

Thomas Mann and the German Critique of the Enlightenment (Mann and the Enlightenment)

Christopher Vasillopoulos*

Eastern Connecticut State University, Department of History, Philosophy, and Political Science

Abstract

Mann premises his criticism of the Enlightenment on his conviction that it is an essentially Roman, Latin and French set of ideas, which not only differ from German conceptions but are anti-German. As the descendant of Imperial Rome, the Papal Monarchy, France and the French Revolution, the Enlightenment is a civilization, not a culture. Comprised of individuals, not personalities, the Enlightenment expresses its values in literature, not music, and is therefore shallow. Following Nietzsche, Mann's remedy is to become as Greek as possible, although only in the artistic, not the political sense. Following Dostoevsky, Mann emphasizes Germany's protestant role in Europe, the antagonist of the 'entente of civilization.

Keywords

Personality, Individual, Culture, Civilization, Literary.

* vasillopulos@easternct.edu

The whole tendency of the Germans ran counter to the Enlightenment and to the revolution of society, which, by a crude misunderstanding, was considered its consequence: piety toward everything still in existence sought to transform itself into piety toward everything that has ever existed, only to make heart and spirit full once again and to leave no room for future goals and innovation. The cult of feeling was erected in place of the cult of reason.

Nietzsche¹

During the grim years of World War One, Thomas Mann wrote *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, a complex, profound and troubling work which is perhaps the best analysis of enduring German values (Mann 1983 [1918]). Moreover, understanding *Reflections* contributes to understanding why National Socialism had so deep and broad an appeal among the educated classes in Germany. This point is all the more salient because *Reflections* is not in the tradition of Lagarde, Moeller, and Langbehn that Fritz Stern so brilliantly dissects in *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (1965). Yet *Reflections* admires Lagarde, a notorious anti-Semite who said, referring to Jews: “You don’t talk about what to do with parasites and bacilli (...) They are as quickly and fully as possible destroyed” (Kershaw 1998, 151). While Mann makes no such statements in *Reflections*, he never disavows Lagarde, whom he quotes frequently. Furthermore, *Reflections* contains many sentences which might seem equally outrageous to those who value the Enlightenment.

Perhaps the biggest question for those of us who are concerned with political and the other social sciences of the twentieth Century has been, “How could the most cultured and best educated European nation follow Hitler into aggressive war and genocide?” Much of the answer to the German Question is embedded in the pages of *Reflections*. Before I begin my analysis of Mann’s ideas, it might be useful to indicate some of my initial and often surprising impressions. The first is Mann’s sustained attack on Rome: Rome as power State and Empire and Rome as Papal Monarchy, the differences between them largely unimportant. When post-Revolutionary France is targeted, not only as a source of chaos, but also as the legatee of Rome, secular and sacerdotal. The occasion for writing *Reflections* is World War One; the reasons for writing it are Rome’s abuse of Germany since the Caesars, its humiliation by Popes since Gregory VII in the eleventh century, and its ostracism by the West since the French Revolution. So deep is Mann’s animosity for the Latin World that he cannot see World War One as a European *civil war*. Not a conflict between European nation-states, the War is Civilization’s attempt to defeat Germany. So far from being a fratricidal war, it should be conceived as a war of the anti-European, imperialist power, ‘Civilization,’ against the sole ‘European’ power, Germany, a conception which by itself jars West European sensibilities. One of the main theses of *Reflections* is that the nationalism, so incarnated in the French, is anti-European. Nor should World War One be seen as a Clash of Civilizations. Germany is culture, not a

¹ Quoted in Fest (1974, 97).

civilization. It is a Mann's implication is that: if Europe, that is, is to survive, as a culture, it must retain its humanitarian values, which are best exemplified by Germans.

