

# It Is Worse Than You Think In Germany

In Europe, we once honestly believed that we had learned the lessons of the past. Never again would we support a Genocide. Never again would we support war on this continent. Yet here we are, at the losing end of a NATO proxy war in the East and a Genocide in Gaza. And so much more. Here to discuss what went wrong mentally is Dr. Hans-Georg Möller, Professor of Philosophy for Social and Political Thought at the University of Macau and the Host of the YouTube channel Carefree Wandering. Links: Hans-Georg's YouTube channel: @carefreewandering Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Intro 00:04:25 "Scary Germany": Academic Conformity and the "Expert" vs. "Understander" 00:15:52 Why Europeans Lecture the World (and the Chinese Reaction) 00:27:46 The Pariah Principle: Why Understanding the Enemy is Forbidden 00:34:00 Strategic Ignorance: Using Morality to Prepare for War 00:44:00 German "Guilt Pride" (Schuldstolz) and Moral Superiority 00:52:16 The Toxicity of Moralization and How to Escape It

## #Pascal

In Europe, we once honestly believed that we had learned the lessons of the past. Never again would we support a genocide. Never again would we support war on this continent. Yet here we are, at the losing end of a NATO proxy war in the east, a genocide in Gaza, and so much more. Here to discuss what went wrong mentally is Dr. Hans-Georg Moeller, professor of philosophy for social and political thought at the University of Macau and host of the YouTube channel \*Carefree Wondering\*. Hans-Georg, welcome.

## #Hans-Georg Moeller

Thank you very much, Pascal, for having me.

## #Pascal

Well, thank you for saying yes. I should also add that you've published several wonderful videos—one of them about "scary Germany" and the propaganda that's raging there right now, as well as some of the traits of society at the moment. Could we maybe start with that? Especially this issue I've already discussed with other guests here: that now the word \*Verstehen\* in German—"understanding"—has taken on a negative meaning. Being a \*Putin-Versteher\*, somebody who understands Putin, is seen as something negative now. And we see that this has also been mapped onto Hamas and other so-called enemies of the West. Could you speak to that a bit and explain what's happening here?

## #Hans-Georg Moeller

Yes. Well, I mean, I noticed this change particularly with regard to China, because I teach in Macau—a special administrative region of China, quite an autonomous area, but still part of China. My background is actually in Chinese studies; I got my degrees in Germany in that field. So rather than being focused on Russia or the Gaza issue, my personal perspective is more influenced by my experience with the German, let's say, attitude toward China. And that has drastically changed during my lifetime. When I started, as a teenager, to study Chinese studies, there was a great "China fashion." There was a strong idealization—almost a kind of romanticism—regarding China. The media reporting about China was very positive, which is why a lot of young people at that time took up Chinese studies, wanted to learn Chinese, and wanted to travel there, and so forth.

And the reason for this, quite obviously, was the reform and opening-up policy that started under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s and was still developing in the 1980s. So the image of China portrayed in the media—and also supported politically—was very, let's say, supportive of this liberalization process going on in China. Over the years, that gradually shifted, but the turnaround has accelerated. And for the past few years, I think there's been a complete reversal, in the sense that reporting on China has become very negative. Also, this notion you mentioned—the one I discussed in the video—the idea of the *\*Versteher\**, the "understander," has become an issue for people like me who actually live in China, work for a Chinese university, and to some extent speak Chinese.

And I noticed that I was also, either explicitly or implicitly, labeled a *\*Versteher\**. And that was now something negative. So that was, like, a personal experience behind this, right? And that's also what was the reason for this video on "Scary Germany." That was my trip to Germany last summer, when I was there for an extended period—about two months, basically. And I noticed that when I was talking to people, whether they knew me or not, and I was explaining or telling them what I was doing, it always kind of resulted in a very similar reaction. They were trying to tell me how bad China is, trying to explain to me how bad my situation must be, and how problematic it is that I'm doing my job here.

