ARTICLE

BILDUNG AS REDEMPTION
Ernst Robert Curtius and The German Spirit in Danger

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Deutscher Geist in Gefahr [The German Spirit in Danger], by Ernst Robert Curtius, was published in 1932, when the turbulent Weimar Republic was heading towards its dissolution. Curtius, as a member of the German educated bourgeoise, sought to defend and restore the social funcion of the concept of *Bildung* and its humanist heritage in maintaining German culture. In Curtius perspective, the reconstruction of *Bildung* could provide solutions for the German situation during the Weimar Republic. *Deutsch Geist in Gefahr* is the main thema of this paper, which is divided into two interconnected parts: in the first, I introduce the German concept of *Bildung*, and its social and indentity implications related to the educate bourgeoisie and German national identity. In the second part, I analyze Curtius' book in order to connect it to the previous section and present its theoretical and conceptual construct, emphasizing the relations established by Curtius between *Bildung*, *Kultur* and humanism.

Bildung – Humanism – Intellectual history – Conceptual history

ARTIGO

BILDUNG COMO REDENÇÃO
Ernst Robert Curtius e O Espírito Alemão em Perigo

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Deutscher Geist in Gefahr [O Espírito Alemão em Perigo], de Ernst Robert Curtius, foi publicado em 1932, quando a conturbada República de Weimar caminhava para a sua dissolução. Desde a perspectiva da burguesia culta, Curtius procurou defender e restituir a função social da *Bildung* e sua herança humanista na manutenção da cultura alemã. Nesse sentido, a reconstrução da *Bildung* poderia fornecer soluções para a conturbada conjuntura alemã de Weimar. *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* é o objeto privilegiado nesse artigo que se encontra dividido em duas partes interconectadas: na primeira, apresento o conceito alemão de *Bildung*, bem como suas implicações sociais e identitárias relacionadas à burguesia culta e à identidade nacional alemã. Na segunda, analiso o livro de Curtius, a fim de conectá-lo à seção anterior e apresentar seu construto teórico e conceitual, enfatizando a relação estabelecida por Curtius entre a *Bildung*, a *Kultur* e o humanismo.

Bildung – Humanismo – história intelectual – história dos conceitos

Ernst Robert Curtius (1886–1956) is widely recognized, particularly among literary historians, for his monumental book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, published in 1948. Curtius was a notable scholar and a specialist in Romance languages and literature, as well as a literary critic. However, it is less well known that Curtius wrote two interrelated works during the 1930s that dealt with the theme of *Bildung*.

At the beginning of 1929, while spending a semester in Rome, Curtius was invited to assume a faculty position at the University of Bonn, where he began working in October of the same year. From his return to Bonn until 1932, amid the political, cultural and economic effervescence of the Weimar Republic, Curtius published four books and about forty articles. Among these books, only *James Joyce und Seine Ulysses* [James Joyce and His Ulysses], from 1929, was devoted exclusively to the literary themes. His work *Die französische Kultur* [The Civilisation of France] was published the following year. Curtius sought to understand the relationship between the concept of civilization and the unity of French identity, contrasting it with the communal social ties associated with the German concept of *Kultur* (Wieckenberg 2017, 293). In his other two writings, Curtius concentrated on the problem of *Bildung* and its connections to German culture and humanism, relating them to the German conjuncture of the final years of the Weimar Republic.

Deutscher Geist in Gefahr [German Spirit in Danger] is the main subject of this paper. The book was published in 1932, when the Weimar Republic was heading towards its dissolution in the face of the rise of far-right politics and the appointment of Adolf Hitler as chancellor in 1933. Curtius' focus was the collapse of German intellectual life, whose main driving force, in his view, was the transformation of the ideal of *Bildung* and the growing contempt for the humanist heritage associated with it. This attitude threatened the survival of the German spirit – the *Geist,* so important to the Romantics – and had fateful consequences for German culture in its various aspects.

In addition to these two works on *Bildung*, Curtius also wrote an article, *Abbau der Bildung* [The Dissolution of *Bildung*], published in 1931 in the literary journal, *Die neue Rundschau*. In this article, Curtius anticipated the ideas that would develop more fully in his 1932 book. Curtius' reflections emphasized the decline of humanist culture in the face of the growing dominance of modern technical and industrial society. All these ideas would later be incorporated into *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*.

For now, my aim is to present and analyze Curtius' two books on the German idea of *Bildung* in two related papers. In this first paper, I examine *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* in order to relate it to the German concept of *Bildung* and to the social and cultural functions it assumed, especially in the first three decades of the 20th century. To this end, I have organized the paper into two interrelated sections: first, I discuss the rise and development of the concept of *Bildung* – a semantic peculiarity of the German tradition– emphasizing its social role in the identity foundation of the educated German bourgeoisie. Then, I outline Curtius' argumentative, theoretical and conceptual framework, connecting it to the preceding discussion and seeking to understand the relationships he establishes between the concept of *Bildung* and the social, political and cultural milieu of the Weimar Republic.

THE CONCEPT OF *BILDUNG* AND THE EXPERIENCE OF GERMAN MODERNITY

Enthusiastic readers of Thomas Mann's voluminous books have enjoyed the company of an educated bourgeois who lived through the transition from the 19th to the 20th century. Mann himself was a typical educated German bourgeois, and in his *Buddenbrooks* he converted this universe into a realistic narrative based on the history of his own family. He rightly understood that his book also comprised "a piece of the history of the soul of the European bourgeoisie" (Mann, 1974, 383. Apud: Galle, 2016, 683). When reading Mann's writings, we can immerse ourselves in the home of an educated bourgeois: we may sit in a beautiful and comfortable leather armchair, walk through a charming dining room and leaf through many fine books that fill the shelves scattered throughout the rooms. And, not least, there were the salons, which provided the educated bourgeoisie of the belle époque with their intellectual dinners and gatherings – the central social activities of the period[1]. The salons – organized, for example, by the Weber, Simmel and Lepsius couples, for example – were social spaces shared by educated bourgeois who recognized a common axiological universe that underpinned their individual and collective identities. The sociability of salons preserved the idea of *Bildung* as a fundamental element of the educated bourgeois way of life and served as a unifying concept for understanding the experience of modernity.

In my understanding, it is easy to say that the semantic and axiological universe concentrated in the concept of *Bildung* is difficult, almost impossible, to translate. And this is indeed the case: in Portuguese, my first language, both "education" [*educação*] and "formation" [*formação*] fail to capture the multifaceted totality of *Bildung*, as they are generally associated with formal schooling. Koselleck (2020, 115) begins his reflections on *Bildung* by emphasizing this semantic complexity, pointing out what the concepts do not encompass: it does not consist of an institutional educational trajectory, nor does it refer to the false pretension of those who merely consider themselves educated people.

