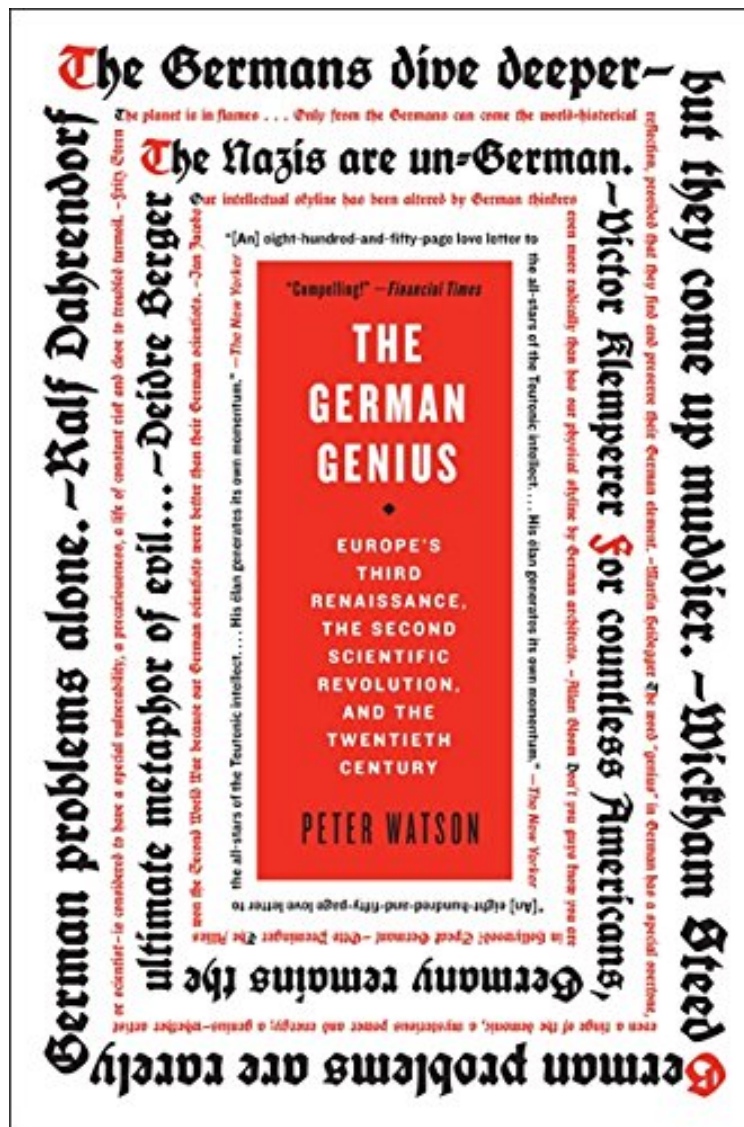


The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century

Peter Watson

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#119797 in Books Peter Watson 2011-07-26 2011-07-26 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x 1.98 x 6.00l, 2.50 #File Name: 0060760230992 pages The German Genius Europe s Third Renaissance the Second Scientific Revolution and the Twentieth Century | File size: 68.Mb