And of course, I found this very odd, right? Because my impression was that the less people actually knew about China, the more they somehow felt entitled to lecture me about it. Whereas the people who have experience in China, or know China better—many people know and understand China better than I do—those people tend not to lecture me about living there. So it's kind of an absurd situation that now, in public discourse, the further you are from China, paradoxically, the more authority that seems to give you to be opinionated about it.

And I have the strong impression that this is the case—definitely in politics, even more so in the media. But even in academia, even in an academic context, it's now regarded, even in Chinese studies, as a downside if you're associated in one way or another with China and live in China. And

then this label *\*Versteher\**—you're more likely to have that label attached to you, often immediately, right? Even before the conversation starts, this kind of label kicks in: that you're an "understander," and therefore you're morally, politically, or even personally suspicious, right?

## **#Pascal**

And I just need to add, for people to understand in English—"understander," the way it's used in German, actually means an excuser, right? The word conflates "to excuse" or "to justify" with "to understand."

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, I think that's correct, but the important subtext is also that you have some form of sympathy, I guess, right? It's not just *\*Verstehen\**, it's also having *\*Verständnis\**—having some sort of... empathy.

## **#Pascal**

Yes, yes. You actually see or have some viewpoint that's similar to the viewpoint of what you're talking about, so you're able to step into the shoes of the other. And that's an accusation. Exactly—it's negative now.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Exactly. That's now very negative. You're associated somehow with the political and moral "other." Right, right. You're kind of suspected of being, let's say, a traitor or something. Yeah. And this happens to you even in academia, Nick? Yes. I mean, that is very strongly the case in academia, I would say. I have to say I'm not—and intentionally not—in Chinese studies. As you said at the beginning, I work in Chinese philosophy. I work in philosophy, and I still do work— You didn't mention this, but it's important for my academic background: my main specialization is actually Chinese philosophy. But personally, I put the emphasis on philosophy, not on "Chinese." I see myself, even though my academic background is in sinology, in Chinese studies, as having switched from Chinese studies to philosophy.

And I regard myself, for various reasons, more as a philosopher than a sinologist. But yes, I'm, I don't know, maybe 30 or 40 percent sinologist, and I work in China. And yes, even academically, there's strong pressure, from what I can tell. I still have some contact with German sinology, though those contacts aren't very close anymore. Most German sinologists who are teaching nowadays I don't know, because I left Germany more than 25 years ago. But from what I can tell from the outside, it's clear that it's very difficult for my colleagues to present, or to appeal to, some form of *\*Verständnis\**—some kind of empathetic understanding—for the situation in China, especially in an academic context.

This is not welcome. In my video, I mentioned a true story told to me by one of my friends in sinology, who sent a letter to the editor of a major German newspaper that had reported very critically on China. Not only did the newspaper refuse to publish the letter, but they also sent him a long, personally written reply explaining why his views were not acceptable. So the journalist was, again, criticizing the professional sinologist for being a *\*Versteher\**—and saying that this was not acceptable, that it shouldn't even be published in mainstream German media. It's just not publishable.

That reminded me of an attitude I had only known from the former communist East Germany—or, for that matter, from countries like China—where people with dissident opinions in academia wouldn't necessarily be fired or imprisoned. I don't think that, except during very radical periods, that would usually happen. What would happen would be something exactly like what happened to my colleague and friend in Germany: the political authorities would somehow tell you that you're wrong and that you should, you know, change your attitude. They would have this *\*belehrende\**—how can we translate that into English?—this kind of...

## **#Pascal**

A teaching attitude—this wanting to educate you, right? Yes, re-education. Yeah, exactly.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

It's a re-education effort. You first try the re-education effort. So this journalist, a leading journalist, was trying to re-educate the professional sinologist about his position on China. And for me, that is very representative of, let's say, the general social atmosphere in Germany. And again, like in the video, I talk about the distinction between *\*Versteher\**—understander—and expert. Because the media nowadays, in order to frame their propaganda, don't really have open opinion pieces that much anymore, where a certain journalist, you know, with their name, says, "This is how I see the situation." No, the propaganda now operates differently. The media always refer to these experts who are often unnamed. Sometimes they are named, but often they're not, right?