I agree that translating the concept is quite complicated. But I maintain that although the translation is arduous, what the concept itself encompasses is not. *Bildung* is intrinsically related to the foundation, maintenance and circulation of the cultural identity of a particular group - in the German case, the *Bildungsbürgertum* (Selbmann 1994, 1). What is really important here is the collective self-definition of a cultural identity for which the idea of *Bildung* operated as a normative and interpretative force shaping the significant

[1] As we see in *Doctor Faustus:* "I have yet to describe the apartment on Prinzregenten Strasse, eight rooms safeguarded from every particle of dust. With its two salons, of which the one was more intimately furnished and served as the family living room, a spacious dining room in carved oak, a gentlemen's smoking room done in comfortable leather, a conjugal bedroom with hints of canopies floating above the pair of polished, yellow pearwood beds and a lady's dressing table with rows of gleaming bottles and silver implements arranged precisely by size-it was, I say, a model home of German bourgeois culture, a model that would endure for a few years, even as it fell apart, a model not least because of the "good books" that one found displayed everywhere, in the living, reception, and smoking rooms, but in whose acquisition anything provocative or seditious had been avoided, partly out of social, partly out of tender psychological considerations: worthy educational books, history by Leopold von Ranke, the works of Gregorovius, volumes of art history, German and French classics-in short, a solid basic collection for preserving things as they were" (Mann 1997, 345). I emphasise here the notion that *Bildung* was associated with 'a solid basic collection for preserving things as they were', pointing in the direction of maintaining a tradition, an important element for the identity formations of any and all groups.

experiences that were unfolding in connection with historical circumstances. I believe that *Bildung* was an important element of these individuals' historical consciousness and assisted them in their temporal orientation and understanding of the experience of modernity, helping them grasp their place and social function. Thus, *Bildung* acquires a social attribute that guides the actions of social groups – including the educated bourgeoisie – tied to the political, economic, and cultural conditions of a given historical reality. I will return to this subject later.

In the same way as the modern concept of history, the neo-humanist concept of *Bildung*, shaped mainly by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) at the end of the 18th century, included the perspective of a collective singular that became a premise for collective actions, a concept that brought together different experiences through the sense of belonging to a common historical path (Koselleck 2020, 118; 121). Transcendental-philosophical thought, developed through the conceptual correlation between *Bildung* and *Geschichte* as collective singular, became an indispensable foundation for the development of individual and group identities. Inevitably, *Bildung* was historical (Koselleck 2020, 122). The neo-humanist *Bildung* was heir to idealism and romanticism and to their appreciation of the individual inner world, in contrast to the universalizing tendencies of the French Enlightenment. At first, *Bildung* concerned the autonomous and self-reflective formation of the individual, which was later incorporated into actions in the external world. In the course of this formation, which is combined with the historical circumstances, the person comes to know what they want to be – an educated bourgeois, in other words, a German – their inner life belonging to this community and, at the same time, their individualism encompassing it.

The idea of *Bildung* was part of the semantics and value system of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, whose development was linked to the political, social and cultural world of the Germans. Compared to other European nations, German territory, as we know it today, was unified relatively late, in 1871, under the aegis of Bismarck's campaign and his victory in the Franco-Prussian War. The political and territorial unification of the German Empire formally put an end to the long-standing tradition of political and territorial decentralization of the Holy Roman Empire, which had been dissolved in 1806 with the abdication of Francis II in the face of Napoleon's invasion and the organization of the Confederation of the Rhine under French leadership. After years of Napoleonic dominance, the German Confederation was founded and later, in 1866, with the unfolding of the Austro-Prussian War under Bismarck's campaign, Prussia took control of the German territories, leading, a few years later, to the project of German unification[2]. Furthermore, the German bourgeoisie enjoyed little involvement in

[2] In 1828, Goethe wrote to Eckermann about the territorial decentralisation of Germany and the lack of a capital city that would bring together the political and cultural life of the Germans. 'I am not afraid,' said Goethe, "that Germany will not be unified; our good roads and future railways will do their part. May it be, first and foremost, united by love for one another! And may it always be united against foreign enemies. [...] United in the sense that my luggage can cross all 36 states without being opened. Let it be united so that the passport of a citizen of Weimar is not considered invalid by the border guard of a neighbouring state as being that of a foreigner. Let there be no more talk of "inside" and "outside" within the German states. That Germany be united by common weights and measures, in trade and industry and in hundreds of other similar things that I cannot and do not want to mention. But to think that German unity consists in the enormous empire having a single great capital, and that this single great capital would serve the good of the great mass of the people as much as the good development of great individual talents, is a mistake." (Goethe 2016, 657). The translation was done from Portuguese.

political affairs, and its plans for emancipation, together with the project for a liberal constitution that would ensure national identity, were defeated by the outcome of the revolutions of 1848.

Therefore, the bourgeoisie lived in a confused political territory in which they were not politically active. Thus, part of the German bourgeoisie turned to culture as an element of social distinction and identity. So, how could the German bourgeoisie find its identity? If national identity could not be anchored in a territory or a centralized political system, it could be established through a shared cultural formation. The *Bildungsbürgertum* founded German national identity by absorbing a specifically national culture. This cultivation of German identity through culture became its mission. The pragmatic outcome of the concept of *Bildung* as used by the *Bildungsbürgertum* can only be correctly understood in connection with the German idea of *Kultur*, which was tied to the historical development of the *Bildungsbürgertum* and its commitment to promoting national identity. The intersection between *Bildung and Kultur* confirmed this formative path, which was completed in the necessary combination of the inner and outer spheres. Throughout their formative years, individuals experienced the external and historical world through an organic connection – inherited from Romanticism (so, Wilhelm Meister!) – which established a sense of belonging to a community, a *Gemeinschaft*. For this reason, Dumont (1994, 20) argues that *Bildung* is an idiosyncratic German concept involving two structural aspects: a holistic view of the community combined with the autonomous and reflective cultivation of the individual.

These fundamental aspects highlighted by Dumont lead to two substantial points regarding the relationship between *Bildung* and *Kultur* and the educated German bourgeoisie in their endeavor to explain national identity from their conceptual universe of social and cultural values: the first concerned an idea of community that emphasized cultural diversity – an important legacy of Herder's philosophy – and rejected the universalism of the Enlightenment. This dichotomy is expressed in the construction of two antithetical and asymmetrical conceptual pairs (Koselleck 2006) that underpinned the discourse on identity engendered by the *Bildungsbürgertum* and which prevailed until the 20th century: *Kultur/Zivilisation* and *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*[3]. These concepts are antithetical because they emphasize an opposition and are, at the same time, asymmetrical because they establish a comparison of inferiority with Enlightenment France. Civilisation and society were associated with France, with the cultural and social universalization established by the Enlightenment, with the appreciation of the outside world and the rejection of the inner sphere. In this case, the French national identity was conceived first from the outside world and then internalized. On the other hand, culture and community were Germanic characteristics completely opposite to those of the French. What is clear in this

[3] In 1914, the Vossische Zeitung published a call for enlistment directed at German university students to defend German Kultur on the battlefronts. "Students! The muses have fallen silent. What matters is the battle, the battle we have been forced into in defence of German Kultur, which is threatened by the barbarians of the East, and in defence of German values, which the enemy in the West envies. Thus, the Teutonic fury bursts into flames once again. The enthusiasm of the wars of liberation shines brightly and the holy war begins." Burschen heraus! In: Vossische Zeitung. 391. 4 August 1914. Here, we can clearly observe the use of the concept of *Kultur* to mobilise a non-Western identity. This discussion is beyond the scope of this article, but there is an interesting question here concerning the Germans' lack of identification with both the West and the East, leaving them with a peculiar identity formation.

conceptual opposition is the enthusiasm for the internal sphere and for the conception of a cultural identity that was based on interiority and then intersubjectively shared in social reality.

