



My Last Wishes for Germany

Description

I have already said goodbye to Germany once under this title. That was in 2005, in my farewell lecture from Freiburg. At that time, I went to England because German university legislation made it impossible for me to continue financing my position as a non-scheduled professor at the University Hospital in Freiburg with my third-party funds, which I possessed sufficiently. I found England very congenial. The colleagues were friendly and collegial. There was almost a conspiratorial community spirit. I soon realized why, and that's what drove me out of England 5 years later: The system there is divided into academics – those who add value by teaching and researching and thus earning the money that keeps the university going – and administrators and managers – who tell academics what to do. German academics have it better in that regard. At least in theory, they are free in their research and teaching. In addition, the English system is extremely hierarchical and reflects the English class society: There are the universities at the top, Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, Queen Mary, University College, the excellent universities of the Russell Group, and a host in the back ranks. The top universities take in just under 50% of their students, mainly the best students from the 7% or so English private schools (they are not allowed to take in more of these, otherwise they lose their grants from the state; I have reflected on these connections elsewhere [1, 2]). The pupils of these private schools are, with very few exceptions, those from rich homes. This is because the tuition for such schools costs at least a year's salary of an average wage earner. (When I was in Northampton, the average annual income in the area was £27,000; the local private school would have cost £25,000 a year, and it was still one of the cheapest in the country). In this way, the English class system distills upward. In the country's good universities, the upper classes meet. That's how the social system is fixed.

When I understood this at that time, I decided, if there was an opportunity, to return to Germany, where I experienced a very egalitarian university system and a permeable education system, the quality of which did not depend on the income of the parents. As a child of simple parents with a farming background and no tutoring from home, I was able to graduate from a good school and study without paying fees. To this system, I wanted to give back something of what I once received myself.

When the opportunity arose to apply for an endowed professorship at the Viadrina in Frankfurt an der Oder, I did so and received it. What I did not foresee at the time was the almost insidious resistance to the program – a continuing education program for physicians in complementary medicine – that emanated from local Brandenburg politics and then propagated through some agitation loops to the press and from there to my colleagues. I have described this story separately and will not elaborate on it here [3].

In 2016, our program was closed by the faculty, which also made my job lapse and ended my endowed professorship. And so, at 59, I found myself an unemployed academic and began to re-sort my professional life. This time as a freelance scientist, which I still am. During the Corona crisis, I learned to appreciate that. Because the positive flip side of freelance uncertainty is freedom.

Now the political situation in Germany is once again getting too tight for me, and I am going abroad for the second time, probably for the last time. And formulate my perhaps very last "last wishes" for Germany. I have returned to Switzerland, to Basel, where I lived from 1985 to 2005, where I had my first job after my studies, did my PhD and then stayed because of my family situation and became a commuter to Germany.

My last wishes to Germany is a title I stole from my philosophical-psychological role model Franz Brentano. He left Vienna in 1895 with an "clat" and formulated what happened to him in a short text "My last wishes for Austria" [4]. He felt "and was" cheated out of his chair. He had given it up in order to be able to marry his love, a Jewish banker's daughter. As a former priest who had left the church, he could not have done that in the Catholic Habsburg Empire if he was also installed as a professor, he was told. And promised him that he could have the professorship back later if he resigned, married abroad and then applied again. So he let the professorship go, went with his bride to Saxony, where he could marry as a confessional and stateless person, and then came back to receive his chair again. He also twice underwent a new application process, in which the faculty twice placed him first "unico loco", that is, as the only applicant "without competition", so to speak. But the ministry refused him the appointment and broke the promise made to him. Brentano shimmied through as a private lecturer. Then, when his wife died, the humiliations were apparently enough for him, and he left Vienna and Austria, not without finally setting down his story in said text.

I also feel a bit like Brentano. I am disillusioned. But that is a good thing. For the word shows that one has left a deception behind and is freed from an illusion. The delusion Brentano was under was the belief in honesty and justice in the imperial Habsburg ministerial bureaucracy of Vienna of his day, the hope that promises were binding and words reliable.

The delusion I have left behind is the belief in a functioning democratic system, built after World War II, that works for the benefit of its citizens. The Corona crisis has taught me otherwise. It really bodes ill for the future: the fact that our parliamentarians slipped past a relapse into fascistoid times by a narrow majority on the issue of compulsory vaccination and now, in approving the new WHO pandemic treaties (or the positive mandate to negotiate), have basically surrendered German sovereignty in health matters to a completely nebulous body that is democratically unaccountable to anyone.