And these experts are the ones who have the correct opinion about organizations—whatever it is: China, Russia, Israel, or whatever, right? And yeah, these experts are, so to speak, the vetted, the okay, the accepted ones—those who have the accepted opinion. So the difference between *\*Experte\** and *\*Versteher\**, between expert and understander, is obviously that the connotation is: is this position the one that the media and political establishment consider politically correct? The media then attach the label that this is the politically and morally correct opinion. So the experts always have the politically and morally correct opinion, whereas if someone is an understander, that indicates they have the politically and morally incorrect opinion—and you shouldn't listen to them.

Whereas the experts—if you don't listen to the experts—then somehow there's something wrong with you, right? Then you're not really capable of rational or critical thinking. That is also, of course,

very interesting, right? That “critical thinking” in Germany now means that you believe what the experts say and you don’t believe what the understander says. This is now what’s basically taught as critical thinking: that those who are considered capable of thinking critically are, absurdly, the ones who have internalized this distinction—who can intuitively make it, who believe the experts, and who disagree with the understanders.

## **#Pascal**

It's fascinating to me. And I just wonder—where does this necessitate, like, opposition? No, not opposition—where does this necessitate negative views? Because we have... This is very interesting, right? I’ve been living in Japan for over ten years now, and I work at a Japanese university, and it happens to me very, very rarely that somebody in Europe tries to explain Japan to me. They actually listen; they want to know more—how does Japan work? They don’t do that. I don’t have that experience. Whereas you, working in a country with a lot of negative views attached in Europe, constantly get these lectures on how you should actually view the country you live in. So why is it that when we have positive views of another country, we don’t do that?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, I guess, as I said earlier, I experienced that same change. In my first twenty years of being a journalist—well, a sinologist—it was exactly as you described the situation for yourself in Drukat. That was the attitude I was used to. But with the geopolitical changes and the shift in opinion toward China—let’s say with the rise of China and the perception of China no longer being this wonderful, exotic “other” full of opportunities—this perception has changed. It’s now seen as part of the “axis of evil,” a global competitor, if not a sinister enemy. Yeah, that is clearly the context in which this has happened.

## **#Pascal**

Would you say this is a general psychological trait of people? I mean, does this also happen to you in reverse? Like, do Chinese people try to explain to you everything that's wrong with Germany? Or is this a particularly European phenomenon—or maybe even a German-speaking phenomenon—that we just believe we understand everything better than everybody else?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

I wouldn’t say it’s a specifically German phenomenon, but I would say it’s particularly strong in Germany. There are several aspects to it. First of all, the image of China has changed drastically throughout history. I studied the history of China and the current atmosphere—let’s say, especially in Germany—because again, this exists all over the West, but I’d say it’s hardly anywhere as strong and pronounced as it is in Germany. And that may have something to do with, I don’t know, the German character, if there is such a thing. I don’t really believe in it, but on the other hand,

empirically, I often think there is something like that. Anyway, this negative attitude toward China is nothing new, unfortunately.

The Western attitude toward China was very strong historically—for instance, during the 1840s, during the Opium Wars. One of my favorite novels, written by the Hong Kong writer Timothy Mo, is titled *\*An Insular Possession\**. I think it's one of the greatest novels ever written. It's about Macau and the period of the Opium Wars, when Hong Kong was founded and the British moved from Macau to Hong Kong, taking it as part of their colonial expansion. One part of the plot deals with journalism. Parts of the novel recreate the journalistic articles written by the British and Americans about China, and they are full of hatred and racism. They basically promote the Opium War.

The kind of rhetoric I hear in the media nowadays reminds me of what I know from that novel. I actually know the author—I had the honor of meeting him once here in Macau. I know he did a very, very thorough job reconstructing the media language of that time. So I always think back to that novel now when I read something, which is actually personally difficult for me. It's very hard for me to read German media about China because this kind of subtle hatred and subtle propaganda is psychologically difficult for me to expose myself to. Yeah. So I can basically only read a few sentences, or watch the news for maybe a minute, and then I have to turn it off. And that reminds me of that first period.