In this process, the relationship between the interior and exterior was consolidated and underpinned the identity of the *Bildungsbürgertum* which, for the Germans, corresponded to national identity (Dumont 1994, 44). This intersubjectively shared experience in which the inner reached the outer world maintained the German national identity as conceived by the educated bourgeoisie. Individual and collective identities were completed and integrated along this path between the inner and outer world, the inner and the historical realities. Thus, *Bildung* concerned both the autonomous, self-responsible individual formation that embraced national culture [*Kultur*] and the result of this development: the educated bourgeois who shared and asserted the national identity. When Novalis (2021, 53) wrote that "the *Volk* are an idea", and therefore "a perfect man is a small *Volk*", the romantic poet expressed the interrelationship between the inner world and the historical world in the search for a presumed national identity[4].

The second point highlighted by Dumont refers to the organization around the idea of *Gemeinschaft*, which shares the same rituals of sociability and a common universe of values that brings together both a way of life and a set of ideas and concepts that shape the interpretation of reality. From this point on, I understand that the *Bildungsbürgertum* organized itself into a community encompassed by a historical culture, in which the concept of *Bildung* – and *Kultur* – was an element of its historical consciousness and oriented its interpretation of reality interconnected with historical experiences that unfolded over time and which were tied to expectations of possible futures. In other words, historical culture refers to a practical articulation produced by historical consciousness that guides and supports individual and collective actions, as historical experiences from the past are interpreted in light of the present with a view to the future. This interpretative act produces a narrative in which time takes center stage and is indispensable for reflecting on any and all identities, as it guarantees the survival and transmission of historical memory (Martins, 2002). Ideas and concepts are essential to the historical culture of any community that has to deal with its own identity. The concepts of *Bildung* and *Kultur* were organized into a worldview that guaranteed the educated bourgeoisie the maintenance and transmission of their set of values and ways of life through a holistic view of their own community and, at same time, explained the organization of their own identity discourse which, in this case, corresponded to national identity. The community was equated with the ideal of a national community established not by the political or territorial sphere, but by the cultural one. For this reason, from the end of the 19th century, the concept of *Bildung* was exploited by the *Bildungsbürgertum* – Curtius' social group – to explain not only the social and cultural crisis of its own time, but to guarantee the maintenance of its social group's identity in the face of a vertiginous reality in which its values seemed increasingly unnecessary.

[4] The use of the expression „identity" is relatively recent. It was introduced in the late 1940s in the individual psychology and absorbed into others disciplines. According to Aleida Assmann (1998 11-12) „identity" was a new word for an old problem that, in the past, was designated by others concepts suc *Wesen, Charakter, Bildung* and *Volk*. The main idea of our understanding of identity – stability and permanence in the face of significant changes – was assured in the use of these many others terms.

From the end of the 19th century, *Bildung* as the guiding concept of the historical culture of this bourgeoisie began to weaken, although it retained a certain stability until the First World War (Koselleck 2020, 157). Certainly, the violent process of unification conceived by a military elite undermined the social role of the educated bourgeoisie in promoting a national identity based on the intersubjectively shared assimilation of a specifically national culture. In addition to this political transformation before the foundation of the Second Reich, changes in modern society helped to weaken the social relevance of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Germany had undergone a sharp process of industrialization amid an avalanche of technical innovations. A tremendous expansion of the railways narrowed the distances, mass society, the urban modernization of the large cities, the universal expositions, the amazing invention of cinematography, the strengthening of the working class as a new political, economic and social agent and many other transformations excited ambiguous feelings of ecstasy, cosmopolitanism and anguish that would deepen in 20th century Europe. It should be noted that Germany was engaged in the imperialism of the 19th century, and between the 1880s and the First World War, sought to expand its empire in regions of the African continent.

The Treaty of Versailles and Germany's defeat in the First World War stimulated the feeling of humiliation, which was exacerbated by the imposition of the Weimar Republic. Faced with political and social chaos, the *Bildungsbürgertum* could no longer avoid political discussions (Koselleck 2020, 159). Many intellectuals, while trying to maintain the status of the educated bourgeoisie in a world where it no longer seemed to have a place, explained and understood the social and political crisis of Weimar society by reflecting on the importance and function of *Bildung*.

From the historical culture of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, for whom the concept of *Bildung* as a founding element of their identity and understanding of the world was essential, Curtius faced the sea of uncertainties through which German society was sailing. The Weimar Republic was an unknown political experiment in a nation with an enduring imperial tradition. The young Republic was shaken by a vigorous economic chaos – worsened by the crash of 1929 – and political threats– the rise of the far-right politics and the out-of-state violence promoted by the *Freikorps*. *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* was published by Curtius in February 1932. In January the following year, the president of the Weimar Republic, Paul von Hindenburg, appointed Adolf Hitler as German chancellor.

Most of the reflections on the crisis of *Bildung* were closely connected to the perception of a certain decline in German culture. Consequently, these reflections were developed by professors in their research, and presented in numerous papers, essays and books. The idea of *Bildung* was the basis for the organization of two interconnected institutions responsible for maintaining and fostering the values of the *Bildungsbürgertum*: the *Gymnasium* – a secondary school that granted access to universities – and the university – whose export model was conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt for the founding, in 1810, of the University that bears his name in Berlin. For this reason, the thoughts of many intellectuals about the crisis of universities or about theoretical and methodological issues related to their disciplines were grounded in the conceptual framework of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Curtius was part of this tradition, which was already familiar to him. Curtius' grandfather, Ernst Curtius (1814-1896), also from Lübeck, as was Thomas Mann, graduated in Classical Studies (*klassische Altertumwissenschaft*) and Philosophy at the University of Bonn, where his grandson would later graduate and work. Ernst Curtius, his grandfather, was a professor at University of Göttingen and later at the University of Berlin. Because of his successful excavations in Greece, especially the one carried out at Olympia, Curtius became one of the most important names in archaeology in Greece and a important intellectual for the memory of the history of archeology. His brother Georg (1820-1885) was also a philologist and professor at universities of Berlin, Kiel and Leipzig.

The author of *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* studied philology at the universities of Strasbourg, Berlin and Heidelberg, and specialized in Romance language and literature[5]. His *Habilitation* on the French critic Ferdinand Brunetière was completed and defended at the University of Bonn, in 1913. It was from his humanist culture that Curtius experienced horror resulting from the establishment of a new pattern of warfare created by the development of the First World War. A year and a half after finishing his *Habilitation*, Curtius fought on a front near Warsaw where a shot wounded his throat causing his discharge in 1915.Returning to Germany, Curtius took up a position as *Privatdozent* at the University of Bonn, with intermissions at universities of Marburg und Heidelberg, until he was back in Bonn in 1929, where he worked until his retirement in 1951.During the hard years of Nazism, Curtius remained out of public life. His brother Friedrich followed the family tradition and was a professor of Medicine at universities of Heidelberg and Lübeck. We can certainly affirm that Curtius was, from an early age, surrounded by the sociability rules and the set of values of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Curtius wrote *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* as a reaction to the chaos of the Weimar Republic and highlighted an important element of the German Romanticism that immediately refers to the culture of the modern humanism: the faith that letters can change the world. This devotion to the power of letters was part of the literate universe of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, whether inside or outside the universities. Curtius addressed his book to this cosmos, in order to find some redemption for the disordered reality of Weimar and for the decline of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

[5]The tradition of Romance philology focuses on the study of literatures derived from Latin, but which, according to Edward Said, are unintelligible without Christian doctrine and its secular foundation in the Holy Roman Empire. For Curtius and his contemporaries (including Erich Auerbach, Karl Vossler and Leo Spitzer), Romance philology concerned an interest in all documents written in the various Romance languages, 'from numismatics to epigraphy, from stylistics to archival research, from rhetoric and law to a comprehensive and functional idea of literature that included chronicles, epic works, sermons, drama, histories and essays'. At the beginning of the 20th century, Romance philology belonged to a Germanic tradition that began with Friedrich August Wolf's studies of Homer, passing through Schleiermacher's biblical studies, as well as some of Nietzsche's works. For Said, this tradition culminated in the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey (Said 2021, XXIII-XXIV).