The one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness of political discourse in the government and public media, whether it is about health, Corona or the Ukraine war, seems to me to be politically extremely dangerous and is actually a recipe for the next disaster. The linguistic denigration and factual exclusion of prominent critics "let's take Ulrike Gu rot as an example" who dare to call such facts by their names is a sign of the collapse of democratic discourse culture.

Over time, the media have moved themselves forward from the fourth to the first power in the country. They have a formulated mission, but there are no traceable criteria for their actions, and accountability is certainly nonexistent. Anyone who wants to defend themselves against misreporting or damage to their reputation in the media needs good legal protection insurance, an even better lawyer and a lot of money. And then, after a few proceedings, is terminated by their insurance company. What can one say about this when the public broadcaster ARD can afford to bring in an equestrian sports reporter as an expert for a fact check, who then dutifully shoots down research he doesn't know the first thing about, as happened to me with our child mask study? Just to be clear once more, the fact that this study was republished in long form, unchallenged, shows who was right; it was not the ARD fact-checker [5, 6].

The first power in the country are meanwhile, with respect, ladies and gentlemen of SZ, FAZ, ARD and ZDF, our media, which have forgotten to be truly critical and have degenerated to court reporters. What media culture has meant since 1848: Control of the powerful, criticism of the apparently self-evident, giving a voice to the defenseless and powerless – this media culture has disappeared in the woke monotony of a shoulder-slapping self-assurance that one belongs to the smart, enlightened and knowledgeable. These media drive politics before them. Politics drives the judiciary before it (because judicial officials, such as prosecutors and judges, are dependent on their employer, the Ministry of Justice, for their career aspirations). And all of them together drive the citizens before them. To where they want the citizens to go. More precisely, where they think citizens should go so that they can do well. This insufferable know-it-all attitude of the do-gooders, the supposed liberals and the seemingly enlightened, it is the fabric from which the cracked jump-sheet of doom is woven for those seeking refuge from the burning house.

Critical Media Culture

So the very first of my final wishes for Germany is a return to the media culture of the revolutionary period and the early days of our postwar republic, to multiplicity, diverse opinion and discourse culture. How to do that is something the media experts will have to figure out. In my interview study of 40 experts on the Corona crisis, the media experts I interviewed told me in unison, to the point: Whereas newspapers used to live primarily on advertisements from the business community, they now depend on support from politicians and on the public's good opinion. So they talk the politicians' talk and do and report what they think the public wants to hear. The truth is rarely one of these commodities. Probably the first thing to do would be to reorganize the public media sector, abolish broadcasting fees, which are basically a tax on the dissemination of state opinion, and allow people to spend that money on media channels and portals that they really use and feel well-informed by. Presumably, one would have to abolish state funding of the media and funding by large foundations and NGOs, which, after all, primarily want to transport their political opinions. Otherwise, such funding would have to be made much more transparent so that users know whose mouthpiece they are listening to.

Another illusion I have left behind is the naive opinion that – the legislator, i.e. we, the parliamentarians and thus indirectly the people, determine what policy is made. That may seem so on the stage of Berlin. But this game reminds me more and more of the Augsburger Puppenkiste (a very famous puppet theater), with which I grew up as an Augsburg citizen. Even as a child, you can see through it, but you still think it's great: there are people sitting above the stage of the theater, without you seeing them, who make the puppets walk, talk, run, jump, dance, even sleep and kiss on strings so skillfully that you as an audience member are spellbound (even though you know they are puppets). And the voices of the speakers are clearly the words the puppets are saying. Reflecting a bit, one knows, of course: the puppets can't speak, it must be someone else's voice. And one knows the puppets cannot walk, it is the puppeteers who give the impression. But nothing is more real at the moment of the puppet show than Jim Knopf or Urmel, how they rejoice, suffer and cry.

So our political theater strikes me as similar. It is, not always, but often, complex processes of influence that control the voting behavior of our parliamentarians. The Corona crisis was a prime example of Parliament disempowering itself and reintroducing a kind of Reichsermächtigungsgesetz (Reich Enabling Act of 1933) in the form of the Infektionsschutzgesetz (German Infection Protection Act), which gives the executive almost unlimited power to interfere with civil liberties. And if there is one thing we should have learned from history, including postwar history, it is this: rights once taken, withheld, or granted conditionally do not come back easily.