My second impression and, perhaps, more surprising, is Mann's attitude toward the Russians, personified by Dostoevsky. Ignoring the age-old European dread of the Asiatic East, Mann quotes the great Russian author repeatedly. Dostoevsky appreciates Germany's role: "Since the first moment of its appearance in the historical world, that it [Germany] has never, neither in its destiny nor in its principles, wanted to be united with the far Western World, that is, with all the heirs of the ancient Roman destiny" (Mann 1983, 26). According to Mann, Dostoevsky shares his view of the unity of the Latin world: "The concept of the Roman universal monarchy was replaced by that of the unification of Christ; whereupon there followed that split of the new ideal into an *eastern* part, which Dostoevsky says is characterized by the ideal of the wholly spiritual unification of mankind, and a *western* European part, which was Roman Catholic, papal. In its western form (...) it preserved the old Roman political-imperial tradition" (Mann 1983, 25, *original emphasis*). Because this unity has always been anti-German, Germany's task has been Protestantism: "not merely that form of Protestantism that developed at the time of Luther, but her *eternal* Protestantism, her *eternal* protest as it began with Arminius against the Roman world, against everything that was Rome and Rome's mission, and later against everything that was transmitted from the old Rome to the new, and to all nations that received the Roman idea, formula, and element, protest against the heirs of Rome and against everything that constitutes this heritage" (quoted in Mann 1983). Dostoevsky's words make Germany's antipathy to Rome very clear: "During the era of Roman Christianity, more than any other nation, she fought with Rome for supremacy. Finally, she protested in the most powerful way by taking the new formula of protest from the most spiritual, most elementary foundations of the Germanic world. The voice of God resounded in her, proclaiming the freedom of the spirit" (quoted in Mann 1983, 26). The conservative protest, exemplified by Luther, against the Latin World's domination of Europe, finds confirmation in the Russian. Mann admires both Orthodox and Protestant resistance to their common enemy: Rome in all its incarnations. Rome has undermined the political, economic, cultural and spiritual security of Russia and Germany and, therefore, of Europe as a whole. This powerful adversary has the support of a fifth column in the form of Russians and Germans, who take sides with the West in the name of progress and freedom.

My third impression concerns the fraternal war that pervades the pages of *Reflections*. Mann pillories his brother, Heinrich, calling him the worst sort of German, a Francophile, the personification of the 'Literary Man,' the arch enemy of all that is German: "A sublime and brilliant but basically Latinized literary man who long ago renounced every feeling for the particular ethos of his people, yes, who even ridicules the recognition of such a special national ethos as bestial nationalism, and who opposes it with his humanitarian-democratic civilization and social internationalism" (Mann 1983, 20). Mann targets, not only writers who are sympathetic with the Enlightened West, but literature itself, because: "In the innate and eternal conviction of Roman civilization, not only humanism [but] humanitarianism in general, human dignity, respect for human beings, and human self-

respect are inextricably bound to literature” (1983, 32). The irony of this charge does not elude the novelist. Without irony, another great writer, Nietzsche made Mann’s point with typical bluntness: “Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common” (Nietzsche 1967, 428).

My last impression is that Mann poured his heart, soul and mind into *Reflections*. Not only are its brilliance, passion and intensity worthy of Mann’s Noble Prize winning novels, *Reflections* deserves to rank with the best books of his generation. By contrast, Mann’s lectures of the 1930s and 1940s, presented to American audiences, are set pieces, dry, predictable, simplistic, and banal. In these lectures, which manifest what he condemns in *Reflections*, Mann does his duty, performing a chore with all the enthusiasm of taking out the trash. In *Reflections* the impassioned, fully engaged Mann illuminates a complex and profound alternative to the Enlightenment.