Peter Watson : The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating look at the evolution of German and Western culture in the 19th and 20th Centuries
By Michael Van Hilst
This book is about culture, where it comes from, what it is, and how it evolves. The author takes pains to avoid discussing the sorts of historical, military, and political events found in other history books and instead focuses on the thinkers, writers, educators, and artists who were influential at the time. While the book is about Germany, the American system of education copied the one created in Prussia in the Nineteenth century, especially the university system, and many of the great thinkers in Germany crossed the Atlantic and influenced American intellectual culture as well, especially in the mid Twentieth century. Many, if not most, of the individuals discussed will already be familiar to the reader. Only now you will see them in their context, with many new insights revealed. I couldn't put this book down. Every chapter contains interesting new facts and insights. Whether you are interested in physics, philosophy, education, music, religion, art, literature or history this book has a treasure trove of information. Peter Watson has assembled a remarkable amount of research to put this book together. A story about Germany cannot help but be a story about Hitler and the Third Reich. To be anything else would be criticized as a white wash. While the author tries to show that Germany is much more than that, the book still largely focuses on a culture moving toward Hitler before 1940, and coming to terms with those terrible events afterwards. While the book describes what was, I would have liked to see a bit more discussion of what could have been. German culture took distinct turns with Napoleon's victory at Jena, the uprisings in 1848 and 1871, and of course the two world wars. Kaiser Wilhelm, Bismark, and Hitler all took specific measures to suppress certain ideals and ways of thinking. The book talks about how some ideas survived, for example when the government controlled museum shows and theatre performances. But not as much was said about what was lost. In particular, I was hoping to see more discussion of the role of government control over University appointments, for example by replacing the young Hegelians and their Idealist form of skepticism with Positivists (discussed in Marcuse's Reason and Revolution).
11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Stunning in its breath and scope
By John E. Drury
Irony struggles with world history in this recent Financial Times headline "Germany told to act to save Europe." Times have changed since 1945. We missed something along the way in all our readings and movies. Convenient villains for so long, the Germans are now asked to play savior. It is time to pull aside the historical blinders of World War Two, its atrocities and aftermath and open our eyes to Germany's contributions to science, philosophy, music, modern thought and their effect on our twenty first centuries sensibilities. Peter Watson's massive survey book reacquaints the reader, if "reacquainting" is the right verb, to the Germanic phenomenon with his deep research and cultural sensitivity without leaving unaddressed the twelve years of Nazi rule. Reading it is a sumptuous feast on Germanic erudition, philosophical thought and achievement by an author with a keen eye for detail and a gift for synthesis. To paraphrase Philip Larkin, this is a serious book on serious ground; not to be consumed in one or two sittings; its complexities and intricacies are many, inviting the reader to carefully ponder the roots of Western philosophical thought, the wellsprings of nineteenth century symphonic music (mostly Germanic), the scope of Western artistic achievement, the nature of politics and political dialogue in our modern society and the engines of science in the past two hundred years. Watson plies his deep knowledge of the German character in his concluding chapter with five traits of German culture worthy of thoughtful consideration; an educated middle class inhabiting the world of scholarship (and by scholarship, he includes research), the arts (music, film, stage and literature), science, the legal, medical, and religious professions based not on the acquisition of knowledge but "as a process of character development;" a personal reflective character "inwardness" leading one to observe "new structures of our minds;" the German concept of "Bildung," being the primary achievement of the central driving force of inwardness, resulting in a harmonization of research with scholarship leading as " a defining phenomenon of modernity;" and a redemptive community "sustaining a moral community in the face of rampant individualism." These are thought provoking concepts for a people as controversial - and consequential - as the Germans have been for the last century. Watson offers a fascinating take on the cultural pessimism of German middle class society post World War One and its relationship to Hannah Arendt's theory of "a temporary alliance between the educated elite and the mob" leading to a "constant murderous arbitrariness." This is a view one might not readily read about. This wide ranging examination of German culture invites the American reader to contrast our American culture with German culture. Writers like Thomas Mann and other emigres to this country shine a caustic light on our culture; in Mann's words, he commented on "the American tendency to oversimplify . . . the 'barbarous infantilism' of American life." This is not intended to provoke but to evaluate our culture and how the German literary elite saw us over time. It deserves our attention. As I write this, the Wall Street Journal leads with a commentary by one of their business writers about the importance of the present day decisions of Angela Merkel on the 2012 elections prospects in this country. It is about time German society and culture is examined more carefully than it has been in the past. Peter Watson's book is a good starting point.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Germany's Contribution to Our Culture -- Enlightening
By Anne Mills
This is an extraordinary book, from which I learned a lot in an area where I knew very little -- the German contribution to the cultural and intellectual patterns of our own society. It leaves me wanting to learn more. For that I'm very grateful. This isn't to say the book is without flaws. First, The German Genius is more encyclopedic, and less analytic, than I would have liked its long on lists, but short on connections. Second, it is (perhaps in consequence) a

very long, very ponderous read. Its well worth reading, but in recommending to friends I shall warn them that they are undertaking a Project Watson, as he notes, wrote the book because of the profound ignorance among most Brits about German history, except for the German history of the Hitler era an ignorance certainly shared by most Americans. If that ignorance was occasionally reduced perhaps by a lecture on the German inflation, or on the late emergence of the German state -- the reason for doing so was basically to find out what caused Hitler. This may have been largely unavoidable in the second half of the 20th century. Hitler was hard to look around, and other German history did not seem very relevant to Anglo American culture in which English speakers operate. Since English speakers tend to assume that Anglo American culture has now become world culture, this implied that German history really didn't matter except, of course, for the question of Hitler. But German history for hundreds of years, not just from 1933 to 1945 -- is highly relevant to today's culture. Watson shows this by focussing not on political history, but on cultural history, and it is here that the German contribution is astonishing. Germany did not have one political history until 1870, but it had a cultural history that, Watson would argue, is in many ways the basis of modernity. He goes through intellectual area after intellectual area philosophy, mathematics, sociology, psychology, physics, chemistry, etc. etc. etc and shows how Germans dominated their development in the 19th and early 20th century. He also looks at the arts; Germans dominated music, of course, but had a much wider impact on literature and the visual arts than I had realized. The German influence goes beyond what we think, to weigh on how we think. Philosophy is of course an example, but there is a much less obvious and more concrete one. Watson shows how the research-based university developed in Germany, forming a model for the American academic system. This approach required young scholars to develop new knowledge, rather than simply passing on what was already known. It has, Watson argues, a great deal to do with the explosion of knowledge in the past 150 years. At the end of the book, Watson does look at the question of what caused Hitler: he presents some compelling suggestions, though not a definitive answer as he is the first to emphasize. But, the importance of this book isn't in what it tells us about Hitler, but in what it tells us about the rest of Germany's impact on our world.