Deutscher Geist in Gefahr – *Bildung* as redemption

Between 1802 and 1803, shortly before his psychic illness, Hölderlin (1770-1843), one of the most important German Romantic poets, wrote the hymn *Patmos*. Its title has the same name of the Greek island in the Aegean Sea, where one of the twelve apostles, John, exiled by the Roman Empire, faced the divine manifestation that inspired him to write the *Book of Revelation*. At the end of the 11th century, a monastery dedicated to St. John was built there and became a place of religious pilgrimage. Hölderlin's hermetic hymn embodies the simultaneity of two places: that of exile and that of revelation, that of the end and that of beginning, and therefore that of despair and that of redemption (Rondinelli 2018, 79; 97).

Curtius began his *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* with a retrospectively controversial epigraph from *Patmos*. Marco Lucchesi translated Hölderlin's hymn into Portuguese[6] and Tony Brinkley into English[7]:

Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.

Mas onde nasce o perigo, cresce
Também o socorro.

but blessing grow
where danger is.

At the beginning of his introduction, Curtius drew attention to the social reality in which he was living, writing and publishing his book: a transition from the end of 1931 and the beginning of 1932. For Curtius, this period was decisive, "the most important since the ending of the World War". The year of 1932 was just beginning and would be a "year of big decisions" (Curtius 1932, 7). The spiritual and artistic spheres of German life were shuddering. "The same picture is everywhere – a field of rubble" (Curtius 1932, 7). All the artistic tendencies that had flourished between 1920 and 1930, such as jazz, the New Objectivity and the expressionist cinema, were collapsing and the same collapse affected the false political solutions of the Weimar Republic. Faced with the omens that the storm seemed to predict, Curtius was assertive: "Germany is in turmoil and we have only one hope: things must improve, because they cannot get any worse" (Curtius 1932, 7). The year 1932 would become the two places of *Patmos*: On the one hand, the certainty of the degradation and collapse of the values of German life. On the other, the expectation of redemption, salvation and divine revelation. For a significant number of Germans, the revelation was very, very close. As we know in retrospect, it was catastrophic. Curtius was yet to find out.

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[6] I'm specially grateful to Marco Lucchesi, poet and Literature professor at the Universiversidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, who gently sent me a copy of his current translation of *Patmos*, yet uunpublished in Brazil, published in the Romanian literary journal, *Ramuri*, in 2025. Lucchesi's first translation of *Patmos* dates from 1987, and is included in the rare and out-of-print book *Patmos e Outros Poemas de Hölderlin* [*Patmos and Others Poems by Hölderlin*]. The complete hymn in German can be accessed here: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/hoelderl/gedichte/chap131.html

[7] Tony Brinkley is Professor at University of Maine. His translation can be found on the academia.edu website: https://www.academia.edu/39745899/Patmos_by_Friedrich_H%C3%B6lderin_a_translation_ . The differences between upper and lower case initial letters were the choice of each translator, not mine.

Curtius was part of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, educated through the cosmological tradition of the ideas of *Bildung-Kultur*. Anchored in this tradition, Curtius understood that restoring the idea of *Bildung* could open up the possibility of redeeming German culture. The effects of this redemption would unfold in political and social life, pointing to new possibilities. The cultural content [*Kulturgehalt*][8] of *Bildung* was an heir to Italian humanism and developed in Germany around 1800 and, unlike France, was not tied to the foundation of the nation-state (Curtius 1932, 12). According to Curtius, the awakening of the German *Bildung* corresponded to the emergence of Romanticism, especially that paved by Weimar classicism. Goethe's *Faust* expressed the main content of *Bildung*, because as a cultural element of *German Bildung* it yearned for universality and totality, characteristics shared with the romanticism.

Curtius' first analysis of the relationship between Bildung and the strengthening of specialized sciences is based on Goethe's Faust. If on the one hand Doctor Faust presented the Faustian impulse towards knowledge that was part of the idea of *Bildung*, on the other hand he also brought Doctor Wagner, the urge to transform all of reality into an object of scientific analysis. When culture became a scientific object, its cosmological union with life gradually dissolved.

In this sense, *Bildung* (and *Kultur*) found itself emptied. In Curtius' understanding (1932, 13), this deplorable situation was made worse by excessive historicization. Reality was observed through a historicizing point of view that prevented the survival of timeless ideas and values that were indispensable to the individual's formation and integration into the world, as well as their faculty to interpret it. It's clear that Curtius was influenced by the crisis of scientific historical knowledge, the crisis of the historicism paradigm, whose effects on discussions began at the end of the 19th century. This crisis was not necessarily a methodological crisis in historical research. In any case, the historian's claims regarding the foundation of scientific knowledge - the gathering of sources, historical criticism, and the epistemic virtue of objectivity - remained indispensable. The main theme of the debates was the disconnect between historical scientific knowledge and its usefulness in practical human life. In general, the most important demand was the union between science and life. This was Friedrich Nietzsche's demand (1844-1900) in his *Second Untimely Meditation*. In it the philosopher rightly appealed to the most important name in German Romanticism to ground his thinking: Goethe. It should not be forgotten that the concept of *Bildung* was undergoing a crisis linked to the decline of its social function and the importance of the *Bildungsbürgertum* as its proponent.

When all the cultural objects of *Bildung* were historicized, losing their social role beyond the historical context, the concept of *Bildung* became a simple sociological concept, an object to scientific analysis. That's why Curtius (1932, 14) deplores that "the cultural forces [*Kulturmächte*] of our classical age have evaporated [...]. And the concept of *Bildung* has become empty and questionable". *Bildung* "no longer corresponds to the universal but only relates to the sociological manner in which our culture is transmitted. In this sense, *Bildung* "is not a timeless norm, but the specific temporal expression of a sociological structure as it presented itself in Germany in 1800 [...]" (Curtius

[8] *Gehalt* refers to at least two types of content: spiritual, in the sense of ideas, and the content of any physical element it has to be part of something. In the tradition of the idea of *Bildung*, Gehalt concerns to spiritual content, a set of ideas that expressed the cultural canon which is the content of *Bildung*.

1932, 15). Imprisoned in this scientific universe, *Bildung* was incapable of fulfilling its more important function. Curtius appealed to the philosopher Max Scheler (1874-1928) and his work, *Philosophische Weltanschauung* [Philosophical Perspectives], published posthumously in 1929, to justify his understanding of the concept of *Bildung*: "Human participation in all that is essential in nature and history – it is the concentration of the world in the human beings or the elevation of man into the world" (Curtius 1932, 14). The methodological consolidation and emancipation of specialized sciences hindered the harmonious and organized integration of *Bildung* content, which was indispensable for maintaining its unity and cohesion. (Koselleck 2020, 149). From the end of the 19th century to the first three decades of the 20th century, many crises were interwoven, centered on the problem of the weakening of the *Bildungsbürgertum* and its pragmatic function in life. The crises of modernity, of the identity of the educated bourgeoisie correlated to that of the national identity, of the historical knowledge and of the human sciences in general, were inextricably tied to the concept of *Bildung*.