Let us deepen the analysis. For Mann, not a period of history, the Enlightenment is a collection of ideas, born with the Roman Empire and reaching its apotheosis in the French Revolution, as the unnatural coupling of the power State and Latin nationalism. This coupling has spawned chaos, defined as societies comprised of atomized individuals and superficial materialist values; and what is worse for an artist, mediocrity. When democracy, equality, and the politicization of society become different aspects of the same concept, power for power’s sake, then demagogues, in the name of the people, undermine and need to undermine all values which have proved their worth and their capacity to endure. For these values necessarily limit the exercise of power. “And what are the highest goods of mankind? God, fatherland, emperor, freedom, love and loyalty, beauty, science and art” (Mann 1983, 113). To a Westerner, a child of the Enlightenment, these highest goods, to the degree they are not self-contradictory, indicate what has been wrong with Germany. Where are justice, equality, natural rights, rule of law, democracy, and the people? What do love, beauty, science and art have to do with politics? How can freedom—of all terms, freedom—be squared with fatherland and emperor? And fatherland, why not nation? Perhaps because ‘nation’ suggests the people, while ‘fatherland’ suggests blood and soil. In this constellation of values, including those which the Enlightenment respects, like loyalty, becomes perverse from the German perspective. The Enlightenment values loyalty to principles, of course, but not loyalty to tradition, monarchy, or other human beings. Consider the Enlightenment’s God; acceptable as the Designer, a distant, cool clockmaker, but certainly not the Judge of the Universe, and certainly with no capacity or inclination to limit the power of the people, who are omniscient and omnipotent. After all, as Robespierre said, “the people are just, wise and good. Everything they do is virtuous and true, nothing exaggerated, mistaken or criminal” (Mann 1983, 269).

It seems reasonable to conclude that, whether or not, it is based on a shallow materialism, the Enlightenment lends itself to one-sided and simple-minded views of human perfectibility, to anti-human and anti-humane individualism, whose earmarks are getting and spending, to mispremised and anti-historical optimism, coupled with an unsupported belief that politics could cure the ills and conflicts of mankind and thereby create a pre-Fall garden

of delights. And most troubling of all is the Enlightenment's conviction in the infallibility of the Nation (Mann 1983, 219). Mann prophesies the twentieth century would reprise the eighteenth:

The twentieth century declares the character, the tendencies, the basic mood of the nineteenth century to be discredited, it defames its form of truthfulness, its weakness of will and submissiveness, its melancholy lack of belief. It *believes*—or at least it teaches that one must believe. It tries to forget what one knows of the nature of the human being—in order to adapt him to his utopia. It adores the human being completely in *dix-huitieme* fashion; it is not pessimistic, not skeptical, not cynical and—most of all—not ironical (1983, 14, original emphasis).

To this more or less standard citation of the shortcomings of the Enlightenment, Mann adds complex and less predictable elements, many of which seem absurd to non-Germans and seem to prove that they are not like the West. First, the Enlightenment denies what we know of human nature and the natural world. While Mann does not posit Social Darwinism, he makes it clear that nature is not the Garden of Eden or Rousseau's State of Nature. It is surfeit with human violence, depravity, conflict, war, pestilence, famine and all the other horrors of existence. What makes all this endurable, beyond a blind instinct for life, is the capacity of human beings to draw strength and nobility from suffering and travail. Here Mann echoes Nietzsche's belief that good *Eris*, strife, can be embedded in violence: "Just as the Greek individual fought as though he alone were right and an infinitely sure measure of judicial opinion were determining the trend of victory at any given moment, so the qualities wrestle with one another, in accordance with inviolable laws and standards that are imminent in the struggle" (Nietzsche 2006 [1873], 108-9). Therefore, the Enlightenment's portrait of nature is not only wrong; it diminishes human existence by postulating away the possibilities of human nobility.

Second, the Enlightenment denies the metaphysical nature of human beings. By defining humans as social animals who can distinguish themselves by individual achievement, the Enlightenment consigns human beings to the trough of society. "I am what I consume," "I am my social position," "I am my political office," "I am my fame," and so on. This conception of individualism is profoundly flawed and, in the final analysis, self-contradictory. Mann quotes Hammacher with approval: "Nietzsche's greatest service is the *separation of metaphysical from social life* (...) He rediscovered the insight that individualism is a mistake and that superindividuality is still realized through personality itself and only through it; for him, social individuality, society, is relatively unimportant and inferior to metaphysical superindividuality" (Mann 1983, 151, original emphasis). Only by transcending social existence can humans become true to themselves, as personalities, as superindividuals. Transcending social existence does not mean denial of nature. To the contrary, the Enlightenment denies nature by elevating societal existence. In Nietzsche and Mann, a personality comes into being by embracing nature and all its life-giving potential, by perfecting him or herself in the face of all the suffering living to the

full entails. The resonance with Dostoevsky is striking, as Mann's appreciation of Dimitri Karamazov makes clear:

