



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

By Peter Watson

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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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. 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 Review 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

Review

“Watson’s story is vibrating with life. It is unputdownable. It contains a lot one didn’t know. So much enlightenment and so much that moves.”

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