And then the second period, of course, when Germany was involved, was the Boxer Uprising around 1900. German soldiers were sent there, and we have the notorious *\*Hunnenrede\**—the “Hun speech” by the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm—who encouraged the German soldiers to go to China and kill the Chinese so that no Chinese would ever dare to, you know, look luxuriously at a German again. Exactly, yeah. So, again, this speech, which isn't really in the collective memory anymore in Germany—unlike, you know, the Nazi period—the German collective historical memory is very much focused on just a very short period of German history, although there would be plenty of other periods where they could also find, actually, not so different examples of German attitudes toward other peoples in the world.

And one example is the *\*Hunnenrede\** and the attitude toward China, and the military aggression against China by Germans—part of the long, hundred-year history of Western military aggression against China. And, of course, that is also more or less completely ignored by the experts. If you point to it, you become a *\*Versteher\**—an “understander.” So what I'm saying is, these kinds of ups and downs—this is still in response to your question. I told you, if you want, feel free to interrupt me anytime; I'm talking too much. These ups and downs are typical. And also, there have been books written on this. Usually, I think it's very obvious that it's always in the context of military and, generally, geopolitical conflict. The fascinating thing is—if I might still answer the other part of the question—what the Chinese somehow think about the Germans. And that, of course, also shifted. For a long time, that goes back to when I first came to China in the late 1980s.

The opinion about Germany was extremely positive. That even extended to Hitler, right? Germany was kind of associated, by the average Chinese person—this is what you'd hear—as a very strong country. At first, they were very strong under Hitler, and then they were very strong after the war, developing this wonderful economy. And they have always been, you know, the people of the *\*Dichter und Denker\**—the poets and philosophers. So there was a completely uncritical, overwhelmingly positive image of Germany. It was seen as one of the greatest of all nations, and that had a very long-lasting effect, right?

In China, as part of the economic development since the 1980s, there's been a very strong—let's say—obsession with foreign brands. Fortunately, I think that's changing now, and that's a good development. Of course, Germany as a brand, both in the metaphorical and literal sense—many commodities were labeled "Made in Germany." The German car industry, as you may know, profited a lot from China's opening, right? They really benefited from this very positive trend. The German brand was most clearly manifested in German cars, which flooded the Chinese market from the 1980s and 1990s onward, right?

They were already building the Volkswagen plant when I was there as a student. So the Chinese were looking up to Germany. And I think they are now increasingly, even bitterly, disappointed. The Chinese attitude was: we love Germany, we love the German brands, the German brand, we love German culture. It was like a role model for us. Because that was also what they heard from Germany, right? At that time, as I said, "We want cultural exchange; we're open to 5,000 years of Chinese civilization." And then the Chinese, you know, they were promoting this idealized image of China, which also existed in the West. The Chinese kind of internalized that and then were reprojecting this positive Chinese image back to Germany, and so on.

We were opening the door—the Confucius Institutes everywhere—to, you know, promote Chinese culture. But that's changed. Now the Confucius Institutes are also seen as something bad, even evil. As you know, people say they were set up because the Chinese want to spread their propaganda and influence. So many of them have been closed in Germany. I think the Chinese are now realizing that their sympathy toward Germany wasn't really reciprocated. Their love for Germany wasn't met with love for China—quite the opposite. So, yeah, the Chinese are now increasingly ambivalent about Germany. That's my perception.

## **#Pascal**

I see. Thanks for this. Maybe just briefly—one of the things I still wonder about this "understander" issue is whether it has some roots in older, maybe even non-German, traditions. Because if I remember correctly—and I did do my undergraduate degree in philosophy—one of the biggest philosophical fights in ancient Greece was between the Platonists, the School of Socrates, and the Sophists. Accusing somebody of sophistry is a grave accusation. You're using the tools of the sophists, meaning you twist arguments so they still sound logical, but underneath they completely

fail, and you're basically a fraud. Do you see any kind of historical connection there with this tradition?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, yes, generally I think you're correct, right? I mean, the general thing is just that the intellectual opponent is always, you know, delegitimized. And that delegitimization often has a moral undertone. Right. So also, the critique of sophism is that these are like fake, sellout philosophers. They're not true philosophers; they're just in it for the money. That's what you find in Plato's dialogues—that's usually the accusation. So, yeah, these are fake philosophers, the sellout philosophers, and somehow you're correct.