This infamy is not egotistical; in every other sense than the civic one, it is anything but vulgar. It is a sacrifice, a casting away, a self-debasement, a relentless, fanatic, and humiliating devotion that not only is not without generosity, but is rather itself a dirty and bloody form of generosity. To the pure person—but I should rather say: to the clean one—the sight of infamy may awaken disgust, but not without at the same time inspiring him with a certain awe and teaching him presentiments of a mystical morality (1983, 141).

Not being paradoxical, Mann argues that life presents opportunities for transcendence, for mystical morality, in nearly every moment, including the infamous and the depraved. Is this not why an authentic bad person is easier to admire than a politician who makes his or her way by always going with the wind, always securing approval, always calculating benefits and costs, and who believes in nothing? Mann condemns politics, not for its inevitable corruption, but for being empty.

Third, the Enlightenment is anti-intellectual. Here, it seems that Mann contradicts himself. First, he quotes Nietzsche with approval: "Nietzsche (...) signified: the self-denial of intellect in favor of life, of strong and especially beautiful life. This is undoubtedly a most extreme and final escape from the domination of ideals, a submission to power that was by now no longer fatalistic but enthusiastic, erotically intoxicated" (Mann 1983, 16). Then, he writes: "The difference between intellect 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" (1983, 17, original emphasis). In the first quotation, intellect is negative, because it denies life. In the second it is positive, because it is antithetical to politics. Mann is *not* saying that when compared to life, intellect is unimportant, but when compared to politics, it is important. He uses 'intellect' to refer to two entirely different processes. The first indicates the use of intellectual capabilities like a machine, that is, *divorced* from culture, society, freedom, and art. The second process, on the other hand, indicates a mental activity that is interpenetrated with these values. The Enlightenment sees intellect as subordinate to society, civilization and politics. Intellect is part of the policy process; and therefore a tool for Everyman to shape society at will, impervious to doubt: "Every Frenchman considers himself capable of overcoming all difficulties with a little spirit. Never did so many people imagine they were all lawmakers, and their task was to correct all the mistakes of the past, to remove all delusions of the human mind, to insure the happiness of coming generations. There was no room in their minds for doubt" (Mann 1983, 219). Much of the shallowness of the Enlightenment derives from this misuse of intellect as the process of creating an illusion of certainty in matters of the utmost complexity and profundity which defy rational or scientific analysis. For Mann, intellect is moral, spiritual, metaphysical as well as physical: "This solidarity [of intellectuals] is organic, it is constitutional. It rests on the homogeneity of the form of existence, on a higher, more tender, form of existence

that is more capable of suffering, more willing to suffer, more foreign to comfort than the ordinary one. It is comradeship in nobility, brotherliness in pain. *Here* is the source of all tolerance, conscientiousness, all courtesy of the heart and gallantry, in short, of all *morality* of the intellect (Mann 1983, 234, original emphasis)

