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Introduction

The twentieth century, which ended with the triumph of the liberal-democratic systems in Europe, had begun with an extraordinarily deep identity crisis of parliamentarism and liberalism, with a revolt against pluralistic societies and their values. In its radicalism, this revolt exceeded all previous revolts of this kind. Germany and Russia formed the center of this insurrection against the values that are usually associated with the West. It should, however, be pointed out that this revolt had been inspired in Germany, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand, by diametrically different ideas. In Germany, the insurrection against the West was directed primarily against the ideals of the French revolution, the so-called ideas of the year 1789. These ideals were opposed by the ideas of the summer of 1914. At that time, Germany seemed to have created a kind of alternative to the Western model: the German society clarified by the war experience of 1914. In the spirit of optimism of the summer of 1914, the Germans seemed to have overcome all political, denominational, social, and regional tensions. The otherwise torn nation “no longer knew any parties.”

Despite the fact that Germany belongs to the West, the discussion of many values constitutive of the occident is an old topos of German cultural history. In their acrimonious rejection of the so-called Western decadence, many German authors did not differ too much from the Russian Slavophiles. Helmuth Plessner explains the German protest against the West, which reached its first climax in 1914, among other things by the fact that Germany “missed” the seventeenth century, the century in which the triumph of Enlightenment and political humanism began. Not least this “missed” century had turned Germany into a “belated” nation, an adversary of the West and the ideas that shaped it.¹

1 Plessner, Helmuth: *Die verspätete Nation*. Stuttgart, 1974.

In Russia, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the revolt against the West took place under completely different conditions. It was inspired primarily by the ideas of the year 1789. In 1917, Russia seemed to have become a new home to the ideals of 1789, the ideals that the Western bourgeoisie had, in the view of the Russian revolutionaries, allegedly betrayed.

The first section of this book deals with the causes and consequences of the two revolts.

The second section is dedicated to the development of late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, which in 1991 was built on the ruins of the Bolshevik regime that had been established in 1917. The focus will thereby be on the causes of the erosion of the “second” Russian democracy that emerged immediately after the disempowerment of the CPSU in August 1991.

In the third section of the book, I shall deal with the third part of the “fateful triangle” mentioned in the title, namely, Poland. The focus of this section will be on the so-called geopolitical trap, in which Poland—constrained by its powerful neighbors—was caught for centuries.

All three countries of the “triangle” had a special relationship with Judaism. This problem will be the subject of the fourth section of the book.