No Expertocracy

It is basically elites exerting influence through informal channels, whether they are powerful NGOs, foundations, think tanks, platforms like the WEF, or others: The complexity of the postmodern world means that we are heading toward an expertocracy. We leave the decision-making, the calling of the shots, to the experts. The political term for this is oligarchy. A few have the say and have to find convoluted ways of making their announcement in the background in such a way that it does not violate the appearance of democratic processes. Facade democracy is what some call it. And the deeper I look, the more accurate that designation seems.

Once again, the Corona crisis was a prime example: It was no longer democratically elected representatives of the people who determined what should be done, but experts, proclaimed by the media or appointed in an opaque process by the executive branch according to media dictates. What has been demonstrated here will continue: It has proven itself useful, hasn't it?

No, this process has to be stopped or made very transparent. Because if we don't, then our polity becomes a self-service store for completely opaque actors. Anyone who has enough money and influence can then use the media machinery to put their expert stooges in position, whom politics then appoints more or less uncritically as experts to the relevant bodies, and that's it for the puppet theater of the political stage.

My second â??last wishâ? would be that this is abolished and changed. How can this be changed? I think it can only be done through a combination of processes and control mechanisms.

For one thing, media-present and real experts need to be decoupled. Factual, not political, criteria should apply, as they do in appointment procedures. Not who talks after the government's mouth, but who has the most expertise in a field belongs in a council of experts. There would be criteria for this: Type and number of publications in scientific journals, rank in a neutral citation database, which counts the number of foreign citations of a scientist worldwide, e.g. that of John Ioannidis [7] (in which e.g. Prof. Drosten has a lower rank than some others, even than I, who truly do not belong to the exponents of school science). Perhaps there should be an expert senate: People who do not want to and are not allowed to occupy a position in an expert council themselves, but help to look for the right experts. This kind of thing should not be done according to political stable smell, but according to real expertise.

On the other hand, perhaps parliamentarians would have to be subject to even more substantive criteria of competence than they have been up to now: whoever is named by a party as a â??health expertâ? or a â??traffic expertâ? should actually be one. Otherwise, it could be that a children's book author becomes minister of economics and a pharmaceutical lobbyist becomes minister of health. It is not political employability and media presentability, but factual expertise that should be the deciding factor.

Perhaps grassroots democratic elements would also have to be taken into account in individual factual issues, especially where political decisions affect the immediate reality of people's lives.

Binding Ethics

One final illusion I have lost over the past few years is the belief that politicians have the best interests of citizens in mind. They may claim they do, and some may have. But with the really powerful politicians, I have (gotten) my doubts. Whatever they have in mind is more likely to be their own advancement, career, power, a place in the history book.

My wish would be that all these motives, which certainly have their place, would fade into the background among those who bear responsibility.

How can this be achieved? It would actually only work via an outstanding personal ethic. Ethics that are linked back to universal ethics. Not to a supposedly better life in a better future or whatever the postmodern, often transhumanist and not infrequently flat-materialist conceptions are. Such ethics would have to be coupled to the knowledge that the good in itself has to be valuable and provide guidelines for action. That it can be complex to agree on what the good is goes without saying. That is what discourse is for. And therefore there must be no talk of no alternatives and constraints and things like that.

So the next "last wish" would be a return to ethics. Not to the supposed "Western values" in whose name bombing and killing was done. In whose name ice-cold power and geopolitics was and is practiced. But on correct ethics, as they are summarized since ancient times in the fundamental law texts of all religions and all reflected ethical theory.

This brings me to my final last wish. What has increasingly gotten on my nerves in recent years has been a distinctly noticeable intolerance of dissent, of those who seem to have the "wrong" political opinion, a different ideology of life, or a different worldview. I believe this stems from the fact that a cultural consensus, namely the primacy of a Christian-based worldview, has gradually broken down since World War 2, perhaps earlier, with nothing comparable ready to fill the vacuum. A relatively unreflective form of a "scientific worldview", a naturalistic materialism, seems to me to have taken hold clammily, which in turn has fraternized with some other ideologies. With left-green positions, with libertarian views in the area of relationship and family formation, etc. From this, a conglomerate of what is considered good, right, progressive and humanly helpful among "moderns" is then distilled. And so what is called "wokism" emerges, a certain form of political alertness that thinks it knows what is generally good and right and loudly asserts this. Then lecturers with the supposedly "wrong" political opinion are not only, as in the past, harshly taken to task in discourse, but are no longer even listened to, disinvited, canceled. Because one knows in advance that they only promote reactionary content. One knows that from superficial social media channels, poorly researched Wikipedia articles, and from generally "just knowing it". Then one does everything to keep one's worldview "pure". Because belonging is everything.