Fourth, the Enlightenment collapses the concepts of civilization, politics, democracy, and equality, making it impossible to consider one without meaning them all: “Civilization is politics through and through, politics itself, and its hatred too, can only be, and must immediately be, political. The political spirit as democratic enlightenment and humanitarian civilization is not only psychologically anti-German; it is also by necessity politically anti-German” (1983, 18). The effect of this collapse of concepts is not limited to an inability to understand Germans; it is intended to destroy them: “Our good natured, non-political humanity has always led us to think that understanding, friendship, peace and good relations were possible, and we would never have allowed ourselves to dream, we had to learn for the first time in the war with shock and horror, how much *they* hated *us* (and not we them!) all this time” (1983, 21, original emphasis). Note the asymmetry of the relationship. The German *cannot* hate, while the civilized Westerner *must* hate, because, unlike the German, the Westerner expresses his or her individuality in the Power State, first as a bourgeois then as an imperialist: “But he [the German] will never become a state philistine, a Reich philistine. He will never come to believe that the state is the purpose and meaning of human existence, that the destiny of the human being is found in the state and that *politics makes people more human* (...) The German burgher was really the German human being; and everything that strove for freedom and intellectuality, both from above and below, strove toward his center” (1983, 97, original emphasis). The asymmetry derives from the fact that the German is a complete human being: “The human being is not only a social but also a metaphysical being; in other words, he is not only an individual but also a personality (...). The nation, too, is not only a social but a metaphysical being; the nation, not the human race as the sum of the individuals, is the bearer of the general, of the human quality; and the value of the intellectual-artistic-religious product that one calls national culture, that cannot be grasped by scientific methods, that develops out of the organic depth of national life” (1983, 179).

For these reasons, Germans have been assaulted for their self-perceived virtues: profundity and their true understanding of what it means to be a free, cultured personality. Their role has been determined by the antipathy of the Roman world:

Dostoyevsky’s formulation of the German character, of German primeval individuality, of what is eternally German, contains the whole basis and explanation of the lonely German position between East and West, of Germany’s offensiveness to the world, of the antipathy, the hatred she must endure and defend herself against—in bewilderment and pain at this universal hatred that she does not understand because she knows little about herself and has not developed very far at all in all matters of psychological understanding—the basis and explanation also of her enormous *courage* that she has unflinchingly displayed to the surrounding world (Mann 1983, 31, original emphasis)

Therefore, Mann writes, [Germany's] 'eternal and innate mission' [has been to engage in a] 'terrible, perilous, and in the most magnificent sense, irrational struggle against the world *entente* of civilization (1983, 34, original emphasis).

To appreciate how Mann arrives at this portrait of the Enlightenment and Germany's sacred duty to defy it, it is necessary to make clear the cardinal distinctions he makes between words often used as synonyms. Mann's usage is much too complex and nuanced for me to assign clear definitions to the concepts his analysis employs. Far from apologizing for this inability to be precise, Mann repeatedly makes the point that precision cannot be achieved without engaging in the very reductionism that marks Enlightenment thinkers. Although the kind of linear chain of reasoning, which so identifies the Enlightenment, is not found in *Reflections*, Mann's work can be read as a coherent alternative to the Enlightenment. A discussion of some of his cardinal distinctions fulfills this claim in some measure. (1) Civilization and culture: we have already seen how negatively Mann treats the idea of civilization and how little it has to do with culture. Civilization, including its association with humanitarianism, is the enemy of culture, because it signifies the superiority of the social to the metaphysical and spiritual and of the political and the individual to the personality and the true community. "Culture binds together; civilization dissolves. This is obvious" (1983, 123). (2) Bourgeois and burgher: personality *and* the true community are what he means by 'burgher.' A burgher, unlike a bourgeois, is capable of being a complete human being because he or she "never elevates social problems above moral ones, above inner experience" (1983, 20). Mann suggests that only Germans could be burghers: "The German burgher is really the German human being; and everything that strove for freedom and intellectuality, both from above and below, strove toward his center" (1983, 97). (3) Individual and personality: As we have already discussed this contrast, here I need underline that the individual is immersed in the material and the political. "Politics is the sphere of the democratic individual, not of the aristocratic personality" (1983, 184). The personality, by contrast, "knows that politics, namely enlightenment, social contract, republic, progress toward the greatest good for the greatest number, is no way to reconcile social life; that this reconciliation can be achieved only in the sphere of personality, never in that of the individual, only on a spiritual path, that is never on a political one, and that it is insane to want to raise social life even the slightest bit toward religious consecration" (1983, 185).