This pattern is there, right? If you say someone is a *\*Verstehen\**, an "understander," the subtext—also regarding me—is, yeah, I'm, you know, paid by the Chinese government. I'm working for the Chinese. That's the traitor thing I spoke about earlier, right? I'm a traitor not just to Germany; I'm also a traitor to German academia because, exactly as you said, I'm bought by the Chinese and therefore I'm undermining, I'm subverting, true German critical sinology. So yes, I agree with you.

That's basically a very similar pattern to what you described about Greece. What I didn't say yet, but kind of alluded to, is that in this particular case it has to do with what I call the "pariah principle." At some point, the attitude toward China and Russia—and Russia more so than China—shifted toward seeing them as pariahs. That was very different before. I also talk about that in the video. When I grew up in the 1970s, there was a very strong conflict—the Cold War. Half of Germany, the Russians were there.

Half of Germany was basically under Russian military control. They were much closer than they are today. And yet there was this idea of *détente*, of *\*Entspannungspolitik\**. The Russians—or the Soviets at the time—were not made into pariahs. You could talk to them, you could invite them, right? You could watch Russian media. There wasn't Russian television here, but the Russian media weren't treated like they are now. Because now they're pariahs—Russian media are actually forbidden, banned in Germany. I don't know if you remember RT, the Russian channel.

RT and Sputnik, yeah. It's not just blocked like in China, where you have the firewall—which you don't have in Macau, by the way, because China is quite diverse, more diverse than Germany, I would say. Anyway, since, I don't know, not very long ago, it's actually banned. The Russian media are completely banned. So they're illegal, and you're not even allowed to, if I understand the law correctly, quote them or refer to them in your own media production. So this is what I mean by the pariah principle: the other is a complete pariah, has no political or moral legitimacy whatsoever.

The only thing we can do is basically some form of organized political mobbing. You can't associate with them in any way. And that also extends to academics. The idea is that if you have something to do with China—even if you just speak the language, learn the language—that already makes you

suspicious. It already makes you seem like you're going over to the pariah. Learning the language of the pariah is already seen as problematic. And that's also why no one studies Chinese anymore in Germany. I don't know about the situation with Russian. That wasn't the case in the 1970s—it was perfectly fine to learn Russian or Chinese. Nowadays, it's not.

## **#Pascal**

It's cancel culture on a national level. We cancel Russia, cancel China. If you infringe on the cancellation—well, dear you, you're going to have to learn a lesson, right? Which is fascinating, though, because it means we did the opposite, right? We're banning the actual endeavor of properly understanding.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, of course—but that's why *\*versteher\**, “understander,” is seen as a bad thing. And the first step that leads you down that path of being a *\*versteher\** is learning the language. You're supposed to learn about China and Russia through English- or German-speaking media. If you learn about China and Russia through Chinese- or Russian-speaking media, you're already, again, undermined by the pariah.

## **#Pascal**

It's such a dumb thing to do. I mean, there's enough literature on military strategy from both the East and the West that tells you very clearly the one thing you want to understand is your enemy, right? Or the significant other. It's the one thing you really want to have a grasp on, because that's what allows you to win in the contest. So isn't this extremely self-defeating as a process?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, yes and no. I mean, on the one hand, I do think it's self-defeating, right? Because, again, if you say the positions of the other side are so completely—politically and morally, and it's always the moral subtext that's very important—illegitimate, then anyone who tries to understand them already becomes afflicted by them. Okay. That, of course, is ultimately, as you just said, from a strategic perspective, not very good. You need to know the enemy better—that's helpful. But, of course, for a warlike situation, if you're gearing up toward a war, either a hot war or a cold war, it's very useful. You want, in your own population, no one who has sympathy or empathy with the opponent. If you want people to be willing to kill others—which normally, most humans have a strong... how to say?