Contradiction Culture

I wish the Germany of the future more contradiction culture and the courage to expose oneself to opposing opinions. This also includes saying goodbye to black-and-white either-or thinking. Reality is colorful, or gray, but rarely black or white. I have observed this tendency in recent years, especially among young people. It is understandable. People want to have order, to know where things stand, who is good and who is evil. This tendency is all the stronger, the less firm one is in one's own worldview or religion. Tolerance is the luxury of the self-secure. The insecure have to exclude. And this insecurity, brought on by an opposing opinion, is uncomfortable. So I wish, especially for the young, for the courage to step out of their comfort zone and expose themselves to the very opinions and information that don't suit them.

Multipolarity

I've been reading mostly political and historical books lately. And one of my insights was: we in Germany, out of gratitude or duty, have cherished transatlantic friendship with the United States since the war. So have I. I have good friends there, owe most of my funding during my active research life to the generosity of an American foundation, and I greatly appreciate the tolerance, the friendliness, the straightforwardness of the country and its people. But we should have no illusions. There, too, politics and the power elite are isolated from the population. That elite has one goal above all: hegemony. And hegemony includes keeping competitors at bay. If one can trust the former presidential adviser Brzezinski, then one of the essential competitors of a hegemonic power USA is not

so much Russia and China – these certainly also – but a united and stable Europe [8]. Because it has more inhabitants, more economic power and as much innovative power as the USA. Therefore, I understand what is happening at the moment, the unfortunate war in Ukraine, as an attempt to weaken Europe and within Europe especially Germany.

The war in Ukraine is, among many other things, primarily a proxy war. Here's a little vignette from my own experience. I am on the advisory board of a small scientific association, the [Society of Scientific Exploration](#). This is a group in which primarily anomalistic researchers have come together. The current president is a medical doctor. We meet at about 4-week intervals for video conferences. I am the only European. A few weeks ago, there was discussion about whether the annual conference, which is held in the US, should be held purely online or once again with presence. The president opened the discussion by saying, to paraphrase: It was not clear whether enough people would come if the conference were held in presence, now that we (i.e., the US) are in the middle of a proxy war. So there it was, the expression. Even a non-political medical professional in the US mouths the argument as a matter of course. Here, it would be a political affront to interpret this war as anything other than a liberation struggle.

Therefore, my very last wish is that the elites here may awaken to this reality. Their best friend is not necessarily where they think they will find him. And if the political elites do not stop accusing the people, who see this reality as it is and give a signal with their voting behavior, of know-it-all democratization or right-wing extremism, then exactly that disunity will be deepened, which promotes the geostrategic goal of the hegemon: the weakening of an independent Europe, in which each nation can keep its own peculiarity and still work together.

Brzezinski saw it very clearly: America is the only and probably historically last global superpower that wants to keep this status as long as possible. In his own words:

– global politics are bound to become increasingly uncongenial to the concentration of hegemonic power in the hands of a single state. Hence, America is not only the first, as well as the only, truly global superpower, but it is also likely to be the very last. In fact, the window of historical opportunity for America's constructive exploitation of its global power could prove to be relatively brief. A genuinely populist democracy has never before attained international supremacy. Democratization is inimical to imperial mobilization. [8], p. 209f.

In other words, after the Cold War, the US emerged as the sole global superpower, and it will try to maintain that status as long as possible. Even though Europe has an important position in this chess game as a partner and ally, and Germany is considered by the US to be the most important country in Europe, it is always only a junior partner. The historical alternative that is emerging, namely a multipolar world with different players and zones of influence that respect and support each other, is one that the global hegemon will try to delay as long as possible. I would like to see our political and media elite slowly begin to see this and act accordingly. Then life would also be easier and more pleasant for the people in this country who have earned its wealth and prosperity.

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