Mann dichotomizes other pairs of concepts which, while not synonyms, often seem to have family resemblances, for example, literature and music. Although it is normal to treat music and literature as two art forms, two expressions of culture, Mann believes this practice is misleading, because literature is part of civilization *etc.*, while music is part of culture. Mann approvingly quotes Luther, "I have always loved music; it is a beautiful, affectionate gift of God and close to theology" (1983, 232). He says, moreover, that "Wagner is so powerfully German that to me it has always seemed one absolutely had to passionately experience his work if one were to understand, or at least to divine, something of the deep magnificence and painful ambivalence of the German character." and further, "In itself alone, Wagner's art would be this portrait of the German character" (1983, 53). Mann is fully aware that his novels, no matter how German they are in character, no matter

how critical of the Literary Man, contribute to civilization and thereby undermine culture. Music is aesthetic, literature is not. Music is art; literature is not, at least not in the absolute sense. This is not a taxonomic exercise. For art is the proper expression of life, just as literature is the proper expression of politics.

In the nineteenth century, Germany flowered as never before. The notoriously anti-German, A.J.P. Taylor concedes: “On almost every test of civilization—philosophy, music, science, local government—the Germans come out at the top of the list; only the art of political behavior is beyond them” (Taylor 1962 [1946], 7). Many scholars have added technology, higher education, and literature. Instead of bonding them to Europe, their cultural superiority has estranged them. According to Hans Kohn (1960, 24) “The Germans, in the nineteenth century, began to feel themselves fundamentally different from and culturally and morally superior to France and the West.” For Mann and the Romantics, these achievements more than sufficed to demonstrate Germany’s pride of place in Europe. They and many ordinary Germans would have been content to live their lives in this garden. They could not, because they saw themselves wrenched into a highly politicized Europe comprised of power states: “The Germans certainly could not remain as innocent and peace-loving as cosmopolitan as they had been in Kant’s day. Napoleon had taught them too roughly what power was and what was the reward for weakness. The misery of state and nation made them discover state and nation, though they still approached the new problems with high idealism” (Mann 1968, 38).

The Defeat in the World War brought the continuation of this cultural superiority into question; its moral basis seemed to be deteriorating: “The abrupt and challenging breach with previous standards of morality touched people at their most sensitive point (...). There was a strong streak of self-mockery, typified by the final scene of (...) *Mahogany*, where the actors step up to the footlights and raise placards reading, ‘Up with the chaotic state of our cities,’ ‘Up with love for hire,’ ‘Up with honor for assassins,’ or ‘Up with the immortality of vulgarity’” (Fest 1974, 94).

To this standard complaint of the *avant-garde*, Mann adds a more sophisticated concern, one which typically rubs against his own aesthetic grain:

Must we not, even against our will, recognize in this phenomenon an aspect of the artist’s character? We are ashamed to admit it, but the whole pattern is there: the recalcitrance, sluggishness and miserable indefiniteness of his youth; the dimness of purpose, the what-do-you-really-want-to-be, the vegetating like a semi-idiot in the lowest social and psychological bohemianism, the arrogant rejection of any sensible and honorable occupation because of the basic feeling that he is too good for that sort of thing. On what is this feeling based? On a vague sense of being reserved for something entirely indefinable. To name it, if it could be named, would make people burst out laughing. Along with that, the uneasy conscience, the sense of guilt, the rage at the world, the revolutionary instinct, the subconscious storing up of explosive cravings for compensation, the churning determination to justify oneself, to prove oneself (Mann 1983, 49).

For Mann, this capacity to see phenomenon in the round, to be self-critical to the point of self-destruction, is what has given the German artist and the German burgher their distinctive characters. This candor, he thought, arises from an ironic appreciation of the world and man's place in it.