They are not psychologically inclined. They have *\*Hemmungen\**—what is that word in English? They... they're not inclined toward killing others. They have hesitation. You need to overcome quite a high psychological barrier to be willing to kill others. And there have been studies on this. So how do you do that? By minimizing all forms of *\*Verständnis\** for the other—by minimizing all forms of

understanding or empathy with the other. So if you're gearing up for war, that is very helpful. And this internalization is very important, not just for the soldier, but again for the people in power—for the journalists, the academics, and the politicians. It's probably most important that among these people there's this kind of willingness to deny, again, the moral legitimacy of the other.

And you want those people in power, right? We see this very clearly in German politics: every politician who shows some form of empathy or sympathy for the opposition becomes ineligible. They get thrown out of the party, thrown out of their positions, and so on. The same is true for the media—you won't get hired, you won't get a job in the mainstream media if you're an "understander." That's like the number one criterion. And now even in academia, we're there. In Chinese studies, for example, if you're suspected of being an "understander," they'll make it much more difficult for you to get a position—or even to get published.

## **#Pascal**

So this is, in this sense, like a sociological mechanism that we're seeing unfold, which then creates a homogeneous epistemic group, right? A group that understands or perceives the enemy in the same way, and thereby you create the group you need in order to overcome inertia. The experts. They are the experts. This is not so much a question—more like a comment. Some parts of the European defense establishment speak openly about this. NATO openly talks about the necessity for a common threat perception. It's like, we need the same perception of who and what the enemy is in order to have a strike force against it, right? Or to have a common approach against it. And this is highly dangerous. It's very dangerous.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

The underlying thing is, from my philosophical perspective, the danger of moralization—of extreme moralization—which we see traditionally. We had this in religion, right? Whatever, from the Middle Ages until the 20th century, or even going back to the Opium War and the Boxer War, religion was still a big issue. You were fighting against the heathens, so that was a major reason why you could kill them—because they were heathens, right? And they kind of resisted Christianization. That was one of many factors, but it was an important one that legitimized, or rather delegitimized, them morally on a religious scale.

Now we're seeing the same mechanism, but no longer religiously coded—what I like to call civil-religious. They don't embrace our values, and that's why they lack moral legitimacy. They just don't get our values, right? We tried—you know, we were offering them, explaining our values to them, which are clearly superior to theirs. And still, or at least their governments—or maybe they were misled by their governments, we suppose—but it's clear that many Russians and Chinese don't really embrace our values. And that, those values, that's what delegitimizes them morally.

And my main, if I may say, philosophical background is in Chinese philosophy and Taoism, and in the German social theorist Niklas Luhmann. And for both of them, along with some other philosophers like Nietzsche, I would say, they have a strong focus—even though they're, of course, historically completely apart, different from one another. Both Taoism and Luhmann emphasize the dangers of morality and the toxic, really poisonous character of moralization. And Luhmann says that morality and moralization are the death sentence for democracy.

And I feel that's what we're experiencing today—that politics, again, and this is very different from the '70s and '80s—has switched to this moral register. We no longer see the other as an ideological opponent, which was the case back then. We don't take their ideology seriously anymore. No one's really interested. They don't even have much of an ideology—they're just evil, right? They just don't share our values. That's the point, right? And we have the *\*Wertgeleitete Außenpolitik\**, the value-guided foreign policy. And that, I would say, is the path to war and militarization—and it always has been.

## **#Pascal**

A drive toward the religious—basically, a religious way of looking at the world. Civil religion, because it's secularized.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Post-religious, secularized, civil-religious—however you want to call it. Yeah, and that has become the main rhetoric. And again, that is the reason for the pariah principle. That is the reason for the distinction between the understander and the expert—it's the moral register. Everything is now kind of subsumed under these moral glasses, the *\*moralische Brille\**. Yeah. And that's a shift in politics that has taken place despite, or in addition to, the geopolitical changes. We have this kind of return to moralist fundamentalism. And that has increased over the past few decades, no doubt. And that's why I'm very worried. I think the clearest indicator is that we are actually moving toward another war.