In order to restore the relevance of his social group, Curtius emphasized that one of the reasons for the decline of *Bildung* – apart from the social, political and economic chaos in Germany – was the weakening of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Since the *Bildungsbürgertum* was the protector of *Bildung*, its disappearance would naturally lead to the collapse of *Bildung*. One could not survive without the other. Without the action of the educated bourgeoisie "an irreplaceable substance of the *Bildung* heritage" would dissolve, and "to interrupt or reverse this process, it is necessary to recognize all its dangers" (Curtius 1932, 16). This means that the salvation of *Bildung* – and consequently of German *Kultur* – depended on the rehabilitation of the social task of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Curtius' attempt to protect the *Bildungsbürgertum,* emphasizing its social functions, has an elitist perspective on *Bildung*. Curtius emphasized that the restoration of *Bildung* corresponded to the formation of a people's identity, since it would be led by a cultural elite. The idea of community [*Gemeinschaft*] inherent to *Bildung* and established by the educated bourgeoisie, remained in Curtius' concept of *Bildung*. This idea of community based on the absorption of a common culture, guided national paths. The restoration of *Bildung* concerns the formation of people, in the sense of the building a national identity, but it was not nationalism. This reconstruction of *Bildung* building am „the people, but not from a persistent nationalistic attitude, but from "the people from which Goethe and Schiller, Herder and Hegel flourished, the spiritual strength to overcome the political pettiness should be born again" (Curtius 1932, 18). *Bildung* was not transcendental and its survival relied on the educated bourgeoisie which in turn depended on the economic, social and political conditions favorable to the maintenance and growth of culture and *Bildung* (Curtius 1932, 21).

Curtius fearlessly made harsh commentaries on the spread of extreme right-wing nationalism, its repugnance for culture and reason associated with its racial hatred. Curtius referred to a "nationalistic university novel" that warned of the dangers of intellectualization. The author of this novel never appeared, not even in a simple footnote. The novel was *Michael: ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern* [Michael: a German Destiny in Diary Form], a semi-autobiographical novel published in 1929, authored by then the future Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945). In the extract quoted by Curtius (1932, 20), Goebbels wrote that "the intellect is a danger to character

formation [*Bildung*]"[9]. Added to that was the misleading appeal to the irrationality driven by a hatred of reason. In the clear view of Curtius (1932, 20), "the irrationalism prepared the path not for the mythical vision, but for barbarism". The revival of *Bildung* could not come from a nationalism headed by "a radicalized mass whose national feeling could be described by the primitive formula of Jew-hatred and the racial myth" (Curtius 1932, 27). The future of *Bildung* required a reconciliation between humanist ideals and a renewed idea of nationality far removed from the radicalism of the extreme right-wing.

Curtius' argument about the tendency towards irrationalism presents a paradox. Curtius did not recognize that, in some ways, this irrationalist tendency promoted by the far-right politics also stemmed from the German Romanticism. Curtius (1932, 20) only indicated that this irrationalist orientation was a "pseudo-romantic direction", which, naturally, was not the genuine romanticism emanating from Goethe and Schiller. This is an argument that has not been accurately developed, presenting itself as obvious. However, this paradox was not pursued further, as Curtius argued that the rebirth of the German *Geist* through the reconstruction of *Bildung* required the abandonment of rationalism. "A metaphysical urge, a philosophical impulse to comprehend the essence of all things" was inherent in the German *Geist* compared to other Western people. "The elements, reasons and contexts of nature, history and suprahistorical *Geist* are the great theme of German thought, and with these tasks it [...] achieves victories that infinitely surpass the rationalism of the Western peoples" (Curtius 1932, 28). According to Curtius, research into new epistemological forms was, at that moment, a German particularity. "In Germany, and only in Germany a new understanding of th human is developing" and its common characteristic was analysis of „the position of human being in the cosmos" (Curtius 1932, 28). This overcoming of neo-Kantianism was visible, for example, in Heidegger's philosophical ontology and Scheler's philosophical anthropology.

From my perspective, this paradox becomes intelligible once one grasps the connection between the intellectual sphere and the concept of *Bildung* as articulated within the *Bildungsbürgertum* tradition. It's clear that Curtius advanced new epistemological possibilities for scientific knowledge. Curtius' critiques should not be misconstrued as an aversion to science, quite the contrary, he upheld the primacy of reason. Curtius did not unpack his understanding of rationalism, for his writing was embedded in the semantic and axiological universe of the Bildungsbürgertum. It is evident that the rehabilitation of *Bildung* as a foundational element in the interpretation of the world – of which the scientific knowledge was part –necessarily had to involve a revalorization of the

[9] It is worth presenting the complete passage from which Curtius took his excerpt: "Die Spezialwissenschaft züchtet Hochmut und Fachsimpelei. Der gesunde Menschenverstand geht dabei meist vor die Hunde. Der Intellekt ist eine Gefahr für die Bildung des Charakters. Wir sind nicht auf Erden, um uns den Schädel mit Wissen vollzupfropfen. Das ist ja alles so nebensächlich, wenn es ohne Beziehung zum Leben bleibt. Wir müssen unser Schicksal erfüllen". [Specialized science produces arrogance and idle talk. Common sense goes out the window. Intellect is a danger to character formation. We are not on earth to fill our minds with knowledge. All of this is irrelevant when it has no connection to life. We must fulfil our destiny" (Goebbels 1942, 14)]. It is interesting to note, and this may explain Curtius' choice not to present the entire excerpt, the socially shared semantic universe that served both the right and progressives in Curtius' style. The idea that specialized science did not serve life is a fundamental idea and defines what Goebbels called intellectualism. For Curtius, specialized science contributes to the dissolution of Bildung. For both, it is a problem. However, it seems that Goebbels did not have the same understanding of Bildung, equating it with formal school education.

sphere of the inner world and its cosmological relation to the outer world. This would not have been possible through a scientific practice restricted to the phenomenal world at the expense of the inner sphere. This was the rationalism that Curtius regarded as necessary to overcome. It was indispensable to move beyond the phenomenon and return to essence. Curtius was not an isolated voice. The imperative to supplant the phenomenal world and of return to interiority was meant to perform an epistemological function in the construction of scientific knowledge, and it was present, for instance, in the vitalist philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), in George Simmel's (1858-1918) critique of culture, in the Friedrich Gundolf's (1880-1931) literary history, in the philology of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931) and, across the Rhine, in Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) notion of *durée*.

Supported by these reflections, Curtius elaborated, from my perspective, the most substantial chapter of his work by analyzing the situations of universities in the face of Weimar's turbulent social and political reality. The relevance of any object of scientific inquiry is, to a great extent, justified by its connection to the researcher's own present context. In the case of historical knowledge, this concerns the explanatory relations established between past experiences and those of the present. The same occurs with the cognitive, creative and culturally constituted act of reading. Every narrative deal with temporally interpreted experiences; it is a reaction of the author to the surrounding world (Iser 1996). These experiences are reactualized and integrated into each reader's historicity, giving rise to new inquiries, anxieties and intellectual concerns. I am pointing to these elements perhaps to explain my own position regarding the relevance of Curtius' chapter. For years, in the face of the political rise of the far right in the contemporary world and the strengthening of a cultural war - accompanied by generational transformations - universities have been subjected to recurrent attacks regarding their educational and social relevance. Curtius' response to his own world, especially when he addressed the assaults on universities, inevitably resonates with our present moment, while acknowledging the conjunctural, cultural, and conceptual differences between past historical experiences and those of today.