Nietzsche, along with Luther, Schopenhauer and Goethe are the major influences in Mann's *weltanschauung*. So it should not be surprising that he shares some of their misconceptions. For example, with Nietzsche, Mann wishes Germany were more like Greece, ancient, and less Latin and French. Yet his notion of Greekness, like Nietzsche's, is limited to heroic aesthetics. "There are ages in which the rational man and the intuitive man stand side by side, the one in fear of intuition, the other with scorn for abstraction. The latter is just as irrational as the former is inartistic. They both desire to rule over life; the former, by knowing how to meet his principal needs by means of foresight, prudence, and regularity; the latter, by disregarding these needs and, as an overjoyed hero, counting as real only that life which has been disguised as illusion and beauty" (Nietzsche 2006 [1873], 122) While capturing the significance of art, including the art of the hero, it ignores its basis in the *polis*. The *polis*, even in its most democratic phases, never forgot its heroic and artistic ideals. Its creative outburst in the fifth century was the result of the tension between heroic individualism, warrior and artist, and the needs of the *polis*, political and military. Mann's one-sided appreciation of the Greeks ignores Aristotle's conception of the citizen and *polis* as mutually dependent. One could not exist without the other. This conception differs fundamentally from the bond that Mann celebrates by his dyad of personality and community, because Mann ignores the Greek passion for participation in the social-political arena. In so doing, Mann suggests that freedom can be achieved through inner virtue, that its pursuit is a solitary and lonely endeavor. This may be true, but this is not how the Greeks viewed it. A citizen must participate in public affairs. To fulfill his obligations, he must rule and be ruled in turn. It is possible that Mann, like Nietzsche, is trying to import as much of Greek culture as he could given the realities of the modern State. There is no indication, however, that Mann is making the best of a bad bargain. On the contrary, he believes that Germany has achieved high culture, an amalgamation of art, freedom and discipline. He fears that this nineteenth century achievement is being squandered by the victory of the Enlightenment over German culture; this fear makes him an enthusiast for World War One. Moreover, his support of war, moreover, is generalized, as an ennobling, mystical experience. Although I am sympathetic to his critique of the Enlightenment, I cannot so glorify war. Even if war were necessary to bring out the courage and nobility inherent in human beings, which I doubt, its price seems too high. For all his praise of doubt, Mann seems altogether too certain of the value of war.

My final concern deals with the notion of rights and the modern State. Mann is openly and often contemptuous of human rights, which, since he links the idea with the French Revolution, must include natural rights. While he decries the Roman power State, as it has manifested itself in Western Europe, he ignores how the concept of natural rights might limit such a state. He does not say the concept of rights failed to work, but that it is empty. "The German concept of freedom will always be of a spiritual nature: an individualism

that, in order to reveal itself politically, must always create institutions other than those barren-abstract ones of the political West and of human rights” (Mann 1983, 201). Pre-societal rights, rights as an endowment by birth as a human being, simply make no sense to him. Moreover, freedom, for Mann, does not mean a zone of liberty into which coercive state power may not trespass. Freedom is spiritual, echoing the Lutheran conception that, however oppressed an individual might be, a Christian is free. For those who believe the material world is insignificant, then slaves might be as free as a king. Freedom becomes an entirely personal concern.

His idea of what might limit the power State in the here and now is even more troubling. Mann writes that the State has a metaphysical character which prevents rulers from becoming tyrants and the people from becoming an individualistic mass. “Never has the difference between the people as a mystical character and the individualistic mass appeared more visibly; and no sense of awe for the former, no heartfelt participation in its heroic, protects one from seeing the basically miserable nature of the latter, its cowardice, impudence, wickedness, lack of character, and meanness” (Mann 1983, 182). His suggests that the metaphysical State endows the people with a mystical character. Not only does this conception deny intrinsic value to human beings, it suggests that only a metaphysical State can limit their depravity. Mann praises the German personality, really the nexus between this personality and the metaphysical State, because: “He [the German] knows that politics, namely enlightenment, social contract, republic, progress toward the greatest good for the greatest number, is no way to reconcile social life; that this reconciliation can be achieved only in the sphere of personality, never in that of the individual, only on a spiritual path, that is never on a political one, and that it is insane to want to raise social life even the slightest bit toward religious consecration” (Mann 1983, 185). Furthermore, social life and the political arena are futile because they are antithetical to ‘religious consecration.’ Mann suggests further that the way toward consecration is through an immersion of the individual in the nation. He affirms Lagarde: “The nation speaks only when nationhood (...) is expressed in the individuals” (1983, 198). Moreover, Mann suggests that individuals become personalities only through the nation. “The one and only possibility for Germany is for *national affirmation to imply negation of politics and democracy*—and vice versa” (1983, 191). Only by these negations can individuals avoid devolving into the mass. Only by these negations can they become *the* Nation and thus become personalities.