## **#Pascal**

It's a very good observation. I mean, this also explains, at least within this framework, why we have that huge difference and shift—from *\*Ostpolitik\** under Willy Brandt, which was a pragmatist approach. It was pragmatism, right? The question was: what do we need to do to not end up in a nuclear war? And the question shifted to: what do we need to do to be on the right side of history—which you hear a lot these days. And that's a moral question: what do we need to do to be good, versus what do we need to do to avoid bad consequences?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Yeah, and it puts a lot of moral pressure—moral fear. It instills moral fear in your own population. And again, this moral fear is tied to your career prospects. Right. You understand that if you don't share, let's say, the completely illegitimate view of the other, then you lose your own moral credibility, which then becomes a big professional problem for you. So this moralization is not only directed against the other; it also has a very strong effect on the population in Germany.

## **#Pascal**

You know, it's kind of unfair to bring this up now because we only have about 15 minutes left or so. But the second topic you mentioned that needs exploring, in regard to Germany, is this pride of—guilt pride—and this point that the Germans, to me, seem almost obsessively focused on not being on the wrong side of history again. It's so internalized that the Hitler period was utterly, completely wrong and must never happen again. Therefore—but then the “therefore” seems weird—therefore we need to support Israel come what may, even if it means genocide against the Palestinians. So, can you speak to that a bit?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Yes. I mean, I have another video on this German guilt pride—\*Schulstolz\*. And that's, I think, very crucial for understanding German history after the Second World War. It's also something I know very personally because it happened very much during my own lifetime, and that's why I experienced all of this firsthand. Of course, the Germans always had guilt, right, because of the Holocaust. I grew up in West Germany before 1989—that was my schooling—and the idea at that time, the main idea, was \*Wiedergutmachung\*, like we were “making good again.” The compensation—yeah, restitution or whatever.

And so, yeah, it was clear, like, we have this terrible guilt and we're guilty. And, yeah, we just have to, so to speak, \*kleine Brötchen backen\*—we have to be kind of modest. You know, we don't build up our military, we don't open our mouths very much, we keep quiet and quiet. We don't want to become a power internationally. We just, you know, pay some money to Israel and say, “Sorry, sorry, sorry,” and then hopefully someday everything is \*wieder gut\*—is good again—and we can get a fresh start. And of course, in Eastern Germany it was very different. Communist Germany saw itself as anti-fascist, so they didn't really see themselves as the guilty ones, but as those who had opposed—which was true.

The Eastern communist government—many of them had been in jail or otherwise persecuted by the Nazis—saw themselves as anti-fascist, which they were. But then, after 1989, after the 1990–1991 reunification period, neither of the two approaches really worked anymore. So we have a new form, which I define as this kind of \*Schulstolz\* idea. The idea is that we committed the most horrible crime ever in world history, but we confess to it, and we're no longer just trying to, you know, make

good again. Now, indefinitely—forever, eternally—we declare that we have this guilt. And somehow, paradoxically, that makes us very proud. We're like the morally strongest people in the world because, and this of course has Christian roots, right?

Because we confess our guilt, and this confession somehow absolves us morally, it becomes a never-ending confession, right? It's like, eternally into the future, we carry this moral responsibility—and that somehow makes us, paradoxically, the moral superheroes. Yeah, and that, I think, is a very important factor that contributes very strongly to this hyper-moralization, particularly of the Germans. This hyper-moralization of the political and national discourse of Germany—the German profile—becomes like the profile of these moral superheroes. And that has, well, whatever, the post-reunification Green Party—they're kind of a symbol of that hyper-moralization.

And no wonder they're now at the forefront of the re-militarization of Germany, right? So really, the more important part of the term "guilt pride" is pride, not guilt. Guilt was always there, Jim, but not this immense pride—this kind of moral pride and this feeling of, I'd call it, a superiority complex, right? And so, yeah, even the Japanese, they didn't really confess their Second World War guilt. So that makes them inferior to us Germans, right? But of course, everyone else—no one else really confessed the way we did. So somehow no one else has this moral high ground as much as the Germans do.