The German Genius is a virtuoso cultural history of German ideas and influence, from 1750 to the present day, by acclaimed historian Peter Watson (Making of the Modern Mind, Ideas). From Bach, Goethe, and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, Freud, and Einstein, from the arts and humanities to science and philosophy, The German Genius is a lively and accessible review of over 250 years of German intellectual history. In the process, it explains the devastating effects of World War II, which transformed a vibrant and brilliantly artistic culture into a vehicle of warfare and destruction, and it shows how the German culture advanced in the war's aftermath.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . We are shamefully ignorant of German culture, asserts veteran British historian Watson (The Modern Mind) in this engrossing, vast chronicle of ideas, humanists, scientists, and artists: Bach, Goethe, Hegel, Gauss, and many more. Stirred by the French Revolution, German nationalism exploded. The same era in Germany produced the modern university in which professors are expected to discover, not just teach, knowledge, and students learn to reason, not just memorize and new forms of scholarship. There followed a cultural renaissance as important as Italy's earlier one. Science flourished, stimulated by new university-based laboratories. Modern medicine started as German medicine (bacteriology began with Robert Koch). From Bach to Schoenberg, music became overwhelmingly German. Kant, Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, and others dominated Western intellectual life. An ominous byproduct, though, was a growing, pugnacious sense of national superiority. This led to trouble, but until Hitler wrecked everything after 1933, Germans won more Nobel prizes than Britain and America combined. English now dominates the arts and sciences, but Watson writes an absorbing account of a time not so long ago when German ruled. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist * Starred * As shown in The Modern Mind (2001) and Ideas (2006), Watson has an abiding interest in showing how certain Big Ideas have defined the trajectory of history and a gift for accessibly presenting the vast and varied material required to substantiate such claims. Both qualities are amply displayed in his latest work, a panoramic review of German cultural and intellectual development from 1750 to the present. Examining the contributions of literally hundreds of German thinkers and doers and mapping the conceptual connections between them, the author demonstrates the breadth, volume, and influence of German output in philosophy, science, industry, art, literature, and all forms of scholarly activity. But Watson's true focus is the cultural crucible, forged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and informed by notions of Bildung and inwardness, that gave rise to such accomplishments but also set the stage for the evil actions of the Third Reich. To some extent an effort to untether our understanding of German history from the conflicts of the twentieth century, this study is also a reminder that our modern Western worldview has deep German roots. The U.S. and Great Britain, says Watson, may speak English but, more than they know, they think German. Comprehensive, erudite, ausgezeichnet. --Brendan Driscoll A compilation of essential German contributions to philosophy, theology, mathematics, natural and social science and the arts since 1750. Watson enshrines a vast pantheon of creative thinkers... [including] compressed summaries of some exceedingly difficult ideas. The range of subjects is impressive, from painters to physicists. (New York Times Book) [The German Genius is] Watson's eight-

hundred-and-fifty-page love letter to the all-stars of the Teutonic intellect this lan generates its own momentum The books breadth is part of the point. (The New Yorker)[An] engrossing, vast chronicle. . . . English now dominates the arts and sciences, but Watson writes an absorbing account of a time not so long ago when German ruled. (Publishers Weekly (starred review))Reveals several surprises. . . . A remarkable book on many levels. The research is first-rate and it is surprisingly accessible. (Tucson Citizen)A tour de force. . . . It is impossible not to be impressed by his range and versatility as he bounds across the disciplines. . . . This intelligent book presents a breathtaking panorama. (Sunday Times (London))[A] colossal encyclopaedia. . . . Heroic. . . . Watson derives the German genius from deep springs. (The Guardian)Watsons book is intended to subvert the negative German stereotypes. Though it checks in at just short of 1,000 pages, it is a usefully concise introduction to the principal themes and personalities of German scientific, philosophical, social, literary and artistic culture since 1750. (The Times (London))Few wasted words a welcome resource for students of modern history, literature and cultural studies. (Kirkus s)Watson tells how the Nazis first artistic blacklist appeared just six weeks after Hitler assumed power in 1933 - and how his catastrophic handling of his intellectual inheritance has unfairly overshadowed the country ever since. This exhaustive and virtuoso sweep through history goes some way to restoring the balance. (Press Association)The German Genius present a huge corpus of scholarship in easily digestible form, and its range is astonishing. No professor, least of all a German one, would have dared to essay such a synthesis; so much the worse for the professors. (Standpoint)He has an enviable gift of explaining lucidly and cogently ideas that are complicated or profound (or both). . . . Everyone interested in the sufferings and greatness of modern culture will be informed, entertained and provoked by it. (Literary)Assembles such a wealth of information, based on an impressive range of sources, that The German Genius will be an essential work...for years to come. (The Independent)Watsons story is vibrating with life. It is unputdownable. It contains a lot one didnt know. So much enlightenment and so much that moves. (Frankfurter Rundschau)A joy, for its ambition, its seriousness and its moral integrity. (The Scotsman)A powerful and vivid opus. . . . Watsons story is brimming with life. You can barely put the book aside. (Berliner Zeitung.)Few wasted words-a welcome resource for students of modern history, literature and cultural studies. (Kirkus s)