophy. As I have tried to show, atonality (or democracy) grows out of the crisis of tonality (feudalism) and becomes the precondition for the twelve-tone system (fascism). Free atonality (or the Weimar Republic) is thus the dialectical moment whose emancipatory possibilities are already inhabited by the totalizing tendencies of the twelve-tone row (fascism). The dialectical process narrated in *Doctor Faustus* hints at the ironic recognition that the challenge to hierarchy as a principle of oppression in both music and politics logically generates not freedom but an intensified form of domination. Liberating music from the hierarchical constraints of

tonality and politics from the equally hierarchical organization of feudalism, Leverkühn created the apparently chaotic conditions of cacophony in music and German liberals produced disorder in the streets and disorganization in Parliament. Equating freedom with anarchy, Leverkühn was ultimately to embrace the rigorous organization of the twelve-tone row to constrain free atonality, just as Hitler was to justify his recourse to repressive totalitarian measures by pretending to combat the very anarchy that he himself was only too willing to exploit and had in fact often instigated. It follows that Mann understood that German Nazism was not an aberration from modernity but a possibility always already implicit in the noblest cultural ideals. The symbol of the paradoxical interdependence of mystical irrationalism and mathematical reason is, of course, the magic square in Albrecht Dürers famous painting "Melancolia," which Leverkühn displays in his study in Halle and which was to accompany him throughout his life. The magic square consists of sixteen numbered fields, with the number one situated in the lower right-hand corner and the number sixteen in the upper left-hand corner. The magic or curiosity "consisted in the fact that the sum of these numerals, however you added them, straight down, crosswise, or diagonally, always came to thirty-four" (Mann 1968, 92). Although this puzzle is based on the completely rational logic of mathematics, the result, nevertheless, strikes Zeitblom as inexplicable: "What the principle was upon which this magic uniformity rested I never made out" (Mann 1968, 92). In a highly paradoxical fashion, this excessively rational system is at the same time excessively irrational. As it manifests itself in Mann's novel, the logic of Weber's unintended consequences is both open to rational explanation and ultimately escapes it. From a retrospective position, Hitler's rise to power seemed to follow an inexorably logical necessity. Yet the unique combination of historically specific factors seems so contingent that a "whiff" of the inexplicable stubbornly clings to all rational explanations. What Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism captures above all is a recognition that the relationship between causes and effects is often incommensurate.

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