That's a very interesting kind of political and general phenomenon, I would say, because it has become like a national identity thing. In Germany, we call it the \*Erinnerungskultur\*—that's the official term for it, the culture of memory or culture of remembrance. And that's like the German state religion. It's taught in schools, in the media, everywhere. All the monuments are about this. So, whatever—other nations have their own national myth and their own national ideology. The German national ideology is built on this \*Erinnerungskultur\*, this culture of remembrance. And it's the breeding ground for this guilt pride, again, with the emphasis on pride.

The really special thing about it is this kind of new national pride. When I was educated in Germany—like I mentioned, I left Germany more than 25 years ago—we had to, as I said, make small bread buns, meaning you didn't really advertise that you were German. There were no German flags; no one would have a German flag, even at a soccer game or something like that. Yeah, we were doing okay and we were happy, but we wouldn't advertise our Germanhood very much. That has changed, and it has changed on the basis of this kind of newly—well, of course, it's a perverted pride, very obviously. It's a pride that, from the start, is psychologically perverted and highly dangerous.

**#Pascal**

Yeah, because the danger is, of course, that if you believe you've learned the right lessons from history, then you can't be wrong anymore, right? Therefore, your approach must be correct, so the other one must be wrong and needs to be taught. And if they resist, then we need to go down—why do they resist? That's right.

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

We have a value-guided foreign policy. And that value-guided foreign policy is the direct political result of the guilt pride. China does not have a value-guided foreign policy. China just doesn't have it. I don't think Russia claims to have it either. I don't think so. I don't know.

## **#Pascal**

But do you think it's because of Germany's structural role inside the European Union that the entire EU is using that discourse? Kaja Kallas uses it. Of course, von der Leyen uses it too. But this seems to be a European...

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Yeah, the Germans have been very successful in imposing this on large parts of Europe. I doubt they've imposed it on all of Europe—I doubt that. But the political figures you mentioned, and let's say the guiding voices, especially in the media beyond Germany, have basically bought into this model. Yeah, morality is very toxic, Pascal. It spreads. It's like—like Luhmann says—it's a bacteria. It spreads and infects a whole society because of this mechanism that's kind of like a religion.

Right. It becomes more and more dangerous not to buy into the religion, or not to buy into this hyper-moralization. It becomes more and more dangerous. You become the pariah yourself if you don't participate in the moralization. And that's why the Germans—and the German guilt pride—is the root cause, I would say, of this hyper-moralization. And it's highly toxic. What does Luhmann recommend? And again, it might lead, as for the third time, Germany might in this way lead us into a world war—for the third time.

## **#Pascal**

I worry about the same, but we're not there yet. What does Luhmann recommend? How do we get out of this? What does Daoism recommend? I mean, beyond just saying it's the individual who has to stop moralism—how can we, sociologically, snap out of this situation?

## **#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Well, it's a mental and social hygiene. Try not to overuse moral language. Try not to communicate morally. Try not to think in moral terms. It's a hygiene—a moral hygiene. I wrote a book about it,

\*The Moral Fool\*. And yeah, the recommendation is to somehow liberate ourselves from this toxic way of thinking and communicating.

**#Pascal**

Yep, because the pathway to hell is paved with good intentions. Exactly. This was fascinating. Hans-Georg, for people who want to hear more from you, they should first go to your YouTube channel, \*The Carefree Wanderer\*, right?

**#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Carefree Wanderer, yeah—which is a Daoist term, yes. Carefree Wanderer.

**#Pascal**

Do you have another place where you regularly publish, where people can find you?

**#Hans-Georg Moeller**

No, that's my YouTube channel.

**#Pascal**

Okay. I'll put a link to your channel in the description box below. Hans-Georg Moeller, thank you very much for your time today.

**#Hans-Georg Moeller**

Thank you so much. Thanks.