In engaging with the problematic of *Bildung*, Curtius could not avoid the task of analyzing and identifying the pragmatic function of the universities for the reconstruction of *Bildung*. In fact, this is an obvious argumentative path, for if the idea of *Bildung* was in crisis, then the educated bourgeoisie and culture would be as well. The same applied to the institutional face of *Bildung*, the university and, naturally, scientific knowledge. These are crises that cannot be examined separately, for they are interrelated universes. In addition, Curtius underscored that the university was part of society and, for this reason, the political, economic and social turmoil of Weimar Republic inevitably affected it, which led to the view that "following the dismantling of *Bildung*, one seeks the dismantling of the universities, and thus the level of our higher institutions continues to decline"(Curtius 1932, 56).

Universities should not provide only a technical formation for labour, as *Bildung*, grounded in its humanist tradition, could not be reduced exclusively to *Berufsbildung* (Curtius 1932, 61). The German university was an institution that embodied an idea. "It was a community of life and, at same time, a sociological apparatus of knowledge" (Curtius 1932, 56). In Curtius' view, the central issue concerning the universities was related to their ideal of *Bildung*. Drawing on Scheler's reflections, Curtius emphasized that the central aim of the universities

was to integrate intellectual education with the development of the human personality (Curtius 1932, 62). It involved a comprehensive formation, in accordance with the concept of *Bildung*. More than that, this ideal encompassed an unfolding within the social world, for by being formed within this model, the individual became a subject of the world — a model of moral inspiration. Each individual was part of humanity and bore humanity within themselves. In this formative path the individual's autonomous development grounded in *Bildung* was realized through a cosmological relationship with humanity - a cosmos understood through the alignment between *Bildung* and *Kultur*. The German culture – the content of *Bildung* – corresponded to the preservation of German identity through the social action of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Novalis' statement (2021, 53), therefore, remained valid: "a perfect man is a perfect people".

In order to fulfill its formative function, integrating professional education and individual development through *Bildung*, the universities needed, above all, freedom. And not only academic freedom, but full freedom, which should be an indispensable value for society. At this point, Curtius understood it to be a mistake to delegate the institutional organization of *Bildung* – namely the universities – to the state for this led to their collapse. As in France, Curtius wrote (1932, 74), "a tendency toward the dismantling of Humanism, and with it of the entire tradition of *Bildung*, is emerging among us". *Bildung* was not a matter for sectoral political parties and should not be contested in the name of secondary interests that threatened its survival.

Curtius did not oppose the expansion of university admissions in Germany after the end of World War I. To Curtius, this parliamentary requirement was not the rise of the "without talent" into the academic life, as some of his colleagues thought. Curtius (1932, 76) returned to the defense of the organization of a "Bildung elite" [*Elitenbildung*], whose moral pattern should guide mass society. This elite must promote German culture and its humanist heritage through the maintenance of *Bildung*. The survival of the humanist tradition could be secured by this elite. At this point, Curtius was forceful in defending a conservative stance that he carefully defined in order to distinguish it from a reactionary posture. In Curtius' view (1932, 57), a conservative stance was characterized by the endeavor to keep alive the classical founders of the modern state and of modern philosophy. After all, the university was not the progenitor of humanism, yet the responsibility for preserving it rested with it (Curtius 1932, 65).

Curtius (1932, 63-64) opposed the academic discussion on the "idea of humanism" and its restriction within the present-day conjuncture, as well as its tendency toward pedagogization and methodological disputes. Curtius sought to a transcendence of the concepts of *Bildung*, *Kultur* and Humanism – one that overcame historical immanence and endured through the action of a cultural elite. What remains in Curtius' analysis the guiding idea of *Bildung* and its importance as the foundation of a nationally valid form of social cohesion – developed first through inner formation and subsequently projected toward the outside world. This path – moving from inner to the outer and vice versa – sustained the survival of the German spirit, the *Geist*. This lack of a transcendent aspiration was one of the main misconceptions of nationalism associated with the rise of the far right. In contrast to authentic nationalism, this form of nationalism was confined to the present, and was unable to preserve the Western humanist tradition along with culture and *Bildung,* whose survival depended on the generational transmission of that tradition.

Without mentioning the word, Curtius emphasized the need for historical orientation, for "without a living connection to the past, one cannot have a cultural consciousness. However, the most recent nationalism doesn't intend merely to discard the now-so-defamed nineteenth century, but rather the entire historical tradition as a whole" (Curtius 1932, 40). For this reason, these movements had lost their "sense of time" and conducted themselves as "enemies of culture", denying its autonomy (Curtius 1932, 40). This temporal disorientation was indeed a symptom of an intensification of this kind of nationalism. The peculiarity of this German international nationalism lay in its opposition to the "*Geist* including that of its own people" (Curtius 1932, 43).

"This nationalism", Curtius affirmed, "not only renounces reason and tradition through its gesture of superiority; it seems that it has also lost its sense of time in the whirlwind of development" [...]Within the consciousness of contemporary man, one perceives an escape from the past" and an overestimated valorization of the present, which in turn produced "a devaluation of both past and future" (Curtius 1932, 40)[10].The reconstruction of *Bildung* was contingent on a new relation to historical time and on the endurance of the connections between past, present and future, as well as on the appreciation of the classical humanist tradition tied to *Bildung* and to the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

In his last chapter, Curtius offers a glimmer of hope. The redemption of humanist culture was indispensable for the survival and reconstruction of *Bildung*. This humanist tradition was part of the European identity, which the Germans also shared. The humanist project transcended the conditionality of historical time, even though its maintenance depended on favorable historical conditions. Although it may sound naïve to us today, Curtius left us a simple yet fertile idea of humanism, conceived amid a vertiginous escalation of violence across all spheres of German society.

> Humanism is nothing if it is not an enthusiasm for love. It can mark epochs, peoples and individuals only if it springs from the exuberance of fullness and joy. It is the intoxicating discovery of a beloved archetype [*Urbild*]. It is the encounter of the modern spirit with a life that had been sleeping in the dark depths of the blood and now reclaims its origins (Curtius 1932, 107).

When this sentiment was internalized - through the permanence and continuity of tradition – humanism could establish itself as an element of *Bildung*. As part of *Bildung* and *Kultur*, this sentiment was not connected to that Germany of 1932, in which the rise of violence and racial hatred was already evident. In Curtius' argument, a romantic ideal persists, as he asserts that this sentiment would not be revived through a programmatic path, but spontaneously, "through the creative intensity of life". Curtius expected that this renewed humanism would enter the universities in order to promote a measure of social harmony and peace (Curtius 1932, 115).

[10] In the second chapter, Curtius analyzes the journal *Die Tat* as an example of the promotion of this new youth nationalism. The journal was published between 1909 and 1938. During the year of the Weimar Republic, *Die Tat* achieved significant resonance among German youth and the middle class, becoming associated with a conservative and nationalist stance.