Apart from Aristotle’s view that the *polis* is prior to the man, how unGreek this all is: no justice, no life of virtuous activity, no political participation, no liberty, no rebellion against tyranny. Instead, Mann offers a pathway to religious consecration by aesthetic endeavors. For those without creative ability, he offers life as a burgher. “I do not want politics. I want objectivity, order, and decency. If this is philistine, then I want to be a philistine” (1983, 189). As Mann comes to regret in his exile, one should be careful what one wishes for. In 1933, Mann recanted his lukewarm support for the National Socialists with his typical perspicacity:

The primitiveness, the disappearance of culture, the increase in stupidity and the reduction to a petit bourgeois mentality are not recognized as fright by the intellectuals but are welcomed with a perverted approval. Propagators of the irrational, as they prevailed in great masses in Germany during the period of growing National Socialism, educated the people to a moral san-culottism and to an apathy to all cruelty (...) Cryptic sciences, pseudo sciences and frauds, formation of sects and quackery were the vogue and had mass appeal. Intellectuals did not consider all this as a low, modern fad or as cultural degradation. Instead they welcomed it as the rebirth of mystic powers of life and the soul of the people. The soil was ready for the most absurd and lowest mass superstition. That was the faith in Adolf Hitler (Broszat, 1966, 41).

References

- Broszat, Martin. 1966. *German National Socialism*, Clio. Santa Barbara.
- Fest, Joachim. 1974. *Hitler*. trans. Richard & Clara Winston. New York. Harcourt.
- Kershaw, Ian. 1998. *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris*. New York. Norton.
- Kohn, Hans. 1960. *The Mind of Germany*. New York. Scribner's.
- Mann, Golo. 1968. *The History of Germany Since 1789*, trans. Marian Jackson, New York. Praeger.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967. *The Will to Power*; trans. W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale, New York. Vintage.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2006 [1873]. On truth and lies in a nonmoral sense. In *The Nietzsche Reader*. K. Pearson and D. Large.(eds). Oxford. Blackwell, 114-123.
- Stern, Fritz. 1974. *Politics of Cultural Despair*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Taylor, A. J. P. 1962. *The Course of German History*. New York. Capricorn.

Özet

Mann kendi Aydınlanma eleştirisini Aydınlanma'nın özü itibarıyla Romalı, Latin ve Fransız fikirlerden oluştuğu ve bunun Alman kavrayışından sadece farklı olmakla kalmayıp Alman karşıtı olduğu görüşü üzerine kurmuştur. Buna göre Roma İmparatorluğu, Papalık, Fransa ve Fransız Devrimi'nin devamı olarak Aydınlanma bir kültür değil bir medeniyettir. Şahsiyetlerden değil bireylerden oluşan Aydınlanma, kendi değerlerini müzik değil edebiyat ile ifade etmekte olduğu için yüzeysel kalmaktadır. Mann'ın çözüm önerisi ise, politik anlamda değil de sadece sanatta, mümkün merteye Yunan olabilmektir. Dostoyevski'yi izleyerek Mann, Almanya'nın, Avrupa'daki medeniyet güçleri ile antagonist bir ilişki kurmasına yol açan, protest rolüne vurgu yapar.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kişilik, Birey, Kültür, Medeniyet, Edebiyat.