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*Finding Voice: The Presence of German Political Thought*

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Attaining *Mündigkeit*, or political maturity, literally means finding one's voice. The attendant concept of citizenship gives the tradition of German political thought beginning with Luther its democratic imperative. I demonstrate the presence of this tradition in contemporary democratic theory through an analysis of Martin Luther, Samuel von Pufendorf, G.E. Lessing, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F Hegel, and Ludwig Feuerbach. The politics of interpreting and constructing the German language has determined the language of modern politics. The conceptual language developed by Luther for theology was, in a categorial shift, incorporated into German political thought, has been continually developed in that tradition, and persists in governing the terms of secular political theory. Specific changes introduced as a vocabulary of theological and political concepts during the Reformation are coincident with and co-constitutive of the rise of modern politics. The emphasis on the presence of the "word"—as both interpretive possibility and moral requisite—animates democracy.

The chapters of the dissertation are built on this historical elaboration from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Luther's solution to the problem of freedom consists not so much the despiritualization of religion as in a kind of spiritualization of politics. The response of Luther to the crisis of authority in modernity is a hermeneutic management of the disorder institutionalized in modernity. Luther's crisis of faith, or *Turmerlebnis*, is emblematic of the moral crises many modern individuals face. Luther felt tortured by his inability, even as a blameless monk, to follow the law. His solution to this was to understand Christian freedom as categorially distinct from the law, and comprised not of commands but promises. Justification by faith alone decouples political realms from salvation, enabling believers Christians to obey secular rulers. This dual citizenship requires democratic self-governance.

The democratic imperative stemming from the necessity of a personal conviction for salvation, grounded in an individual's response to a text, follows from Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone. His novel hermeneutical approach to the Bible places that text at the center of religious life, under

a triune schema of law (the Hebrew Bible), word (the New Testament), and spirit. Luther's doctrine of two realms—one spiritual and one temporal—is the political elaboration of this interpretation. In the act of translation, of putting the words of the Bible into a national language, Luther has enjoined a specific type of community and also a conception of the individuals within that community. Subsequent thinkers in my analysis consciously work in elaborating this tradition; their relationship to this philological stance has determined the structure and content of contemporary liberal and democratic thought by placing the law under the democratic governance of an individually realized moral orientation. This deprofessionalization of spirituality marks a democratization of spirit.

Consistent with this, the 17<sup>th</sup> century natural law theorist Pufendorf preserves and refines the doctrine of two realms in which human beings maintain an inner relationship to God while being simultaneously responsible for implementing human justice. His thought reveals the deep structure of contemporary democratic commitments, enabling a closer understanding of the moral commitments the modern state was thought to complement. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Lessing attacked the institutionalization of Lutheran thought to renew the permanent revolution of the soul that Luther envisioned as the key to Christians' lives. This can be seen in his hermeneutics, which deals with the relation of spirit to word to law, in his view of history (which is startlingly different from Luther's and points the way past the Critical philosophy). Kant, considered by many the author of a radical secularization in philosophy, is also seen to be intimately connected to this tradition. Kant's conflict with Hamann over the importance of language to philosophy revolves around and is in systemic conflict with the tradition of Luther. Kant effects a collapse of the moral and political realms by naturalizing, and therefore negating, spirit!

Hegel's political philosophy recasts Luther's thinking on the two kingdoms, preserving the trinity of exegesis: his doctrine of word is delineated in the language projects of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*; his thinking on the law is systematically treated in the *Philosophy of Right*; and the account of spirit, while permeating all aspects of his work as it had Luther's, is specifically the topic of discussion in the *Phenomenology* and in his *Aesthetics*. Following Hegel, Feuerbach is announcing the redirection of Lutheran theological energies, pointing the way through the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with links to

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Marx as well as contributing a “genetico-critical” method to Nietzsche. Feuerbach revives the idea of justification through work in post-Hegelian philosophical language. Secularized Reformation thought remains central to contemporary political thought. The liberal-communitarian debate demonstrates that concerns Luther sought to address in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century are still live; the development of the concepts and their recurrent employment points to German political thought’s continued presence. The imperative to find one’s voice animates democracy by creating the moral authority and the moral requirement to attain political maturity and participate in self-governance.