Curtius' conclusion reinforced to his readers that the year of 1932 brought not only the dismantling of the German cultural and political life, but also the possibility of its revival in a renewed form, without abandoning tradition. There are clearly connections between Curtius' considerations and our current context. In that moment in the twentieth century, "humanism should return to life, a total humanism: one that i sat once sensorial [*sinnlich*] and spiritual, philological and artistic, religious and political". And even if "the insensitivity of the times, the displeasure of those in power, and the coarseness of the crowd prevent this new life from emerging in the present day, even so the dispersed and the anonymous will gather and act in secret" (Curtius 1932, 130). Not coincidentally, Curtius chose the Roman philosopher and poet Lucretius to close his book, highlighting the necessity of a revalorization of tradition for the maintenance of *Bildung* and humanism in the face of chaos: *Vitai lampada tradunt*[11].

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Curtius' book led to a counterattack. Hans Naumann (1886-1951), a folklorist, Germanist, literary historian and Curtius' colleague at the University of Bonn, published *Deutsche Nation in Gefahr* [German Nation in Danger] [12]. An enthusiastic member of the NSDAP, the Nazi Party, which he joined on May 1, 1933, Naumann gave a speech in support of the burning of books in Bonn. To Naumann, the empowerment of Nazism, together with left- and right-wing youth movements and paramilitary organizations such as the *Freikorps*, could promote the union of the German virtues that had been shattered since the emergence of modernity. National Socialism indicated the return of Romanticism and, consequently, the rebirth of the nation. And since the Romanticism stood in opposition to French Enlightenment, National Socialism not only rejected it as well, but also repudiated its offspring: liberal society and its notion of homogeneous equality, derived from the Roman idea of *civis romanus*, a cornerstone of French civilization.

If Curtius valued Germany's cultural belonging within European culture and saw it as an antidote to the political chaos in which he lived, Nauman dismissed it. If Curtius (1932, 11) turned to Naumann's book, *Ritterliche Standeskultur um 1200* [Chivalric Culture around 1200], to reinforce the integration of German culture into the Western Mediterranean tradition, Naumann understood it as a malevolent influence. In Naumann's view, the

[11] From the poem *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). The widely known excerpt is used to emphasize the traditions that are passed from one generation to the next and thus sustain life. To my paper in Portuguese, I use the translation by Rodrigo Tadeu Gonçalves. To the English, I use the translation by William Ellery Leonard: "Thus the sum/Forever is replenished, and we live/ As mortals by eternal give and take./ The nations wax, the nations wane away;/ In a brief space the generations pass,/And like to runner hand the lamp of life/One unto other". The complete work is available on the Project Gutenberg website: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/785/785-h/785-h.htm

[12] I became aware of Hans Naumann's publication while researching the book cited by Curtius during the writing of this article. In general, the dispute with Curtius did not appear, not even in the excellent and extensive afterword to *Elemente der Bildung*, although Naumann's name is mentioned there. I found Annamaria Bercini's doctoral dissertation, defended at the University of Bologna in 2015, on Curtius' book. The author devoted a chapter to Naumann's text. Most of the information presented here was identified by Bercini. Naumann's publication is rare, unavailable online, and difficult to find in second-hand bookstores, whether in Brazil or in Germany. The complete reference to Bercini's dissertation is duly listed in the final bibliography.

incorporation of other traditions into German culture, although important, was pernicious to Germans because it introduced foreign elements that, he believed, corrupted the true essence of Germanness.

Opposed to the idea of equality derived from the French Enlightenment, Naumann called for a new elite whose mission was to lead the masses and to restore Germany's immutable values to the contemporary times. The damaging effects of Enlightenment (the proletariat, Marxism, liberalism, feminism) had dismantled the harmony among the German classes. Once these damages were eradicated by the National Socialist elite, social cohesion would be restored, accompanied by the true German essence, safeguarded by the peasants and transmitted to this new German national aristocracy. Naumann believed in the existence of a "*Germania Eterna*", whose remnants had survived into modernity through fantasy and popular literature, as well as through the culture and Lifestyle of the peasants. These remnants were to be reconstructed in order to integrate the Germanic myth propagated by National Socialism.

The bourgeoisie was excluded from this equation and, because of this, Naumann, in opposition to Curtius, did not believe in a corresponding crisis between *Bildung* und the German *Geist*. For Curtius, the idea of German *Bildung* carried European culture and its ideal of universal European man - in other words, of humanity itself. For Naumann, this relation was a central problem, since it was constituted by contents alien to the German spirit. In Naumann's thought the dissolution of *Bildung* resulted from the harmful connections between the German bourgeoisie, the Enlightenment and its outcomes. In this view, *Bildung* was indeed an outsider. In the final part of his essay, Naumann used the same epigraph that Curtius had placed at the beginning of his *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*. For Curtius, salvation could only come from *Bildung,* together with the European culture. For Naumann, this salvation was already at hand: National Socialism.

When the Nazis came to power, an atmosphere of persecution took hold in the universities. In the March 24, 1933, edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* – the official Nazi newspaper – the review "On *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*" was published. Its author was Hermann Sauter (1907-1985), romanist and librarian who, due to his institutional support for Nazism, would go on to assume the directorship of the *Stadtbibliothek* and the *Städtischen Volksbüchereien* in Munich, stated that Curtius' work stood in opposition to the new Germany.

In his biased review, Sauter wrote that Curtius could be right only if "with that sigh of his heart, disorientated by the continual contact with Jews and sympathizers of Judaism, the spirit whose decline he laments would in fact be the German spirit" (Sauter 2017, 505). For Sauter, Curtius failed to grasp the true German spirit that could now be lived, and, as a result of his misunderstanding, Curtius attacked the racial nationalism and the hatred of Jews promoted by Nazis (Sauter 2017, 506-507). Curtius, Sauter argued, should be acknowledged for his scholarly research - as a *Wissenschaftler* - but never as a cultural politician - a *Kulturpolitiker* – due to his incomprehension of the biological foundation of the German culture (Sauter 2017, 508).

Curtius was not dismissed from the University of Bonn, but he was certainly under surveillance, as he never considered converting to the racist ideals of Nazism[13]. In a letter to Catherine Pozzi (1882-1934), dated April 2, 1933, Curtius expressed concern about Sauter's review and found that, faced with an intellectual sphere tightly controlled by his own colleagues, "independent minds will have to take refuge in silence or in pure science". In the same missive, Curtius took a vehement stand against the Nazis: "It pains me that my country is doing all those things (especially the boycott of the Jews) that make it an object of humanity's repulsion" (Wieckenberg 2017, 393).

At the end of war, in 1945, Curtius made an effort to publish a third revised and expanded edition of *Deutscher Geist im Gefahr,* but this project was never realized, partly as a result of disagreements with the publisher (Wieckenberg 2017, 386). In the manuscript for this unpublished third edition, Curtius typed out an addendum to its preface: "July 1932 brought the coup d'etat in Prussia and the victory of Hitler's movement. Night fell over Germany" (Wieckenberg 2017, 387).

CONCLUSIONS

I would like, once again, to return to Hölderlin's hymn *Patmos*. Hölderlin portrayed the modern humanity's estrangement from the divine presence in everyday life, the disenchantment of life. Entirely different from the classical culture symbolized in *Patmos*, modern man no longer experienced the divine in the world directly through the senses nor did he enjoy a cosmological harmonious union with nature. The sons of the Alps gather around "Time heaps mountains/those we love are near/but far apart/ worn down on isolated summits"[14].They then ask the untouched waters to give them "flight and faithful/ thoughts to seek and to return". To find the divine again, it was necessary to return to the past, to make it live, to reconstitute the connection between classical and modern culture so that the divine might emerge once more. The restoration of the divine in the world would come precisely because of its pernicious absence. "Too long, too long, /has Heaven been obscure/until its darkness almost guides/my finger. And how miserably/we feel it force our hearts", wrote Hölderlin. In its final movement, *Patmos* brings the divine and the human together once more: "but our Father who reigns over us loves most/the cheerful reading/of the Letter – the enduring. This/the singing follows"[15].

Hölderlin highlighted humanity's need to maintain a connection with the sublime - the divine in the world -whose presence could give to individuals a foundation to guide their lives and interpret their experiences. It is clear to us that *Bildung* has a religious heritage. I can state that, for Curtius, *Bildung* was a redemptive force. Germany could be saved from its chaos through *Bildung* and its revival of the humanist culture that is intrinsic to it. On this path of salvation,

[13] According to Wieckenberg (2007, 391), Curtius' biographer, Heinrich Lausberg, claimed – without presenting documentary evidence – that it was Hans Naumann who prevented Curtius from being dismissed or sent to a concentration camp.

[14] Cf. notes 6 and 7.

[15] Brinkley's translation omits the adjective "German" that accompanies the hym to be followed. In the original German: "der Vater aber liebt,/Der über allen waltet,/Am meisten, dass gepfleget werde/Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut/Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang".

the *Bildungsbürgertum* had to organize a cultural elite capable of protecting this tradition and transmitting it to future generations.

Since its historical development, the modern concept of *Bildung* has integrated religious norms and secularized them. According to Koselleck (2020, 133), *Bildung* never left behind its religious content, above all those elements rooted to Pietist values, which emphasized individual self-obligation in opposition to Enlightenment rationalism and to the orthodoxy of the Church. In this way, *Bildung* assumed a religious dimension, yet remained unbound by the dogmatics of institutional religious organization, while at the same time preserving ideals of social reform. In this process, "modern religiosity was secular, in the sense that the Christian doctrine of original sin [...] was now replaced by a feeling of laceration, by a reflective consciousness of alienation that recognized itself as *Bildung*" (Koselleck 2020, 135). As Dumont argues (1994, 10), the centrality of the self-responsible individual in German culture, was impacted by the Lutheran Reformation, or, in other words, by the extension of humanist individualism into the religious realm. In the first half of 18th century, this Lutheran individualism was integrated into Pietism and its intensified sense of community and belonging. In the second half of that century, this Pietism encountered the opposition of the individualism promoted by Enlightenment and, later, by the French Revolution. The ideas of individual and society became a threat to the communal bonds inherited from Lutheran Reform and from Pietism.

From the late 19th century onward, in response to the expansion of industrial society and the crisis of scientific knowledge – and in connection with the erosion of the social role of *Bildungsbürgertum* as a source of German identity - *Bildung* became central to the concerns of a part of German intellectual elite.

The persistence of the German culture and of the heritage of humanism of the European culture could be ensured through the reconstruction of the concept of *Bildung* and through the restoration of the *Bildungsbürgertum* as its safeguarding force. Intellectuals such as Curtius, with some exceptions, believed that they could offer the Germans a salvific path in the postwar period, confronted with the chaos of the Weimar Republic.

In my view, *Bildung* was not merely an important element of historical consciousness, but rather a hope for salvation. The *Bildung-Kultur-Humanismus* triad offered a redemptive horizon, a union of the transcendent and the immanent characteristic of religious experience. In the midst of a reality where the future seemed hopeless, *Bildung* emerged as an opportunity to restore the divine in the world. As in Hölderlin, its disappearance led to the necessity of its rebirth. The search for a different experience of time – one capable of surpassing the historical conditionality and safeguarding the connection with the eternal and transgenerational values - was another aspect of this experience related to divine. It was within the tradition of humanism related to *Bildung* and *Kultur* – that Curtius perceived the conjunction between timeless values and a temporally delimited reality.

When faced with the catastrophe, or at least its beginning, with the expansion of Nazism and its hatred toward Jews, and with the disorder of the Weimar Republic in a Germany traumatized since the First World War, Curtius did not shy away from expressing his thoughts. His clarity of judgment and composure impress us to this day. A proud heir to humanist culture – one he not only devoted himself to understand as a scholar, but also understood as an essential component of his *Bildung* and of his interpretation of the world -

Curtius lived through the Nazi dictatorship and came to see the total collapse of humanism in the concentration camps, in the genocides of Jews, Black people, disabled people, Romani people and other groups whom the Nazis deemed unworthy of belonging to the German nation. If in 1932 Curtius perceived that the collapse was approaching, we can conjecture about his suffering after the end of the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War.

The foundational principles of the German concept of *Bildung*, I argue, retain their validity and continue to be deeply relevant: to form and develop in a reflective, independent, and responsible manner, so as to integrate into and understand the surrounding historical world without losing sight of humanity and of respect for the human being in all their potentialities. *Bildung* contains within it a principle of hope. Above all, *Bildung* constitutes a form of resistance against the progressive advance of far-right movements, in Curtius' world as well as in our own.

When I wrote this paper, the rise of far-right politics had been accelerating for years. This is evident in the recent parliamentary compositions of countries like Poland, Italy and Slovakia. Since the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic, Hungary has been in a state of exception. Its president, Viktor Orbán, has carried out harsh and constant attacks on universities, where it is no longer possible to research or teach any topics related to the gender studies. In Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), a far-right party, reached a considerable level of support in recent parliamentary elections. In Brazil, universities were attacked by groups from the conservative right, which resulted in assaults on both faculty and students. This situation still continues, to some extent. Two wars are currently underway, among various other regional conflicts. The Russian-Ukrainian war awakens past resentments and threatens the balance of power in Europe, undermining the state of peace between nations. The conflict between Israel and Palestine, whose end seems to be approaching, leaves us with images that are difficult to absorb, reminding us of the collapse of humanistic ideals[16].

Curtius' cultivated humanism, in the sense of *Bildung*, presents itself to us as a project that surpasses the temporal conditionality of historical humanism and offers an orientation in the face of the atrocities that pervade daily experience. Confronted with a reality that seems, day after day, to undermine our confidence in the future, I would like to conclude this paper by returning to Curtius' gesture of hope – even if such hope may now appear to us as notably naïve:

Humanism is nothing if it is not an enthusiasm for love.

[16] From the moment I finished the original Portuguese version of this paper to the moment I completed it, the sense of peace has been severely shaken by recent events: the Israel–Palestine conflict has come to an end, and, at the present moment, Israel and the United States are engaged in a complex attack on Iran, destabilizing global peace and the world economy. Before that, the United States invaded Venezuela and arrested its then-president, Nicolás Maduro. None of the attacks carried out by the United States were approved by the U.S. Congress, undermining its democratic parliamentary organization.

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Bildung as redemption*:*
Ernst Robert Curtius and *The German Spirit in Danger*
Article received in 20/10/2025 • Accepted in 05/03/2026
DOI | 10.5216/rth.v28i1.84212
Revista de Teoria da História | issn 2175-5892

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